THE SOCIALIST SACRED:
ATHEISM, RELIGION, AND MASS CULTURE IN ROMANIA, 1948-1989

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on new archival sources, official publications, and oral histories, I challenge the self-portrayal of socialist civilizations as scientific, secular, and the "other" of everything religious. Between 1948 and 1989, the Romanian communist regime sought to disenchant believers with a scientific, materialist worldview. Yet, it likewise strove to imbue citizens' lives with socialist sacred meaning. My work demonstrates that we cannot understand late socialism's contradictory drive for rationalization and re-enchantment without examining how elites produced knowledge about atheism and lived religion.

This dissertation analyzes elite interactions with believers and the Central Committee from 1948, when transforming religiosity emerged as a party priority, to the end of the socialist era. My chapters focus on science popularizers, preservationists, sociologists, and folklorists in institutions of cultural administration and research newly created to manage socialist beliefs and behavior. These elites shaped the place of religion and atheism in Romanian society while competing for resources within the centralized structure of the Party-State. Their voices mattered because they engaged believers for whom national and religious belonging coincided. Elites also provided specialized knowledge for party organs committed to achieve convergence between ideology and citizens' subjectivity.

This dissertation combines approaches from cultural history, anthropology, and sociology to reveal key sites of conceptual labor and expert power within purportedly monolithic party-states. I also historicize the re-composition of lived religion by examining how religious majorities and minorities engaged with a socialist ideology that competed to provide overarching meaning to individual and collective life. On a broader scale, my work provides a comparative

history of atheism in Eastern Europe by de-centering the Soviet Union and illuminates the socialist experiment as part of a global modernity, inherently defined by a tense yet interdependent relationship between disenchantment and sacralization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

reflection and growth as it brought together the last socialist generation from multiple countries across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union with whom family stories could be exchanged and experiences compared. Professors Frederick Anscombe in history and Robert Phillips in political science were inspiring teachers. I owe special thanks to them for being so incredibly invested in our progress. At the University of Illinois, the Department of History funded most of my research, facilitating two years of archival investigations in Romania and participation at numerous international conferences. The Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center similarly provided much needed support for travel to the annual conventions of the Association for the Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Orthodox Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți Pimen Zainea has recently shared

some curious memories about Romanian socialism in the national media. In 1966, Zainea was

hegumen at the monastery of Putna – the necropolis of Moldova's medieval ruler, long-revered

folk saint, and national hero Stephen the Great (1457-1504).[1] The same year a Central

Committee delegation headed by the party leader Nicolae Ceaușescu visited the monastery.

Recalling the events on television between 2010 and 2013, Zainea recalled that Ceaușescu "was

overcome with emotion at the grave of Stephen the Great" and, when seeing the map of medieval

Moldova in the monastery's museum, he evoked the "national" territories lost to the Soviet

Union after 1944.[2] Following the first secretary's visit monasteries emerged as sites of socialist

tourism, patriotic education, and national memory according to the archbishop. "During that

period of the communist-atheist regime, especially after Nicolae Ceaușescu's visit at Putna on

May 22, 1966 […], the number of tourist groups increased by a lot. On Sundays over thirty buses

would arrive, especially with youth, pupils and students."[3]

References to anti-Sovietism and state atheism, to the cult of the nation and its leader

present a recognizable picture of late socialism in Romania. Yet, Zainea's narrative also throws

the less familiar into relief. Although not unheard of, ceremonial visits of Central Committees to

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[1] The Romanian Orthodox Church canonized Stephen the Great only in 1992. However, the ruler had been unofficially respected for centuries as a saint-king because his Christian religious stance and victories against the Ottoman Empire had earned him the title "Athleta Cristi" from Pope Sixtus IV.

[2] "Doi președinți români s-au închinat ieri la mormântul lui Ștefan cel Mare," *Ziarul de Iași*, 28 April 2010, at www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/regional/suceava/doi-presedinti-romani-s-au-inchinat-ieri-la-mormantul-lui-stefan-cel-mare~ni6b72 (last accessed 1 October 2013). "ÎPS Pimen despre vizita lui Nicolae Ceaușescu la Putna," *Intermedia TV*, 14 May 2013, at www.intermediatv.ro/2013/05/14/ips-pimen-despre-vizita-lui-nicolae-ceausescu-la-putna/ (last accessed 1 October 2013).

[3] Pimen Zainea, "De veghe la mormântul Sfântului Ștefan," *Cuvinte către tineri* 5 (2012), 2-3.

famous religious locations were rare in the communist bloc. This remains true even in a country that is often held up as a radical example for the close relationship between the majority church and the party. Zainea's allusion to the officially-endorsed patriotic reverence of Stephen the Great, of all places at Putna, invite additional scrutiny. After all, the socialist reach for the mixed register of a historical figure – one who absorbed secular meanings in the modern era but who was already enmeshed in religious symbolism – raises questions about the party's commitment to the atheist endeavor.

The above recollections bring out the main predicament that constitutes the theme of this dissertation: the entanglement between socialist modernity and the sacred. Ontological theories in the tradition of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade understand the sacred in terms of fundamental structures within the human personality or the cosmos itself. I define the sacred, both in its religious and secular guise, rather as historically specific cultural structures that entail normative constructions of social reality and moral community from which the individual self and everyday life are expected to derive meaning.[4] This understanding can illuminate how the "socialist sacred" emerged in Ceaușescu's Romania at the intersection of patterns of discourse, official symbols, spaces, moral and affective regimes, and ritual practices. By adopting such a historically and culturally situated approach to the sacred, this dissertation reframes scholarly narratives of the relationship between atheism and religion, Marxism and spirituality, while historicizing the relationship between socialist modernity and (dis)enchantment.

There were a series of underlying contradictions at the heart of the Romanian socialist project. First, by the time the Second World War ended, the Romanian Orthodox Church had acquired unprecedented national prestige and such credentials were precisely what communists

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[4] Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-8.

in Romania lacked during their underground years and for much of the early socialist period.[5]

Thus while, on the ideological level, the utopian drive towards communism was predicated on

the eradication of religion, the prospects of acquiring social control and political legitimacy

hinged significantly on Romanian party leaders' willingness to extend liberties to the Orthodox

community. The pressures in this direction increased especially once Soviet de-Stalinization

convinced them of the need to chart an independent course in the socialist world. The

contradiction between the ideological and political imperatives of the Romanian socialist regime

was compounded by a second, even profounder one that official ideology inherited from

Marxism. The Romanian party elite laid out a materialist cosmology on the surface, yet it

simultaneously sought to imbue socialism with spiritual values for the this-worldly salvation of

humanity. This underlying tension between the disenchanting and sacralizing aspects of atheism

became a constitutive paradox of late socialist culture. This dissertation tells the story of how the

Romanian party-state grappled with these underlying contradictions and, in the process, provided

the opportunity for a more fruitful, interpretively dense thinking about the fraught relationship

between socialism and the sacred.

Socialism and The Sacred

The desire to banish gods and all shred of irrational belief as part of a top-down attempt

to create a secular, atheist society was paradigmatic to all socialist states, including Romania.

Nonetheless, this effort at societal disenchantment had deep moorings in the (post)Enlightenment

imagination – particularly, in the definition of religion as a residual phenomenon explicable by

and surmountable through modern rationalization. Recent histories of science, religion, and mass

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[5] Vladimir Tismãneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 26-27.

culture have naturally called into question notions that modernity entails the inevitable loss of the overarching meanings and have captured instead the image of a "messy modernity" inherently defined by an antinomial yet interdependent relationship between rationalization and sacralization, disenchantment and enchantment.[6] This broader framework of a messy modernity reveals a great deal about the inherited, fundamentally incongruous nature of socialism. It also invites an investigation of the historical junctures that threw underlying contradictions particular to socialism in Romania into dramatic relief during the Ceauşescu period.

Historical and philosophical criticism has long dismantled the neat socialism-religion dichotomy. Socialist states claimed Marxism-Leninism as a scientific mantle and spent considerable effort to establish "religion" as the other of everything "socialist," modern and rational. Despite – but perhaps because of – these efforts, Soviet studies underscored the extent to which revolutionary ideology and ceremonial culture domesticated religious concepts – transcendence, immortality, salvation – and forms of ritual practice, whether seasonal or life-cycle rites, in order to "transfer sacrality" onto the socialist project.[7] The programmatic denial of this link did not eradicate socialism's ambivalent relationship to religion, which often resurfaced

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[6] For a review of the scholarly literature that regards these opposing forces – reason and the irrational – as existing in a tense harmony with a potential for rich analysis of modernity see, Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 692-716. Walter D. Mignolo, "The Enduring Enchantment: (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go From There)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 927-954. Richard Jenkins, "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millenium," *Max Weber Studies* 1 (2000): 11-32; Jane Bennett, "The Enchanted World of Modernity: Paracelsus, Kant, and Deleuze," *Cultural Values* 1, no. 1 (1997): 1-28.

[7] Malte Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 76-77. Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelicalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 8 and 31.

in the mentalities or practices of revolutionaries, party members, and common workers.[8] To be

sure, when the questioning of humanism was at its peak in the 1960s, socialist regimes faced

powerful critique. Anti-humanist atheists, in particular, chided communist parties for

participating in the Stalinist purges despite their abiding proclamations about the divinity of man.

Such violence in the name of human emancipation, the argument went, was made possible

precisely because Judeo-Christian thought lay at the root of foundationalist ideas of the New

Man.[9]

      Following Marx, numerous thinkers were deeply preoccupied with imbuing individual

life with sacred non-theistic meaning and sought not only the socio-economic liberation of man

but also his spiritual fulfillment. Yet, the story of Marxist spirituality in socialism has become

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[8] The classic bibliography on religious terminology and symbols in official and popular revolutionary discourse includes: Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: the Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mark Steinberg, *The Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity and the Sacred, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); R. L. Hernandez, "The Confessions of Semen Kanatchikov: A Bolshevik Memoir as Spiritual Autobiography," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 13-35; Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For the absorption of religious symbols and practices in Soviet mass festivals, political ceremonies and life-cycle rituals see James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Katerina Clark in *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On the attraction of the political left to religious idealism ranging from Christianity to theosophical esotericism and the occult see, Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1963); Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed. *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Victoria Frede, *Doubt, Atheism, and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Intelligentsia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

[9] This was essentially the critique articulated by Alexandre Kojève, Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others who emerged as the official faces of French thought and were foundational for the phenomenological and (post-)structuralist critique of Marxism. See, Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 114.

marginalized in scholarly literature. This is largely because the objective scientific rationalism

that underwrote orthodox Marxism since the Second International and increasingly under Stalin,

led to the loss of this humanist emancipatory dimension. It also helped de-legitimize the

communist vision of the future to a significant degree.[10]

Numerous studies continue to follow the suit of these historical and intellectual trends,

overwhelmingly emphasizing the instrumentalist motivation of party-states to compete with and

supplant religion without engaging the existential ideals that atheist spirituality strove to provide

instead. The tendency to consider such ideals meaningless except in terms of states' projection of

power is especially pronounced in studies that apply the concept of "political religion" to

socialism. These works also tend to overstate parallels between socialism and religious

fanaticism to underscore the totalitarian aspects of such regimes.[11] By comparison, the early

historiography of atheism and religion dwelled on the repressive, coarse efforts of Bolshevik

officials before and during the Stalinist years and examined why the scientific-materialism of

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[10] M.S. Kagan, "On Spirit and Spirituality" in Benjamin Page, ed. *Marxism and Spirituality: An International Anthology* (Westport: Bergin&Garvey, 1993), 111-114. See also, Boris Majer, "Marxism, Transcendence, and Spirituality," 125-126 in the same volume. Arnold R. Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision: Herbert Marcuse and Recent Liberation Theories* (New York: Lexington, 2009), 16-17.

[11] Vladimir Tismãneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), esp. 1-17, and f. 9 on p. 235. Klaus-Goerg Riegel, "Marxism Leninism as Political Religion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 1 (2005): 97-126. Michail Ryklin, *Kommunismus als Religion – Die Intellektuellen und die Oktoberrevolution* trans. Dirk and Elena Uffelmann (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008). Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* trans. George Staunton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 44, 62-4. For a critical review, see David D. Roberts, "'Political Religion' and the Totalitarian Departures of Inter-war Europe: On the Uses and Disadvantages of an Analytical Category," *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 4 (November 2009): 381-414. That the communist leadership exhibited doubt, uncertainty, and varied levels of militancy regarding its mission in history and therefore cannot be simply described as fanatical was addressed by Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (New York: Praeger, 1962) and Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: New Press, 1985).

Marxist-Leninist ideology proved unpopular with believers.[12] More recent works have moved

away from these paradigms of "repression" and "failure." These studies examine instead the re-

composition that both the atheist project and religious life underwent in the post-Stalinist period

largely because of interaction with each other.[13] Yet, while this research analyzes the degree to

which atheists made the spiritual lives of citizens a matter of party-state concern, no one has

examined how the return to spiritual questions after Stalin echoed broader trends in Marxist

thought or led to new entanglements between socialism and the sacred.[14]

    This lacuna becomes especially pronounced when viewed against the paramount number

of works that approach the history of religion from the narrow perspective of politics and a

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[12] Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Eren Murat Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: the Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2010); William B. Husband, *"Godless Communists": Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987); James Thrower, *Marxist-Leninist "Scientific Atheism" and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR* (New York: de Gruyter Mouton, 1983); David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975).

[13] Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty': Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (PhD Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2010). Miriam Dobson, "The Social Scientist Meets the 'Believer': Discussions of God, the Afterlife, and Communism in the Mid-1960s," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 79-103; Katherine Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2012); Esther Pepperkamp and Malgorzata Rajtar, eds. *Religion and the Secular in Eastern Germany, 1945 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularization Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Heléna Tóth, "'It Must Not Look Like Expropriation': The Cemetery Regulations of 1970 in Communist Hungary and the Spatial Aspects of the 'Battle between the Religious and the Materialist World View" in *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience* eds. Katrina Gulliver and Heléna Tóth (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 197-214.

[14] Gail Kligman authored two seminal works on spiritual questions in Ceaușescu's Romania in which she noted the state-endorsed secularization of folkloric religious-magical rituals, both life-cycle and seasonal, arguing that this reflected official attempts to promote a "new religion" for a New Man. However, her analysis does not address the problems of atheism or the transformations in Marxist thought after the early 1950s. Gail Kligman, *Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. 257-259. *Căluș: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). The quote is from p. 149.

monolithic "regime." The importance of religious organizations in Cold War competition,

popular dissent, and post-socialist politics made it particularly seductive to focus on church-state

relations. [15] This angle, in turn, also entailed a glossing over of distinctions between the various

elites – leading party members, state officials, and scholars – whose conceptual labor shaped

official approaches to the religious question in quintessential ways.[16] In Romanian scholarship

especially, the notion that the regime acted as one has led to the general consensus that the

accommodation between the Romanian Communist Party and the Orthodox Church largely

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[15] Scholarship on church-state relations is by far the most extensive. For brevity, I will cite the Romanian scholarship under footnote 18. On the centrality of religious organizations of superpower politics, see T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport: Praeger, 2009); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Diane Kirby, ed. *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012). Lucian Leuștean, ed. *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-1991* (New York: Routledge, 2010). On churches and dissent see, Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests: Religious-Based Activism and its Challenge to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (New York: CEU Press, 2013); Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Jehowah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In Romanian historiography, numerous works made the argument that the churches provided alternative values to socialist ideology and that religion revived because of popular opposition to the regime. Trond Gilberg, "Religion and Nationalism in Romania" in *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 346; Ioan Marius Bucur, "Church and State Relations under the Communist Regime. The Case of Romania" in *Religion and Political Change in Europe: Past and Present* ed. Ausma Cimdina (Pisa: PLUS, 2003), 172. For the controversial roles that churches play in post-socialist politics and in dealing with the communist past see, Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Sabrina P. Ramet, ed. *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe: Challenges since 1989* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

[16] There are a few partial exceptions. John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 69-81. Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years* ed. and trans. Edward E. Roslof (New York: Armonk, 2002). Anca Maria Şincan, "Of Middlemen and Intermediaries: Negotiating the State-Church Relationship in Communist Romania" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Central European University, Budapest, 2011). Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty'."

explains how the relationship between religion and communism evolved.[17] This particular bias also sheds light on the following paradox: while the atheism of the Romanian regime is taken to be an old chestnut, until now the ideological arm of the anti-religious endeavor has received no attention in scholarship.[18]

Yet after Stalin, professional atheists – propagandists, historians, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers – transformed the struggle against religion into a struggle for a socialist spiritual life. Historian Victoria Smolkin demonstrated that Soviet atheists gradually veered away from anticlerical campaigns and enlightenment measures; instead they strove to develop a "positive atheism," a set of beliefs and practices imbued with spirituality. What drove this qualitative transformation in atheist thought was the recognition that religion was strong not because it constituted a set of intellectual beliefs but because it had individual and experiential components – aesthetic, emotional, psychological, moral, communal and ritual - that provided answers to the ultimate questions of human existence.[19]

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[17] On the relations between various churches and the Romanian socialist state see Lucian Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-1965* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu communist, 1945-1959* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005) and *Între Vatican şi Kremlin: Între Vatican şi Kremlin: Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003); George Enache and Adrian Nicolau Petcu, *Patriarhul Justinian şi Biserica Ortodoxă Română în anii 1948-1964* (Galaţi: Editura Partener, 2009), Vasilică Croitor, *Răscumpărarea Memoriei: Cultul Penticostal în perioada comunistă* (Medgidia: Succeed Publishing, 2010); Adrian Nicolae Petcu, ed. *Partidul, Securitatea şi Cultele* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2005).István Tőkés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1945-1989* (Budapest: Magyarságkutató Intézet, 1990); Péter Sas, *Az erdélyi római katolikus egyház, 1900–1948* (Budapest: Mundus, 2008); Ulrich Andreas, *Kirchenleitung über dem Abgrund: Bischof Friedrich Müller vor den Herausforderungen durch Minderheitenexistenz, Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998).

[18] There is only one exception. Writing on cremation in modern Romania, historian Marius Rotar addressed atheism very briefly. See, *Eternitate prin cenuşă: O istorie a crematoriilor şi incinerărilor umane în România secolelor XIX-XXI* (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2011), 378. Marxist-Leninist atheism has received surprisingly little attention in studies of state socialism in Eastern Europe overall, a fact that is reflected in the works cited above.

[19] Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty': Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2010).

However, besides the recognition that religion remained relevant to human life, a series of processes converged in the 1950s and 1960s to make atheism and the spiritual world of socialist citizens key policy concerns for socialist states. Khrushchev's initial denunciation of Stalin in 1956 was followed the Soviet suppression of liberalizing forces in Hungary and the subsequent wave of re-Stalinization in the socialist camp. These rapid reversals rattled the myth of party infallibility and raised questions about Marxism's ability "to provide meaningful answers to the problem of human life."[20] Crucially, the possibility to cultivate a strong philological relationship with the works of the "early" humanist Marx convinced many theorists at the time that Stalinist ideology led to the extensive pauperization of the Marxist vision.

Indeed, the discovery of young Marx's emphasis on democracy, ethics, individual inner fulfillment, and the self-creation of humanity in history revealed an emancipatory, transcendental vision of society. Such a vision stood in stark contrast with the orthodox Marxist insistence on materialism and the historical determinism of the political-economic structure. The revisionist claim that Stalinism produced a spiritual void in Marxism justified the push for politically liberating changes in Eastern Europe from party and unofficial quarters alike. At the same time, the rejuvenation of Marxist humanist thought influential before the Second International also opened a global dialogue between religion and Marxism. It inspired the Vatican's re-articulation of Christian humanism and the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America while also

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[20] The quote is from Miklós Tomka, "Életfordulók ünneplése a szocialista országokban" in Márta D. Hoffman and Szilágyi Erzsébet, eds. *Ünnepek a mai magyar társadalomban: az ünnep szociológiai és szociálpszihológiai szempontból* (Budapest: Tömegkomunkációs Kutatóközpont, 1982), 165.

contributing to the intellectual consolidation of anti-humanist atheism in French thought.[21]

Revisionism naturally had important repercussions for socialists in the anti-colonial movements

at their peak after the mid-1950s. As Léopold Senghor famously stated, "the philosophy of

humanism, rather than economics, is the basic character and contribution of Marxist thought."[22]

Tied to this was the growing popular familiarity with the colonial and imperial injustices of

western countries and the culture of social awareness that the movements of the 1960s inspired.[23]

     Due to all of these factors, Marxism's ethical and humanist dimension was the subject of

unprecedented debates around a globe. This conjuncture explains why the spirituality of

individual citizens began to preoccupy socialist states in the 1960s and the 1970s across the

Soviet bloc. The reanimation of the academic study of religion and reliance on professional

expertise in atheist policy in the region can also be understood as an answer to these larger

processes.[24]

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[21] Paul Mojzes, *Christian-Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981). A. J. Van der Bent, *The Christian Marxist Dialogue: An Annotated Bibliography* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1969). Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 258-286. The debates that peaked around Marxist humanism in the late 1950s and 1960s were part of a broader questioning of humanism after the two world wars. See, Thomas Baldwin, "The Humanism Debate," in *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy* eds. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 671-711. In Romania, discussion around the Marxist conception of man resulted, among others, in anthro-philosophical works like C. I. Gulian, *Problematica omului: eseu de antropologie filozofică* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966).

[22] Léopold Senghor, "Socialism Is a Humanism" in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* ed. Erich Fromm (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 57.

[23] Introduction to Michael J. Thompson, ed. *Constructing Marxist Ethics: Critique, Normativity, Praxis* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 4.

[24] For the Soviet Union, see Smolkin's dissertation, although she does not contextualize the evolution of Soviet atheism within the broader crisis of Marxist humanism after 1956. The connection between Marxist revisionism and the revival of the academic study of religion see, Patrick Hyder Patterson, "The Shepherds' Calling, the Engineers' Project, and the Scientists' Problem: Scientific Knowledge and the Care of Souls in Communist Eastern Europe" in *Science, Religion, and Communism in Cold War Europe* ed. Paul Betts and Stephen A. Smith (London: Palgrave, 2016), 55-76. For other studies see articles on Czechoslovakia and Poland in the volume Iva Dolezalová, Luther H. Martin, and Dalibor Papoušek, *The Academic Study of Religion during the Cold War: East and West* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 95-154.

By situating the history of the socialist sacred in Ceauşescu's Romania in the context of the broader transformations in Marxist thought, this dissertation also examines the impact of nationalism on official approaches to religious belief and atheist education. The regime's need for political legitimacy and its endeavor to centralize cultural life, especially from the 1970s onward, reinforced intellectual competition around national symbols. In Katherine Verdery's words, "The monolithic party-state produced a monolithic nation."[25] The relative openness to revisionist Marxism during Ceauşescu's thaw spurred the re-evaluation of religion from less dogmatic positions and, like elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Romanian atheist experts articulated the need to endow socialist culture with a spiritual dimension. Yet, such reformist positions could not achieve cultural authority with intellectual and popular audiences that were deeply attached to national values. Nor could they secure long-term support from a regime that was historically inclined towards Stalinist centralization precisely because of its tenuous hold on public support. By the 1980s then, Marxist humanism underwent both an indigenization and a Stalinization, a process most emblematically evidenced in the 1980s by the cultivation of "Romanian spirituality" in the framework of a mass folkloric festival. In effect, this development meant that the official form of the socialist sacred was emptied of humanist transcendental values, a process that reflected the particular course of Marxism's rupture in Ceauşescu's Romania.

The Ceauşescu regime's engagement with atheism, religion, and spirituality reveals the tangled history of socialist modernity and the sacred. The extensive ideological discussions in the party-state and scholarly establishment provide insight into how a heterogeneous elite grappled with conflicting objectives and the broader ramifications these had for the management of

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[25] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 315.

socialist culture. To historicize the tense interdependence between state-endorsed secularizing and sacralizing efforts, I examine printed sources from the press and scholarly journals alongside the archival records of institutions involved in managing socialist beliefs and behavior.[26] These sources provide a possibility to de-center the regime by revealing how the elites that populate the forthcoming pages – party-state officials, atheist cadres, preservationists, sociologists, and ethnologists – shaped the sacred in socialism. This dissertation investigates the conversations that took place in institutions responsible for making socialist citizens into Romanian atheists and thus explores the multiple and shifting locations of decision-making in a purportedly "monolithic" party-state. It analyzes the ideological elite's construction of meaning around religion and atheism, their encounter with the underlying contradictions in the regime's project, the actions they took to address them, and the broader implications all of these had for the relationship between socialist culture and (dis)enchantment as well as post-socialism and religiosity.

Religion, Nation and Modernity in Romania

The historical shifts leading up to Ceaușescu's "golden epoch" are instrumental for drawing out the contours of Romanian socialism. Since the emergence of modern institutions of culture, education and government during the 1800s, the prospective place of religion in national modernity has been a contentious issue in the Romanian political and intellectual sphere. By the

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[26] The main archival records I rely on belong to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture, the Department of [Religious] Cults, the Committee for Historical Monuments, the Ministry of Culture, the Secret Service, and the various public and restricted publications of institutions involved in researching atheism, religion, and folklore (the Center for the Study of Youth Problems, the Center for Sociology, the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences, and the Institute of Research in Ethnology and Dialectology in Bucharest). For a full bibliography of archival records and printed sources see the bibliography at the end. The archives of the Department of Cults, the Committee of Historical Monuments and the Ministry of Culture were not inventoried and fully accessible for research, as a result of which this dissertation cannot attempt to represent the voices of clergy members.

time the nation-state came into its own in 1878, elite positions fell across a rich spectrum from religious to secular or atheist in a way that a classification by broad groups – traditionalists, Europeanists, and early socialist – cannot address with adequate sensitivity here. In particular, the few intellectuals who embraced atheism were of scientistic, philosophical, or Marxian inspiration and they offered their respective systems of thought to replace religion in modern Romania.[27] Although atheists rejected divine entities, by virtue of linking the meaning of existence to some earthly principle as a means for human completeness and self-transcendence, they preserved a space for the sacred in individual and public life.

With extended borders, Romania emerged triumphant from the First World War but the experience of communal devastation and violence ushered in a disillusionment with rational modernity and unsettled belief in a righteous Western humanism. The sense of existential crisis after the Great War made intellectual views about the divinity of human society increasingly difficult to sustain. In the broader social arena, the religious and ethnic diversity of Greater Romania presented both opportunities and unprecedented challenges for nation-building in the newly acquired territories of Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transylvania. It was these twinned factors – competing nationalisms and the feelings of existential malaise – that lent such virulent force to religion in the interwar years and pushed both atheists and secularists on the various margins of the national debate. On the mainstream, Romanian elites were swayed by notions of "Romanian spirituality" that certain thinkers formulated by variously fusing together ideas about Eastern Christianity, the rural world, and Asian or Western mysticism in order to provide the

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[27] Simion Ghiţă and Dumitru Ghişe, "Filozofie şi cultură în evoluţia culturii româneşti," in *Filozofie şi religie în evoluţia culturii române moderne: studii şi antologi*e vol. I, ed. Simion Ghiţă and Dumitru Ghişe (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1984), 21-58.

collective and the individual self with new existential purpose.[28] Comparable trends were observable among the German and Hungarian elites, in whose case Western Christianity was a main source of inspiration. Among the post-imperial nation-states of Eastern Europe, interwar Romania exemplified then the culmination of a long-term nineteenth century process that involved both "the nationalization of religion and the [religious] sacralization of the nation."[29] This mutual imprint entailed, on the one hand, a rapprochement of confessions to nationalism and believers' adoption of national values and, on the other, the appropriation of religious functions and modes of expressions by national ideology. As historian Maria Bucur's work indicates, this intertwining of the religious and the secular sacred surfaced especially in the commemorative public rituals around World War I that sought to reinterpret individual death as a necessary sacrifice for the nobler, collective cause of the nation protected and guided by a national God.[30]

With the advent of communist take-over in 1947-1948, the Dej regime called an end to such imaginings of the "sacred nation" and heralded a cultural revolution instead. Under the influence of the Stalinist interpretations of Marxism, Romanian communist leaders believed that mass consciousness in post-war Romania was defined by a socio-economic environment that hegemonic groups such as the nobility, bourgeoisie, and the churches controlled. The implication

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[28] Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 298-319.

[29] Martin Schulze Wessel, ed. *Die Nationalisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 7. Hans Christian Maner, *Multikonfessionalität und neue Staatlichkeit : orthodoxe, griechisch-katholische und römisch-katholische Kirche in Siebenbürgen und Altrumänien zwischen den Weltkriegen, 1918-1940* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007). Hans Christian Maner and Martin Schulze Wessel, eds. *Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen 1918-1939: Polen, Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn, Rumänien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002). Mainstream Czech secular conceptualizations of the nation are noted as an exception in the latter volume.

[30] Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth Century Romania* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010), 37, 98-145.

of such deterministic views was that aligning citizens' beliefs Marxist-Leninist ideals would be achieved through the mechanistic rearrangement of property structures, social and institutional hierarchies, public space, and cultural life executed under the banner of "class war." Accordingly, in order to restrict religious life "within church walls," the party-state availed itself of expropriations, the repression of church dignitaries, and a host of legislative measures. The Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture (SDSC), an institution modelled on the late-Stalinist Znanie Society, was similarly called to arms beginning 1949. The emphasis on materialism in its publications and in its nationwide lectures of political, cultural, and scientific enlightenment were expected to banish faith from the hearts and minds of every citizen as a matter of course. The Dej regime likewise adopted Bolshevik functional replacements for religious rites: political ceremonies, mass festivals, a calendar of red-letter holidays, and life-cycle rituals.[31] Through these anti-religious measures and the new ritual culture they adopted, party-state officials cultivated their own socialist sacred – a series of transcendental ideals that exalted internationalism, scientific rationalism, and the mass socio-economic emancipation of the masses.

However, as regime differentiation set in after Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet models underwent increasing domestication. This process was unmistakable, first, in the party-state's relations with Romanian Orthodoxy and, second, in the regime's retreat from scientific-atheist education. Interwar religious nationalism had propelled the institutional expansion and financial growth of the Orthodox Church in Greater Romania, a process not entirely interrupted by the

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[31] Sonja Luehrmann suggests that initial Bolshevik rituals fell out of favor by the late 1920s because Soviet cultural planners acted out of such a mechanistic "logic of replacement." Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style*, 6-7. Importantly, these were the kinds of rituals that Eastern European regimes borrowed in the early 1950s.

communist take-over.[32] While the forced unification of the Greek-Catholic Church with the

Orthodox Church was inspired by Stalin and applied elsewhere in Eastern Europe, in Romania

this re-unification showed a meeting of interests between the party-state and the interwar

aspirations of Orthodox nationalists. The nationalization of land and the education system in

1948 along with the anti-clerical campaigns hit the church hard.[33] But although it was heavily

regulated during the entire socialist period, the privileged status of Orthodoxy can be made

evident by several facts: no Orthodox bishops were imprisoned; the religious and economic life

of Orthodox monasteries revived in the 1950s; above all, the church was the only religious

organization that canonized saints (1955) and published some of the most important religious

and liturgical works in the socialist camp.[34]

　　Due to their tenuous national credentials, Romanian party elites resisted Nikita

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization efforts after 1956. In the early 1960s Soviet plans to reduce

Romania to an agricultural hinterland for the more industrialized socialist countries aggravated

inter-party relations further. In consequence, the Dej regime issued a declaration of independence

from Moscow in April 1964. As the Romanian party elite embarked on de-Sovietization instead

of de-Stalinization, foreign and domestic policy priorities shifted and the official stance towards

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[32] Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [Central National Historical Archives, henceforth ANIC], Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, File 76/1949, f. 6. In a report, the head of the Department of Cults Stanciu Stoian indicated that in the 1947-1948 financial year, before the strongest wave of anti-religious repression (1948-1952), 80 percent of all Orthodox clerics received over 502 million lei in salaries from the state budget. This arrangement reflected the legacy of the interwar period. I have not come across sources giving exact numbers about the extent to which the payment of clergy salaries was maintained. But in stark contrast to the Soviet Union, the Romanian communist state paid salaries to numerous hierarchs – Orthodox or otherwise – largely as a measure of control.

[33] Ibid. According to the Department of Cults, in 1948 the Orthodox Church owned about 2,800 square kilometers of land, most of which was nationalized over the course of 1948-1962. In 1962, monasteries still owned 18.23 square kilometers of land (over 10 percent of their previous holdings), out of which only 2 sq km were to be handed over to the state. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, File 14/1966, vol. I., f. 57-62.

[34] Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War*, 93-95, 163.

religion relaxed further. After the campaign against Orthodox monasteries in 1958-1961, the Dej regime reached a pact with Patriarch Justinian. The external relations of the Orthodox Church and the higher clergy proved particularly instrumental in repairing diplomatic relations with the west and in obtaining funds for socialist industrialization from outside of the Soviet camp. The retreat from the ideological battle against religion was evident in 1963 when the Soviet-inspired SDSC was reduced to small department within the Ministry of Culture. This institutional erosion had prohibitive effects on science popularization, the promotion of alternative socialist rituals, and the professionalization of atheist work in the late Dej era. Meanwhile, party-state attempts to reconcile with Romanian citizens both on the religious and national front prepared the way for the symbolic re-appreciation of cultic buildings. By the late 1960s, in fact, the Ceaușescu regime had cast a number of churches as carriers of national memory and socialist identity based on their historical and aesthetic value. It encouraged citizens to sightsee and care for these vestiges of the past so that they could take ownership of their integration into the socialist nation.

A fundamental question regarding religion and ideology in late socialist Romania is why the regime became invested in atheism at the height of the thaw in the late 1960s when it had practically abandoned this enterprise a couple of years earlier. Certainly, during the first atheist campaigns during Ceaușescu (1966 and 1969), it became clear that the relaxation in anti-religious measures along with other aspects of the thaw – the amelioration of postal and press censorship, the opening of borders to western tourists, or the 1964 amnesty of political prisoners, including priests – animated religious life across the country. The thaw also produced confusion among the lower party ranks. The renewed commitment to atheist work was likewise fuelled by the Central Committee's anxiety over maintaining the ideological reins. Having sided with China in the Sino-Soviet split and condemned the Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968),

Ceauşescu was at the height of his isolation in the socialist camp. In this climate, the possibility of Soviet invasion seemed real enough to warrant calls for the re-establishment of ideological unity around party and leader. Importantly, however, the dynamism of the religious landscape and the preoccupation with ideological control during the thaw coincided with the regime's much invoked departure from "dogmatic" Stalinist hyper-rationalism and its relative openness to revisionist Marxism. When taken together, these factors soon led to the consensus that Marxist-Leninist atheism needed revision. It did not give an accurate picture of popular religiosity, the argument went, explain its persistence in socialism or provide directions for how to disenchant society.

Indeed, after 1965, the Central Committee invested unparalleled amounts of resources and professional expertise to transform the spiritual lives of socialist citizens – their worldview, morality, and feelings. Instead of being the "stepchild" of the regime's ideological program, by the 1970s the mission of creating atheist beliefs and practices turned into a "permanent aspect" of building socialism and became a prerequisite for the communist future. As a result, atheist education became the subject of repeated party plenums and resolutions; inspired the creation of specialized research laboratories; and helped revive psychology, ethnography, and the sociology of religion. It also led to the emergence of a new generation of specialized cadres – professional atheists and scholars of religion. Meanwhile, religiosity went from being dismissed as a "remnant" of "retrograde societies," in the orthodox Marxist parlance, to being recognized as a "complex phenomenon" that needed to be discovered empirically and understood scientifically. As the individual and experiential components of religiosity came into focus, cadres provided further impetus for developing a "positive atheism" – one that did not simply negate belief but was expected to replace religion's psychological, emotional, and aesthetic functions in daily life.

By the late 1970s, these preoccupations coalesced into efforts to produce a socialist spiritual culture that could provide citizens with the experience of a socialist transcendent. Experts' call for ritual reform culminated after 1976 in the biannual "Song for Romania" Festival, a vast cultural-artistic event that popularized new life-cycle and seasonal rituals inspired by folklore. Most importantly, by imbuing positive atheism with national values, the regime offered its citizens a so-called "Romanian spirituality" as a path for self-fulfillment and transcendence.

By examining religion and state atheism under the broad rubric of the sacred, this dissertation investigates the relationship between socialist modernity and (dis)enchantment, while historicizing the entanglement between Marxism and spirituality. The chapters that follow integrate a chronological with a problem-centered exposition. Each privileges a domain of socialist culture where the socialist elite grappled with rationalization and the sacred. My chapters focus on science popularization, cultural heritage, atheist education, and socialist rituals, although these themes re-surface and intersect throughout this work.

Chapter One focuses on the rise and demise of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture in order to examine the evolution of scientific-materialist enlightenment in the early socialist years. I demonstrate that, in contrast to Khruschev's Soviet Union where a renewed assault on religion coincided with the interrogation of Stalinist ideology, the scientific atheist endeavor was abandoned in Dej's Romania by the beginning of the 1960s as the regime reconciled with the Orthodox Church and embarked on its independent course. *Chapter Two* describes how medieval monasteries became endowed with secular transcendent values derived from nationalism and were incorporated into the rituals of patriotic education and tourism as the late Dej period gave way to the Ceauşescu era. This approach to the museification of religion buttressed the legitimacy of the late socialist regime in front of both domestic and international

audiences. Yet, petitions also reveal that everyday citizens kept the ideological boundary between the religious and the secular sacred porous challenging the party-state to carefully police the inclusion of additional cultic buildings into socialist heritage. *Chapter Three* analyzes Ceaușescu's Thaw as a crucible for the revival of atheism and presents this shift as an outcome of Central Committee concerns to manage the course of "autochthonous" socialism. *Chapter Four* investigates the ramifications that Marxist revisionism and the sociological mapping of popular belief had for the transcendental in atheist education and socialist culture. I argue that atheist experts identified spirituality and cultural tradition as the main reasons for why religion persisted, even thrived, in the inhospitable conditions of socialism. Attempts to imbue atheism with the same values peaked in the folkloric rituals of the "Song for Romania" Festival. Yet, staged for the re-production of "Romanian spirituality," this mass cultural-artistic event also revealed the indigenization and Stalinization that revisionist atheism underwent in the 1980s.

The re-composition of atheism during the liberal phase of Ceaușescu's "golden epoch" demonstrates that the emancipatory ideals of revisionist Marxism reverberated in late socialist ideology, yet did not cancel out specificities that made Romania "different" in the socialist camp. Specifically, both the articulation of the atheist project in the register of a "Romanian spirituality" and the undertaking of socialist ritual reform in the frame of a mass festival constituted the trademarks of a national Stalinist regime. Without doubt, Marxist-Leninist atheism under Ceaușescu has its own story in several respects. In contrast to reformed communist states, Romanian atheists never gained the political status or resources that their Soviet or Eastern European colleagues enjoyed. Nor did the rhetoric of spirituality in Romania entail the regime's move away from Stalinist principles in the interest of private, individual happiness. Instead, the enchantment of socialist culture with "Romanian spirituality" reflected

party-state attempts to contain and even divert innovational influences in the socialist camp. Thus, reformist initiatives were cast into pre-emptive structures that referenced a new language on the surface but revealed Stalinist and national values on a closer look.

This dissertation tells the story of the socialist sacred in communist Romania. By investigating the re-composition of religion and atheism from 1948 to 1989, I deepen understandings of Marxism's particular course of rupture in a socio-political terrain that has proved inhospitable to its projects since the nineteenth century. I also elucidate why today's religious nationalism constitutes the spiritual legacy of socialism and cannot be understood either in terms of an interrupted continuity with the interwar years or as a function of contemporary politics.

CHAPTER ONE
SCIENCE FOR THE MASSES:
THE SOCIETY FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE, 1949-1963

Founded on 26 May 1949 through a Politburo resolution, the Society for the

Dissemination of Science and Culture (SDSC) was modeled on the Soviet All-Union Society for

the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (later the Znanie Society). The SDSC's

key objective in the early Dej era was to forge a vanguard of intellectuals who could serve as the

beacons of political, cultural and scientific enlightenment. Under the supervision of the Central

Committee's Department of Agitation and Propaganda, it was to re-educate and assimilate "the

large intellectual circles of the R.P.R" that it had inherited from the monarchy. This objective

reflected the new regime's dual desire to ideologically discipline and to extend limited

concessions to the "old" intelligentsia, upon whose expertise it depended in cultural affairs, the

industry and state administration. Yet, the state harbored a deep mistrust towards this group and

perceived its pragmatic compromises with such "fellow-travelers" as ethereal. Therefore, one of

the Society's long-term responsibilities became to mold "workers and working peasants with

high political, ideological, cultural and professional consciousness" into a new socialist

intelligentsia, one of healthy social origins and revolutionary commitment.[41] As a corollary to

such a task, the SDSC was to develop into a mass organization of intellectuals and take its place

in a network of party institutions established for other social categories – the youth, women,

workers and nationalities.

More importantly, however, the Society's broader mission was to lift the ideological

darkness and cultural backwardness that the exploiting classes had purportedly cast on the

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[41] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 54/1949, f. 6-7.

proletariat and the peasantry. As its first statute stipulated, the Society's principal calling was "to propagate scientific and political knowledge among the masses, to fight against obscurantism, mysticism, superstitions, [and] combat all inimical ideological influences," including nationalist and religious beliefs.[42] Naturally, the young socialist regimes insisted that this kind of mass enlightenment, infused as it was with the discourse of class war, was part of a radical rupture with the past. Yet, state-socialist fervor to enlighten and humanize the masses was, in many ways, just another manifestation of deep-seated post-Enlightenment aspirations that political and intellectual elites shared broadly. Creating a cultured, orderly and productive labor force was, after all, quintessential to reshaping society in the age of western industrial modernity.[43] Entrusted with the task of mass enlightenment, the SDSC – much like its institutional forefather, the Znanie Society – emerged as the foremost establishment in charge of fashioning new socialist citizens. Until its dissolution in 1963, it also remained the largest institution of experts in Romanian society tasked with the coordination of scientific, cultural and political education on the ground.

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[42] *Statutul Societății pentru Răspândirea Științei și Culturii* (Bucharest: S.R.S.C., 1949), 7.

[43] David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 14-16; See also, Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working Class Drinking, Temperance and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 4. The RWP was also heir to the educational campaigns of liberal and socialist intellectuals. In particular, it inherited two liberal interwar institutions involved in mass enlightenment: the Romanian Athaeneum Literary Society (*Societatea Literară Ateneul Român*) founded in 1865 by academicians Constanting Esarcu, Vasile Alexandrescu Urechea and Nicolae Kretzulescu, and the Ioan I. Dalles Foundation established in Bucharest in the early 1930s following the donations of Elena Dalles to the Romanian Academy of Sciences. On the popularization of science in Romania, see also Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 189. Marius Rotar, "Propagandă și acțiuni anti-alcoolice în România interbelică" in *Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis* XLV (2008), 259-281. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 31-35. Simona M. Antonescu, *Literatura de popularizare a științei în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului XX în România* (Bucharest: Ars Docendi, 2007). Additionally, Romanian communists were also heirs to the educational campaigns of socialist intellectuals which the latter expanded, particularly in 1905-1921. I thank Anca Mândru, my colleague at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for this point.

By examining the ideological considerations and bureaucratic structure governing the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture, this chapter explores the conceptual and institutional impediments party ideologists encountered as they struggled to translate socialist ideology from state intention to popular conviction. Without doubt, this dedication to social engineering was simultaneously informed by the regime's ambition for total control and by its utopian commitment to the social and spiritual emancipation of the working classes. For a weak party that was simultaneously building itself and administering the revolutionary transformation of an unsympathetic Romanian society, these competing ideological objectives were sufficient to cause considerable strain. However, as this chapter will show, the challenges were far more significant. Under the aegis of Agitprop, the SDSC's work suffered from the parallelisms of the dual party-state structure, the ideological incongruities inherent in the Soviet blueprint, cadre problems, and the ideological revisions of the post-Stalinist years. As a result, for much of the 1950's, success in transmitting a coherent approach on the place of nation and religion under socialism remained an aspiration rather than a triumph.

In their ambition to usher in an alternative modernity, socialist regimes engaged both national ideology and religion in official ideology and political practice. Nevertheless, few histories studied party-states' concerns with overlapping ethno-religious identities or examined how the relationship between nationality and religious policy evolved. Meanwhile, scholarship on enforced secularization and the promotion of a new kind of patriotism towards a "socialist fatherland" have run on separate tracks.[44] For example, studies of the socialist nation have explored the reliance of socialist parties on ethnic constructions of nationhood for the purposes

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[44] See, Pedro Ramet, ed. *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) and Steven M. Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003).

of political legitimacy and examined how ethnographers, historians, and other experts re-imagined the body politic while struggling over cultural capital.[45] By comparison, analyses of religion under socialism have centered on the political history of church-state relations or on Soviet "scientific-atheism," particularly its misrecognition of religion as modernity's temporal "other," its institutional shortcomings and its lack of appeal to intended audiences.[46] By comparison, the Party's efforts to rewrite the historical, cultural and affective ties forged between the nation-state and religion have thus far remained unexamined. Nor have works explored how

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[45] On national ideology under socialism, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism;* Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (New York: Central European University Press, 2001); Yannis Sygkelos, *Nationalism from the Left: the Bulgarian Communist Party during the Second World War and the Early Post-War Years* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jan Palmowski, *Inventing A Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[46] On church-state relations see, Lucian Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-1965* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican şi Kremlin: Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003); Sabrina Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Tatiana Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years,* ed. and trans. by Edward Roslof (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2002). For works on secularization and Marxist-Leninist atheism see, Bohdan R. Bociurkiw and John W. Strong, eds. *Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); Esther Peperkamp and Malgorzata Rajtar, *Religion and the Secular in Eastern Germany, 1945 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Thomas Schmidt Lux, *Wissenschaft als Religion: Szientismus im Ostdeutschen Säkularisierungsprozess* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2008); the works of Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, in particular *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975); Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); William B. Husband, *Godless Communists: Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Never Remains Empty:' Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2010); Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); and Eren Murat Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: the Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2010). On post-Soviet societies, Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularization Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

the socialist project strove to make citizens' lives meaningful through a socialist national way of life that was atheist at heart. This lack of a genuine analysis of how state socialisms, in their aspiration towards an alternative modernity, engaged ethno-religious subjectivities on the ground is all the more surprising because nationalism and Marxism-Leninism have both been compared to religion.[47]

Socialists of all stamps grappled with the imaginaries of the "sacred nation" that emerged in the late nineteenth century with Christian nationalism and that manifested with such potency in interwar Eastern Europe.[48] Like their counterparts elsewhere, early Romanian socialists often confronted charges of being anti-patriotic and anti-national. In 1910, for instance, Panait Zosin observed as follows:

> Whenever there's talk in our circles about … the withdrawal of state support from a state religion, [and] especially about the freedom of conscience, the misunderstanding commonly occurs that the restriction of a people's religion also implies the destruction of its nationality. In other words, it is shown that there is a correspondence between our nationality and the religion of our people, the negation of one implying the negation of the other - from where the deduction [is made] that our free thinkers are anti-nationalists and antipatriotic, to say the least.[49]

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[47] For studies that initially adopted the religious studies approach to nationalism and Marxism-Leninism in scholarship on the nation and state-socialism, see Cartlon Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1960); James Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as the Civil Religion of Soviet Society* (Lewiston: de Gruyter Mouton, 1992).

[48] For instance, see the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer's discussion on the role of religion in the historical development of nations in his *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, 1907), 130-131. On Christian nationalism in interwar Romania, see Hans Christian Maner, *Multikonfessionalität und neue Staatlichkeit: orthodoxe, griechisch-katholische und römisch-katholische Kirche in Siebenbürgen und Altrumänien zwischen den Weltkriegen, 1918-1940* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007). For scholarship that cautions against modernist assumptions regarding the inevitability of national subjectivities, see James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2008). Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), Ines Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen: Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag, 1918-1938* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012).

[49] Panait Zosin, *Câteva considerațiuni pentru libertatea de cugetare, privind religiunea față de naționalitate, știință, morală, și filozofie* (Iași, 1910).

Until Stalin's consolidation of power in the 1930s, Bolsheviks, in particular, repudiated both "bourgeois" national sentiment and religious belief as symptomatic of capitalist class structure. Despite pragmatic political concessions, they expected both to wither as a result of socialist construction. In fact, as historian Terry Martin argued, Soviet patronage of national consciousness entailed both socialist nation-building and an offensive against "traditional national beliefs and practices, above all, religion." The ultimate goal was, after all, to render the above-class appeal of nationalism meaningless.[50] Lenin and Stalin had some important differences regarding the life-time of socialist nations under communism. Nevertheless, both demanded a breaking away from imaginings of the "sacred nation" inherited from tsarist official nationality policy and Russian conservative nationalism in the 19th century.[51]

In following Soviet footsteps, Romanian communists were left to see whether it was imminent for socialist ideology to transform the enthusiasm and beliefs that had been effectively harnessed by Christian nationalism in interwar Greater Romania. While the Romanian Worker's Party embraced Marxism-Leninism as a science that disproved both the primordial, eternal existence of nations and the metaphysical essence of the world, Romanian communists faced daunting questions on how to transpose Soviet ideology into Romanian social reality. How would Stalinist approaches to nation and religion be adapted and implemented? In a bid to overcome their feeble political legitimacy, how far could party leaders venture with their radical mission to transform mass consciousness?

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[50] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, esp. 183 and 444.

[51] Whereas Lenin believed in transcending nationalism, according to Terry Martin, Stalin's conception of the socialist nation shifted by the late 1930s from class towards "a more primordial, völkisch understanding" and he had come close to affirming the permanence of socialist nations. See, op.cit, 436. On the origins and evolution of the official nationality policy, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1959).

Juxtaposing the regime's public rhetoric on the inevitable triumph of mass enlightenment against a far more troubled account of obstacles encountered on the ground, this chapter develops a preliminary institutional history of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture. It investigates the Romanian party-state's attempt to propagate the values of socialist patriotism and scientific-materialism at the expense of the "mystifying" ideologies of nationalism and religion. Such an analysis will show that, despite the substantial resources the party expended, bureaucratic contingencies and shifting ideological priorities converged by the early 1960s to ensure that mass education yielded discouraging results. By showcasing the Party's struggle to translate revolutionary culture from state intention to popular conviction, I argue that this breakdown in the SDSC's ideological and bureaucratic apparatus contributed to the gradual renunciation of Soviet models of culture. Additionally, I propose that the 1950s and early 1960s constituted a formative experience for the state. Once atheism and cultural reform became the subject of a nationwide campaign of revitalization after Ceausescu's advent to power (1965), the experience of the 1950s helped shape the rhetorical devices and institutional mechanisms with which the new regime embarked on the invention of a socialist nation, distinctly Romanian and atheist.

Cultural Revolution and the Inception of Mass Enlightenment

In March 1948, Iosif Chișinevschi, the secretary of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda agreed with the newly established State Committee for Culture and the Arts that "the advancement toward socialism necessitated the commencement of the cultural revolution."[52] In a programmatic article in the June issue of the RWP's theoretical journal *Lupta de clasă* ("Class

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[52] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Propagandă și Agitație, File 37/1948, f. 23. Qtd in Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă, 1948-1953* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 42.

War"), the chief party historian Mihail Roller conformed to this desire by listing the Party's three

objectives in the creation of a new socialist culture. Besides a critical reconsideration of cultural

heritage through the lens of Marxism-Leninism, Roller informed, the cultural revolution was to

entail the socialist organization of public education and the formation of a new intelligentsia.

Most importantly, however, it was to propel the communist education of the working masses.

This cultural uplifting of the people, Roller explained, was predicated on the obliteration of

capitalist remnants in mass consciousness and the inculcation of a new attitude towards work,

collective property and the state apparatus.[53]

As scholars of state socialism have explained, the cultural revolution involved "class

warfare" – a destructive process targeting the inversion of social hierarchy primarily through

state terror – and a productive utopian project aimed simultaneously inward, at the

transformation of the inner self, and outward, at mass enlightenment.[54] Militant calls for the

disenfranchisement and marginalization of old elites in the socialist press, not to mention the

purges decimating their ranks, left no doubt about the worker-state's commitment to class

struggle.[55] Yet, in the process of toppling the "bourgeoisie and feudal classes," the socialist press

also promised ideological and social emancipation by making "culture, science, literature and art

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[53] Mihail Roller, "Pe drumul revoluției noastre culturale" in *Lupta de clasă* seria V-a, nr. 2 (October-December 1948), 97. For similar articles, see also Sorin Toma, "Republica Populară Română pe drumul revoluției culturale" in *Scânteia* (October 24, 1950), 2. Qtd. in Eugen Denize and Cezar Mâță, *România comunistă: statul și propaganda, 1948-1953 (*Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2005), 105-107.

[54] For arguments that have become classical in Soviet historiography regarding the destructive and constructive aspects of the cultural revolution, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 115-148; Ibid, "Cultural Revolution Revisited" in *Russian Review* 58:2 (April 1999), 202-209; and Michael David Fox, "What is Cultural Revolution?" in *Russian Review* 58:2 (April 1999), 181-202.

[55] Clara Mareș, ed. *Intelectualii și regimul comunist. Istoriile unei relatii* (Iași: Polirom, 2009); Dan Cătănuș, ed. *Intelectualii români în arhivele comunismului* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2006).

an asset of the working people."[56] At the first Congress of Intellectuals in 1949, the spokesman

of the Bucharest worker's delegation Iorgu Dumitrescu stated to this effect as follows: "The

Great October Socialist Revolution and the triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union have proved

that it is possible to build a society […] where all human genius and thought are placed at the

service, not of exploitation, but of the free development of the people."[57]

The new socialist regime understood the production and dissemination of knowledge as a

strict function of class relations. Therefore, it denounced the bourgeois-feudal culture of the

Romanian monarchy and claimed that only a new culture of and for the masses could guarantee

liberation from social injustice and cultivate an authentic sense of patriotism. By virtue of its

language of class struggle, the party-state's analysis of society easily lent itself to a dichotomous

vision that set the exploiting classes against the working proletarian and peasantry. Devoted to

serving "the culture of the west," the argument went, the ruling elite "tore science, literature and

art away from the working people."[58] According to the secretary of the Central Committee Iosif

Chișinevschi, the bourgeoisie and the big landowners had promoted an "anti-scientific, anti-

patriotic and anti-social" cultural policy that thrived on "the cobweb of obscurantism, intrigues,

venality and national treason." This policy dragged the masses "into the darkness of ignorance in

order to maintain the regime of exploitation and oppression."[59] Ultimately, as an article from the

journal *Contemporanul* added, the false sense of patriotism which the Romanian far right and the

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[56] Pavel Țugui, "Partidul făureşte o cultură înaintată" in *Contemporanul* (May 4, 1951), 2.

[57] *Congress of the Intellectuals of the Rumanian People's Republic for Peace and Culture, May 29-31* (Bucharest: Rumanian Institute for Cultural relations with Foreign Countries, 1949), 135.

[58] Pavel Țugui, op.cit.

[59] Iosif Chișinevschi, "Development of Culture in the Rumanian People's Republic" in *The Congress of Intellectuals*, op.cit. 105-106.

"historical" parties embraced had disastrous results: "the selling of our independence and sovereignty, the economic deprivation of Romania and its enslavement to Hitler's Germany, [and] the deployment of our people into an unjust and disastrous war […]."[60] Consequently, the old elites were to be stripped of all political, social and human rights and deprived of their previous social positions. Workers and peasants, on the other hand, would inherit "the progressive traditions of the culture of the past" and become the legitimate beneficiaries of socialist construction. As newly empowered citizens, it was them that the socialist regime called upon to bring the progressive aspects of Romanian culture to "new peaks of flourishing" and to become the carriers of a new, socialist patriotism.[61]

The promise of social emancipation was pivotal to the socialist regime's heroic self-conception of being the architect of new times (*timpuri noi*). This discourse was also profoundly saturated with new claims about political legitimacy. Indeed, party ideologues often emphasized their struggles for workers' and nationalities' rights, their preoccupation with the peasant question, and their commitment mass enlightenment during the underground years in Greater Romania.[62] Emulating Stalin's speeches, such narratives also circulated rosy projections about a happy socialist future. [63] More importantly, however, to indicate that blissful utopia was already within the reach of socialist citizens, the regime repeatedly called attention to its performance in cultivating the masses, invoking its myriad literacy campaigns, sanitation drives and public

[60] Victor Adrian, "Patriotismul oamenilor muncii" in *Contemporanul* (May 7, 1948), 6.

[61] *Congress of the Intellectuals,* 135.

[62] Mihail Roller, *Istoria R.P.R. Manual pentru învățământul mediu*. 4th ed ((Bucharest: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1956). Simion Ghiță, *Antologia ateismului din România* (Bucharest: Editura științifică, 1962), 52-61.

[63] Julie Hessler, "Cultured Trade: The Stalinist Turn Towards Consumerism" in *Stalinism: New Directions* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 185. See also, Marina Galina and Evgeny Dobrenko, ed. *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (London: Anthem Press, 2009); Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

lectures. In propaganda posters it often amplified this message juxtaposing statistical representations of the inter-war and post-war developments in cultural life in order to set itself apart from the monarchy.

Socialist Patriotism and the Society

By 1948, the new regime declared a break with the political status-quo ante and the "anti-social" ideologies it had wielded for the reproduction of power and social control. Instead of ethnic and confessional affiliations, the party-state began mobilizing everyday citizens around the imaginary of "the socialist fatherland." According to the Chief of the Romanian General Staff Leontin Sălăjan, the new socialist patriotism entailed an attachment to "the revolutionary traditions of our people" exemplified by Romanian rulers fight against "the Turkish yoke," anti-Habsburg peasant uprisings, the 1848 revolutions, and the heroic struggles of the working class in the interwar period.[64] As the first secretary of the Union of Communist Youth Gheorghe Florescu argued, it also necessitated the cultivation of "an ardent devotion towards the RWP and its leaders," a love of work and a spirit of conscientiousness and firm discipline in production, not to mention a familiarity with "the culture and numerous beauties of our country" and "the magnificent achievements of socialist construction."[65] In their attempt to define socialist patriotism in positive terms, party ideologues often highlighted its constructive aspects in contrast to the destructive features of its bourgeois counterpart. What made socialist patriotism progressive, they argued, was its rootedness in international working class solidarity and in the

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[64] Leontin Sălăjan, "Măreața forță a patriotismului," *Contemporanul* (April 6, 1951), 3.

[65] Gheorghe Florescu, "Educația patriotică a tineretului- sarcină centrală a U.T.M." in *Contemporanul* (March 30, 1951), 1.

principle of the Friendship of Peoples.[66] A classic Stalinist metaphor of socialist unity and class

militancy, the latter was adopted by party leaders to signal the equitable relationship between the

formerly nationalizing Romanian majority and its "co-habiting nationalities," particularly the

Hungarian one.[67] The position of the elder brother was naturally reserved to the Soviet Union. As

some ideologues argued, namely, "the love of the Great Land of Socialism, the invincible bastion

and leader of the proletariat everywhere" was the ultimate bedrock of both proletarian

internationalism and socialist patriotism.[68]

Rejecting any above-class belongings, Romanian party leaders advanced a socialist

patriotism that intermixed respect for "progressive national traditions" with scientific-

materialism, international working class solidarity and a devotion to socialist construction and

Soviet civilization. Indeed, the socialist regime appropriated the symbolic capital of space and

time to reshape both the inner and civic lives of socialist citizens. By adopting a litany of Soviet

political rituals, party leaders reformed the calendar of national and religious holidays in order to

restructure the symbolic organization of public life and the political loyalties it engendered. For

instance, in 1948 Romanian leaders changed the Holiday of National Heroes from Jesus's

Ascension Day to May 9. They also organized red carols (*colinde*) and New Year's greetings

(*sorcova*) on December 30, the Day of the Republic, to offset religious rituals and traditions

centered on Christmas and New Year's Eve. Party cadres likewise experimented with life-cycle

rituals such as "octoberings", "communist youth weddings" (*nunte uteciste*) and "red funerals" in

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[66] Victor Adrian, "Patriotismul oamenilor muncii" in *Contemporanul* (May 7, 1948), 6. "Unitatea și frăția de nezdruncinat a poporului român cu toate naționalitățile din R.P.R." in *Scânteia*, anul XXIV, nr. 3115 (October 28, 1954), 3-4.

[67] "Unitatea și frăția de nezdruncinat a poporului român cu toate naționalitățile din R.P.R." in *Scânteia*, anul XXVI, nr. 3115 (October 28, 1954), 3-4. For an excellent description of the Stalinist concept of "Friendship of the Peoples," see Terry Martin, op.cit, 432-461.

[68] *Patriotismul și internaționalismul proletar* (Bucharest: Editura P.M.R., 1949).

an attempt to order the private world and morality of the new "homo sovieticus." Last but not least, in the attempt to restructure historical memory and promote the alignment of citizen's selves with Marxist-Leninism, the regime transformed the material infrastructure of people's lives. It adopted the cult of Soviet heroes, erected socialist monuments, and re-designed and re-named urban space.[69]

Beyond the symbolic reconstitution of time and public space, however, the Party-state assigned the task of mass enlightenment and the cultivation of socialist patriotism to a host of newly established institutions of state administration and mass organizations. The cultural departments of local people's councils executed ideological imperatives in theatres, museums, houses of culture, libraries and cinemas under the supervision of the Committee of Cultural Institutions (*Comitetul pentru Aşezămintele Culturale*) and the Committee of Cinematography (*Comitetul pentru Cinematografie*). In factories similar tasks befell to the cultural sections of the General Confederation of Labor (*Confederaţia Generală a Muncii*), and after 1955, the General Council of Trade Unions. On collectivized state farms, by comparison, responsibility belonged to the Ministry of Agriculture, in particular the cultural activists of the Miciurin Society for Agricultural Sciences (*Societatea Miciurin pentru Ştiinţele Agriculturii*) and the agricultural departments of the local people's councils, both of which were overseen by the ministry. Within this expansive institutional framework, the full coordination of mass cultural enlightenment was entrusted to the SDSC. Thus, while for other organs the function of transforming mass consciousness was one among others, the propagation of mass enlightenment, more specifically

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[69] Graeme Grill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12-14.

socialist patriotism and scientific materialism, in particular, was the SDSC's primary reason for existence.[70]

As a result, the Society fulfilled crucial duties in the mobilization for mass cultural enlightenment in the 1950s. Based on a centralized plan, it commissioned members to prepare conferences and it coordinated their nationwide presentation. Initially at least, half of the conferences dealt with political and social topics, another 30 percent aiming at the popularization of science.[71] The topics for the remaining public addresses were to be generated locally in accordance with the problems and interests specific to its diverse constituency in the region.[72] Although the public address system constituted the Society's main method of mass enlightenment, engaging the masses aurally and visually in the context of high illiteracy rates was of paramount importance especially in the Romanian countryside. Therefore, the SDSC broadcast a number of its conferences, instructing its branches to organize collective auditions.[73] Confident in the efficiency of experiential learning, it set up a series of permanent and traveling exhibits on evolutionary theory, on the Soviet and Romanian achievements of socialism, or on

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[70] Mihai Manoliu, "Doi ani de la înființarea S.R.S.C." in *Contemporanul* (June 22, 1951), 1.

[71] For instance, public lectures were prepared on "the problems of Marxism-Leninism" (e.g. the political and economic evolution of the RPR), "the feats of science and culture in the USSR," the history of Russian/Soviet-Romanian relations, the materialist conception of the world, new discoveries and practices in the natural and agricultural sciences, and on the topics of Romanian culture.

[72] ANIC, Fond Societatea pentru Răspândirea Științei și Culturii [hencefort S.R.S.C], File 6/1950, f. 7-v.

[73] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 1/1951, f. 92.

the history and eography of the fatherland.[74] It also screened Soviet lantern slides alongside documentary and artistic films, which it borrowed from Sovromfilm, and commissioned additional ones to be produced by the film studios "Alexandru Sahia" and "Ion Creangă."[75]

To complete this system of public lectures and exhibits, the Society popularized political and scientific education through the printed media. Next to the annual "Almanah of the S.D.S.C. (*Almanahul S.D.S.C*), publications intended for the broadest possible audience included the popular journals "Science and Technology" (*Știință și Tehnologie*) and "Science and Culture" (*Știință și Cultură*). Already the most widely circulated periodical given its high publication figures (50,000), the latter became the Society's chief journal following the institutional reforms undertaken during Dej's half-hearted thaw in the mid-1950s.[76] While it published articles in periodicals with national circulation, the SDSC also printed its most popular conferences in a brochure format, distributing the series "the SDSC's Collection" (*Colecția S.R.S.C.*), "Science

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[74] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 3/1950, f. 6-10 and File 8/1952, f. 76-77. Opened for the public in late May 1951 in the Pavilion for Agricultural Exhibits of Freedom Park, "the Origins and Evolution of Man" was the S.D.S.C.'s most important national exhibit in the 1950s. To bring the exhibit to the people, the SDSC commissioned the State Committee for Cinematography 100 lantern slides as well as 10 large and 10 small-sized travelling exhibits to circulate according to a detailed plan in cities and the countryside. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 11/1951, f. 54-55. Alongside two future exhibits "The Origins and Evolution of Life on Earth" and "The Origins and Development of Human Society," this exhibit reflected official attempts to normalize the scientific Marxist-Leninist perspective on man's evolution from the natural world toward socialist society. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 8/1952, f. 229. For a presentation of "the Origins and Evolution of Man" see Nicolae Ștefănescu, "Expoziția S.R.S.C: un success de seamă" in *Almanahul S.R.S.C.* (Bucharest, 1952), 204.

[75] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 11/1951, f. 169 and File 17/1951, f. 140.

[76] The journal's initial publication figures of 30,000 copies were raised to 50,000 per annum in 1952. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 3/1951, f. 8 and File 11/1952, f. 38.

for Everyone" (*Ştiinţa pentru toţi*) and "Science Wins" (*Ştiinţa învinge*).[77]

Beyond its responsibilities of producing, coordinating and disseminating political and scientific education, the Society's cardinal task was to train highly qualified cultural activists, who could successfully engage the interest of the public and could, in turn, train local cadres. For this purpose, it established its own three-month School of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture in 1953.[78] In selecting students, the SDSC followed the practices of other party schools, recruiting mainly from top party organs and its branches at the regional and district level. The Department of Agitation and Propaganda and the Ministry of Education prepared the School's course plan jointly. After graduation, students were expected to enhance the SDSC's work on the grassroots level.

To enhance the training of activists, the Society also published methodological guides and other training materials in various printed venues. Cadres and intellectuals could acquire ideological and practical guidance by consulting the Central Committee's bimonthly theoretical journal "Class Struggle" *(Lupta de clasă)* and its official organ "The Spark" (*Scânteia*). Relevant articles also appeared in the weekly of the Ministry of Culture called "Our Age" (*Contemporanul*), and the monthly of the State Committee for the Houses of Culture entitled

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[77] The Society published mainly in periodicals such as "The Spark" (*Scânteia*), "The Youth's Spark" (*Scânteia Tineretului*), "The Army's Voice" (*Glasul Armatei*), "The Universe" (*Universul*), and "Union Life" (*Viaţa Sindicală*). ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 5/1951, f. 72-75. Its collections were usually printed by the state publishers such as Editura de Stat, Editura Tehnică and Cartea Rusă, while the other two were published by Cartea Rusă and Editura Tineretului. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 11/1952, f. 91. Other collections were issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Red Cross, Editura PMR, Editura Militară, Editura de Stat pentru Literatura Stiinţifică şi Didactică. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 10/1951, f. 76. Some of the SDSC's publications were translated in the language of co-habiting nationalities – Hungarian, German, Serbo-Croatian, and Ukrainian, although their numbers tended to be below the demographic percentage of minority populations.

[78] According to the Presidium's resolution on 3 February 1953, the first class of 35 students was to start in Bucharest in the third trimester and the second in the fourth quarter preferably in one of the regions. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 1/1953, f. 12-13.

"The Cultural Guide" (*Îndrumătorul Cultural*).[79] Finally, cadres and intellectuals also had access

to Soviet political writings and scientific scholarship through the publications of "the Russian

Book" (*Cartea Rusă*), the Political Publishing House (*Editura Politică*) and through

methodological brochures issued in the collection "For the assistance of the S.D.S.C.'s lecturers"

(*Colecția "În ajutorul conferențiarilor S.R.S.C."*).[80]

In order to perform all of its duties, the Society's central branch in Bucharest was allotted

ninety-nine employees by 1951. This staff transferred presumably from Party organs, the state

bureaucracy and institutions of public education.[81] At the local level, a series of regional and

district branches (*filiale regionale* and *subfiliale raionale*) helped execute the SDSC's central

plan. These branches coordinated conferences, monitored popular responses, and researched

problems assigned from above.[82] According to its founding statute of 1949, the role of

bureaucratic oversight was allotted to an Executive Council and a Presidium, both of which

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[79] The latter was also published by the same title in German (*Kultureller Wegweiser*) and in Hungarian (*Művelődési Útmutató*) until 1956 and then under the titles "People and Culture" (*Volk und Kultur*) and "Enculturation" (*Művelődés*).

[80] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Despre religie* (Bucharest: ESLP, 1956); G.A. Gurev, *Despre credința în dumnezeu: de vorbă cu credincioșii* (Bucharest: ESLP, 1956); M.P. Baskin, *Materialismul și religia* (Bucharest: ESLP, 1958). Stalin's foundational works on the nationality question were published somewhat earlier. See, Iosif Stalin, *Marxismul și chestiunea națională* (Bucharest: Editura P.M.R., 1949), *Problema națională și leninismul: răspuns tovarășilor Mescov, Covalciuc si altora* (Bucharest: Editura P.M.R., 1949).

[81] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 7/1950, f. 24-26. According to its organizational diagram, the Society's headquarters included the following administrative organs: the Secretariat, the Administrative and Financial Division and the Personnel Office. Headquarters had sections producing and supervising political and scientific education such as the Organizational Division with an Office of Instructors and the Division for Political and Scientific Education, which had a library and separate departments for the natural sciences, technology and politics, society and economy. The counselors, reviewers and instructors employed in the latter two divisions were transferred from academic and research institutions and party schools.

[82] An executive committee ran each regional base, directing a staff of activists assigned to various scientific departments, district branches, urban and rural readerships and "red corners."

comprised the who's who of the regime's cultural and scientific establishment.[83] Yet, besides

these academicians, writers and physicians, the presence of secretary Leonte Răutu and his

deputies Ofelia Manole and Mihail Roller in the Society's governing bodies confirmed that the

actual reins of control lay in the figurative hands of the CC's Agitprop.

Two years after its establishment, the Society trumpeted numerical evidence in the

socialist press on its expanding institutional infrastructure, growing membership base, and the

successful proliferation of public lectures. Based on such numbers, it claimed that its rapid

societal penetration was thrust forward by a mass thirst for enlightenment and for emancipation

from the shackles of past ideologies.[84] Intended for a mass audience, this public account of

triumph was overshadowed however by a second account – one much more disconcerted about

challenges on the ground and much less convinced about the prospects of inevitable success.

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[83] Appointed directly by the Council of Ministers, the first Executive Council included members of the Academy of Sciences who also fulfilled leading positions in ministries and institutions of higher education and research: Traian Săvulescu, President of the Academy of Sciences; Petre Constantinescu-Iaşi, Director of the Institute of History "Nicolae Iorga"; Vasile Mârza, the Minister of Health, Grigore C. Moisil, President of the Society of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Ripan Raluca, Dean of the Department of Chemistry at the "Victor Babeş" University in Cluj, Mihail Roller, Deputy Director of the Institute of Party History. Additionally, the Council also had representatives from the main party newspaper Scânteia (the journalists Horia Liman and Alexandru Buican), the Writer's Union (the president Zaharia Stancu and the writer Geo Bogza), the C.C. of the U.T.M. (Paul Cornea), the Romanian Army (Valter Roman, Chief of Staff) as well as members of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (the secretary Leonte Răutu, his deputy Ofelia Manole and the already mentioned Mihail Roller). The other appointees were Ernest Ungureanu, medic and professor at the Department of Medicine and Pharmaceutics at the University of Iaşi, Prof. Ion Rădulescu, Prof. Simion Pop, Ion Pârvu, engineer, Vanda Nicolschi, prof. Ion Murgulescu, Dumitru Mihalache, Ion Gh. Maurer, prof. Victor Malinschi, prof. Ion Livescu, Dr. Constantin Dumitriu, Sergiu Brătescu, assistant professor Ion Banu and prof. Ilie Ardeleanu. See *Statutul S.R.S.C.*, op. cit. In 1949 the SDSC's Executive Council elected Traian Săvulescu for the position of director, and Ion Gh. Maurer and Valter Roman as deputy-directors. Cite According to the Society's organizational diagram, the position of the latter two was later occupied in 1954 by Alexandru Buican, journalist at *Scânteia*, and Eduard Mezincescu, former Minister of Culture. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 1/1954, f. 24-25.

[84] By 1951 the Society had established 28 regional, 39 district branches and 112 readerships; it claimed 18,000 members and 6,200 representatives with the help of whom it purportedly held 92,000 conferences with 11,500,000 participants. Approximately, 7 percent of these conferences (6,400) were reportedly held in Hungarian, German, Serbian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Turkish and Greek. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 3/1951, f. 8. The SDSC's reported publications of brochures were 23 titles in Romanian in 1,165,000 copies, 16 titles in Hungarian, German and Serbo-Croatian in 73,000 copies. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 1/1951, f. 37. The Society also printed 60 articles in the local and central press, broadcast 70 conferences in its Wednesday series and maintained a radio program for children "Responses to pupils' questions" ("Răspunsuri la întrebările elevilor") on Sundays at 8 a.m. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 3/1951, f. 8 and File 1/1959, f. 92.

Directed at a narrow audience of party cadres and cultural workers, this counter-narrative

unfolded from the instructions and territorial reports of the SDSC's Orgburo and the archives of

the Central Committee. In contrast to the Society's official discourse, it highlighted the

paradoxes inherent in socialist discourse, party-state administration and resource distribution.[85]

Between the Party and the State

According to the provisions on institutional membership in its first statute, the Society

seemed to enjoy a well-defined jurisdiction with respect to ministries, party organs and mass

organizations. It also appeared to have a privileged status within the larger institutional web of

the new socialist state.[86] While the Society had the task to plan and produce the ideological

materials for mass enlightenment and coordinate their dissemination, its institutional members

were assigned the more menial role of facilitators, having to provide the Society with substantial

financial support, audience, transportation and accommodation for its lecturers.[87] The SDSC's

status as a nationwide ideological establishment also seemed to be confirmed by the extension of

its institutional grasp into the villages in the late 1940s, when the rural readerships of the State

Committee for the Houses of Culture (SCHC) were transferred to its jurisdiction.[88] Yet, the

Society's internal reports painted a far messier image of an institution struggling with an

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[85] This contrast between the regime's propagandistic narrative for mass consumption and its internal narrative of affliction and ambiguity is noted for the Soviet Union by Victoria Smolkin in her dissertation, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty:' Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971," 51.

[86] *Statutul Societăţii pentru Răspândirea Ştiinţei şi Culturii* (Bucharest: S.R.S.C., 1949).

[87] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 2/1950, f. 29.

[88] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 6/1950, f. 29 and File 1/1950, f. 63.

ambivalent jurisdiction, organizational disarray, and devolution in a chaotic bureaucratic environment.

By far the largest source of complications was the state's decision to entrust the task of uplifting the masses to a multiplicity of mass organizations such as the Union of Romanian Democratic Women, ARLUS, and CGM, not to mention organs of the state administration such as the Ministry of Education, the State Committee for Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Labor. Without doubt, this tenacious drafting of all institutions in society into mass cultural work was paradigmatic to socialist regimes.[89] Yet, as the Society's records show, the ensuing overlaps in the fields of institutional authority presented not only central organs but also regional and district branches with considerable challenges. For instance, mass organizations and people's councils, the different sections of which were subordinate to various ministries, often duplicated the Society's conference schedules at the local level. On the local level, this resulted in the excessive repetition of lectures and alienating target audiences, as a result.[90] Besides popular demobilization, the duplication of efforts by party-state organs also gave way competition over local audiences, adding to the frustrations and institutional inefficiency of local branches. A member at the Executive Council meeting on October 10, 1955 complained as follows: "I held a lecture at Sibiu, but there were five other lectures scheduled for that day. So that all the people who would have participated in ours split up." As he concluded, several branches struggled with the same problem: "the lack of coordination in cultural activity."[91]

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[89] David Brandenberger, *The Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination and Terror Under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 22. See also, Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

[90] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 7/1952, f. 45.

[91] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 67/1953, f. 50.

Such encroachments on the SDSC's field of authority were amplified when various local organs of the party-state arrogated the Society's institutional structures for their own purposes. According to certain reports of the Personnel Office ("Secția Cadre") drawn up in the aftermath of periodic controls in the provinces, regional party committees and mass organizations often regarded the local SDSC as a "reservoir of speakers" and "a factory of public lectures" on which they could readily rely in times of campaigns to ameliorate the systemic chronic shortage of activists and propaganda materials. An analysis of the Society's activity in the Hungarian Autonomous region described this situation well:

> There were frequent cases when the branch received "orders" from ARLUS [the Association for Strengthening Romanian-Russian Relationships] to mobilize lecturers […]. Especially in the Month of [Soviet-Romanian] Friendship, ARLUS assigned the branch several duties, creating the impression that the SDSC was its subordinate. Thus, besides asking the branch to recommend and mobilize lecturers for ARLUS conferences, it also drew up instructions for the writing of reviews on all movies that would be shown during the Week of the Soviet Film, reviews which were also to be presented by SDSC lecturers. […] It appears that this type of collaboration with the SDSC originated from the regional party, which had demanded the branch repeatedly to draw up lectures that it [the party] needed. The Committee of Fight for Peace put forth the same demands and the branch complied with docility, forgetting our instructions. Thus, it happened that several lectures not approved by the Executive Council were held under our banner.[92]

Claims that the hijacking of the SDSC's lecturers was an institutional habit learnt from the regional party structures also appeared in reports from the Stalin and Galați regions. One such report complained, for instance, about the regional party's tendency "to push the SDSC branch into the mechanical completion of Agitprop responsibilities and [its attempt] to transform it into another editorial staff in charge of producing and presenting conferences."[93]

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[92] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 64/1954, f. 48.

[93] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 4/1958, f. 116.

The appropriation of the Society's lecturers by other party-state organs to plaster the cracks in the regime's propaganda apparatus may also explain the Executive Council's constant frustration with local SDSCs, which seemed to operate "at the eleventh hour," despite the plethora of centrally developed plans.[94] Without doubt, soft and overlapping jurisdictional boundaries, with all the inefficiencies, competitions and bureaucratic disorganization they entailed, produced and irradiated tensions vertically, between the Society's central and local organs, and horizontally between the SDSC and ministries, people's councils, and mass organizations. This bureaucratic wrangling often crystallized into a discourse of blaming, where the Society and the organs of the party-state took turns in casting responsibility on the other side for encroachment, the duplication of efforts and reluctance to coordinate and cooperate.[95] Within the Society proper, central organs routinely criticized lower levels for circumventing or ignoring instructions. While regional branches transmitted the language of blaming inward and downward, the SDSC's local cadres often re-directed it upward, claiming that the governing bodies' excessive planning led to "a loss of contact with the field."[96]

Such tensions suggest that the SDSC operated in an arbitrary and chaotic institutional context, being enveloped in a constant bureaucratic wrangling over jurisdiction with other mass organizations and the party-state administration from the local to the central level. Indeed, these

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[94] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 5/1956, f. 293.

[95] Regional and district branches frequently noted that trade unions, the cultural departments of people's councils and even the regional party committees in the role of patrons, refused to support the organization of conferences. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 2/1950, f. 32 and File 6/1950, f. 40. In other cases, when lecturers arrived for a scheduled conference, their hosts had not mobilized an audience or otherwise failed to make the necessary preparations, reasons for which between 11-20% of the conferences in the last quarter of 1955 had to be called off. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 7/1955, f. 166-167. Illustrative is the case of Professor Gh. Vlăhuţă, who arrived to town of Rupea in Stalin region at 11 p.m. and was forced to sleep on the bench at the raions people's council because cadre responsible for cultural affairs was nowhere to be found. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 3/1955, f. 43. For the widespread phenomenon of blaming, see Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, 65.

[96] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 1/1955, f. 54-65.

were modi operandi symptomatic of the dual party-state structure inherited from the Soviet state. As historian Stephen Kotkin argued "the parallelism of the party-state pyramids and the multiplicity of the state itself created overlapping jurisdictions" and produced "everything from petty squabbling to bureaucratic warfare, which, although mostly invisible" were endemic to the Soviet "bureaucratic Leviathan," and by implication, to all state socialist regimes.[97] According to Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, for the Romanian regime the legacies of the Soviet party-state also involved poor planning and tremendous organizational difficulties.[98]

Aware of such bureaucratic idiosyncrasies, the Executive Council and the CC's Department of Agitation and Propaganda issued repeated instructions to SDSC branches and the relevant organs in party-state administration calling for cooperation and coordination in their work.[99] Further attempts included the allotment of delegates to the cultural departments of trade unions, people's councils and party committees. And since the overlap with the State Committee for Culture and the Arts proved particularly detrimental, the Society also renounced its permanent presence in the villages by transferring jurisdiction over rural readerships to the ministry's subsidiaries at the local level.

By the mid-1950s, however, optimistic belief in the workability of such solutions seemed to dissipate. With Khrushchev's thaw, Soviet encouragements for socialist states to pursue national roads towards communism soon translated into proposals to dissolve the SDSC. Yet, amidst the backlash against the Hungarian Revolution and Khrushchev's antireligious

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[97] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xvii and 297.

[98] Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp.58-68.

[99] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 1/1950, f. 94-v., 132, File 6/1950, f. 11-v., 39, 40 and File 8/1952, f. 73-76.

campaigns, such a unilateral reorganization of mass enlightenment in Romania was considered

radical enough to provoke Soviet antagonism.   As a 1955 Agitprop report argued:

> If the SDSC were to discontinue its activity, the Ministry of Culture, C.C.S and other institutions would have to create their own apparatus for the drawing up of materials necessary for propaganda through conferences, which would accentuate the parallelisms and would constitute a waste of labor force and financial resources...The Soviet experience and that of other people's democracies confirm the utility of such a mass organization of the intelligentsia in the mass dissemination of political and scientific knowledge.[100]

Although party-organs had seemingly opted for reform instead of dissolution, the first

and the second re-making of the Society in 1954-1955 and 1960-1961 restricted its financial and

human resources and its jurisdiction substantially. Accordingly, the resolutions adopted in April

1954 and May 1955 "On the improvement of disseminating political and scientific education

among the masses" and "On the reform of SDSC" mandated obligatory and unpaid community

work (*muncă obştească*) from all intellectuals.[101] At the Executive Council meeting on 10

October 1955, propaganda secretary Leonte Răutu explained that a primary goal of these

resolutions was to push the SDSC towards greater reliance "on the collaboration of intellectuals

instead of a structure excessively bloated and comprised of people [that were] frequently ill-

prepared."[102] The party documents also circumscribed the Society's jurisdiction by assigning

workers' clubs and "red corners" in factories to the CCS and sanctioning the transfer of

jurisdiction on cultural work in rural areas to the Ministry of Culture (former CSCA). Through

these reforms, the SDSC was to become a mass organization of intellectuals, an enlarged corps

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[100] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 53/1954, f. 264-265.

[101] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 2/1955, f. 30-38.

[102] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 1/1955, f. 54.

of experts endowed with the mission to produce brochures and hold lectures for the purposes of mass political and scientific education at the request of party-state organs at all levels. The cumulative effect of the two resolutions amounted to a devastating blow to the SDSC's institutional prestige. The obligatory community work of intellectuals and the reduction of the Society's jurisdiction decimated its central and provincial salaried personnel by 65-77.5 percent and entailed a budgetary curtailment of 52 percent.[103] As propaganda secretary Leonte Răutu described in a report to Gheorghiu-Dej, intellectuals affiliated with the Society based on "voluntary work" gave seventy percent of its public lectures without any remuneration. What is more, state subvention for the SDSC had fallen from 9.5 million lei in 1957 to 5.6 million in 1960 with the prospect of being completely withdrawn by 1963.[104]

Despite repeated delineations of the SDSC's jurisdictional functions, the parallelisms, the bureaucratic warfare and mutual blaming persisted well into the early 1960s.[105] For instance, in a note on the activity of the SDSC forwarded to Gheorghiu-Dej, Leonte Răutu observed that the SDSC "needed to develop and strengthen its collaboration with the trade unions [CGM], the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Union of Working Youth and the Women's National Council." It also "had to overcome parallelisms."[106] Yet, in addition to the bureaucratic legacy of the Soviet state, projecting a coherent approach on the place of nation and religion proved to be an additional challenge for the young socialist propaganda state.

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[103] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 4/1955, f. 13-33.

[104] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 31/1961, vol. II, 11-15.

[105] *Statutul Societății pentru Răspândirea Științei și Culturii* (Bucharest, 1956). For the Central Committee's resolution, see ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 2/1955, f. 30-38.

[106] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 31/1961, vol. II, f. 11-15.

The Society and Soviet Understandings of Nation and Religion

The RCP's approach to nation and religion relied extensively on Soviet atheist rhetoric, the church policies of the 1930s and 1940s, and on Stalin's revisions of the relationship between national identity and socialist patriotism after 1945. Accordingly, Romanian ideologues usually presented three discrete yet intertwining interpretations of bourgeois national ideology and religion and correspondingly offered divergent methods of engagement under socialism. With some approximation, these conceptualizations could be categorized as politico-historical, socio-economic and cultural – although all three were influenced to various degrees by Marxist-Leninist ideology as it evolved after Stalin's consolidation of power in the Soviet Union.[107]

Heir to the Bolshevik rhetoric of class struggle from the 1920s and 1930s, the politico-historical approach recognized that, by the early twentieth century, bourgeois nationalism and religion had folded into each other to inform citizens' loyalties and the politics of government. It portrayed religion and nationalism therefore as intertwining forms of mystification that obscured social power relations and diverted the proletariat from recognizing its own exploitation and dehumanization. Reflecting on the historic relationship between Orthodoxy and Romanian nationalism, for instance, Simion Ghiță, the editor of *The Anthology of Atheism in Romania,* stated bluntly:

> The role of the Orthodox Church in the state grew not because of 'ancestral faith' but in order […] to put the revolutionary consciousness of the masses to sleep [and] to uphold the bourgeois-feudal regime, shaken by profound social contradictions. Religious ideology is used by chauvinist and racist circles in the fight against socialists, democracy and the freedom of conscience.[108]

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[107] In the following pages I am greatly indebted to Smolkin's analysis regarding the co-existence of these three narratives in Soviet understandings of religion; however, I extend it to include the ideological elite's approaches to bourgeois nationalism and socialist patriotism. See Smolkin, 56-59.

[108] S. Ghiță, et al. *Antologia ateismului din România*, 44-45.

Informed by Marxist-Leninist ideology, such conceptualizations led party leaders to attribute national-religious affiliations to distinct institutions, political parties and social groups. Branded as class enemies, these became the victims of repressive measures. The RWP pursued the control and marginalization of national elites by uniformly purging their ranks, banning their parties and abolishing the monarchy in 1948. By comparison, despite the churches' subordination to the Department of Cults, the show trials, and waves of anti-clerical campaigns, measures for supervision and repression towards confessions and clerics showed great diversity.[109]

Yet, in their political approach to nation and religion, Romanian leaders were also inspired by the latest inflections in Soviet ideology. For instance, in its politics of alliance with the Romanian Orthodox Church and its program of scientific-materialist enlightenment, the Romanian regime mimicked Stalinist religious and atheist policy of the 1930s and 1940s. In these decades, the Soviet Union embraced a more traditionalist position and more pragmatic objectives (e.g. industrialization and the promotion of socialist patriotism) at the expense of a Bolshevik utopian verve. This shift was motivated in part by Stalin's urge to mobilize the masses for war and his plan to project Soviet socialism towards Eastern Europe. Over the course of two decades, these factors expedited a re-evaluation of the Soviet state's relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church and induced the overall cessation of militant atheist propaganda. The Soviet Union at this point also inaugurated a softer policy of scientific-materialist enlightenment in 1947 with the foundation of the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, a policy trend that Romanian communist leaders apparently followed.[110]

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[109] For a brief overview of various anti-clerical measures see Comisia Prezidențiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste, *Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 447-472.

[110] On the marginalization of Soviet atheist propaganda in this period, see Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Never Remains Empty:' Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971." For Stalin's wartime and post-war compromise with the Russian Orthodox church, S. Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War.*

By comparison to this relaxation of religious policy towards Orthodoxy, Stalin's

conception of the place of national identity became radicalized in the wake of the Cold War and

was accompanied by an offensive against Titoist "national deviations" and a state-sponsored

anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign. Both decimated party ranks across the socialist camp in

1948-1953. In line with these developments, Romanian party leaders purged party ranks and

denounced "the iniquitous principle of national unity" in December 1948 issuing two Politburo

resolutions on the national question and Zionism, respectively.[111] Since Stalin's new line also

meant the rejection of the principle of multiple national roads to socialism in favor of the Soviet

path, the Romanian regime molded its nationality policy accordingly. On the one hand, it

converged with Soviet practices that advanced nationality languages and cultures for the largest

ethnic minorities by maintaining schools, theatres, a print media and which also promoted

nationality elites into positions of leadership in the government, economy and cultural and

scientific life.[112] Such concessions were naturally intended to render national affiliations

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[111] The Politburo's 1948 "Resolution on the National Question" denounced "national unity" specifically in the case of Romanians, and Hungarians; it also delegated the responsibility to combat nationalism in their ranks to minority organizations. To the extent that it targeted Serbs, Germans and Jews, this rhetoric was specifically inflected by the Soviet-Yugoslav split in 1949, the collective blaming of Germans for World War II, and the reverberations of state-sponsored anti-Semitism that unfolded in the socialist camp between 1948-1953. As a side note, while the political loyalty of these above-mentioned ethnicities was suspect, the regime considered the Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian minorities "sincerely attached to our popular democracy." See, *Rezoluția Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. in chestiunea națională* (Bucharest: Editura P.M.R., 1948), 21-31. On the effects of the Soviet anti-Yugoslav offensive and the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign in Romania, see Rober Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 169.

[112] These concessions were guaranteed in the *Statute of Minorities* adopted in 1946 in the wake of the post-war peace settlements. They were determined, on the one hand, by the party's wish to guarantee the incorporation of Transylvania into Romania and, on the other hand, by Stalin's support for multiple national roads to communism before 1948. For the most comprehensive analysis of Romanian socialist nationality policies, see Zoltán Novák, "Politica P.C.R. față de minoritățile naționale, 1948-1975" (Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of History Nicolae Iorga, Romanian Academy of Sciences. Bucharest, 2010); Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania Rossa: Il comunismo romeno e la questione nazionale, 1944-1964* (Roma: Carocci, 2007); Attila Gidó and Olti Ágoston, eds. *Minoritatea maghiară în perioada comunistă* (Cluj-Napoca: ECDR, 2009). Zoltán M. Nagy and Ágoston Olti, eds. *Érdekképviselet vagy pártpolitika? Iratok a Magyar Népi Szövetség történetéhez, 1944–1953* (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro Print, 2009). Andreea Andreescu et al., *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Evreii din România, 1945-1965* (Cluj-Napoca: ECDR, 2003). Lucian Nastasă, *Armenii din nord-vestul Transilvaniei în anii instaurării comunismului, 1945-1953* (Cluj-Napoca: ECDR, 2008).

meaningless and open the way for class struggle and the formation of above-class identities.[113]

On the other hand, by the early 1950s Romanian leaders also came to privilege people's

integration into socialism on an individual and class-based level as opposed to a collective and

ethnic one, claiming that the national question in Romania had been solved. This gradual turn

had ramifications for nationality institutions: the Central Committee shrank the press and school

network of nationalities, particularly those of Hungarians and Jews. It also transformed minority

mass organizations from representative and community building institutions into "democratic

committees," simple conveyor belts of propaganda.[114] This turn in nationality policy also

inflected the SDSC's work. Following instructions from the Central Committee and the Council

of Ministers, the Society intensified its dissemination of scientific-materialism and socialist

patriotism in high-priority regions.[115] Concentrated mostly in Transylvania, administrative

jurisdictions such as Stalin, Hungarian Autonomous Region, Hunedoara, Cluj, Sibiu, Bacău and

Galați, had significant populations of ethnic Hungarians and Germans alongside other religious

minorities whose loyalty the state considered suspect (Roman-Catholics, Greek-Catholics,

Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.).[116]

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[113] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 1-2.

[114] See Novák, op.cit. These "democratic committees" included the Hungarian People's Union ("Magyar Népi Szövetség"), the Jewish Democratic Committee ("Comitetul Democrat Evreiesc"), the German Antifascist Committee ("Comitetul Antifascist German"), the Albanian People's Union ("Uniunea Populară Albaneză"), the Bulgarian Democratic Committee ("Comitetul Democrat Bulgar"), the Russian and Ukrainian People's Democratic Committee ("Comitetul Democrat al Populației Ruse și Ucrainene") and the Turkish-Tatar Democratic Committee ("Comitetul Democrat Turco-Tătar"). While most of these emerged as representative minority organizations in the immediate post-war period, the "democratic committees" of Germans, Russians and Ukrainians were specifically created by the RWP in 1948.

[115] For reference to one series of instructions of this kind see ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 7/1952, f. 53-60.

[116] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 2/1950, 7. By 1959 the high-priority regions underwent a slight change and included the Transylvanian regions Stalin, the Hungarian Autonomous Region, Baia Mare, Oradea and Timisoara and Bacău and Suceava in Northern Moldova. ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C, File 1/1959, f. 1-2.

While the penchant for "class war" underlying the political narrative constantly called for revolutionary vigilance and cultivated the image of an omnipresent and omnipotent "class enemy," the socio-economic understanding was inherently more confident about the ultimate passing of both nation and religion. Derived from the Marxist-Leninist premise of modernization, this approach led Romanian ideologues to posit an inverse relation between societal development and religious and national consciousness. On the one hand, the socio-economic view assumed that industrial development, urbanization, and bureaucratization as well as the spread of education, health care and social services would result in the eradication of superstitious beliefs as the masses recognized that their gods were created out of fear of the blind, unpredictable forces of social life.[117] This assumption about the inevitable forward march of secularization was widely shared by contemporary advocates of modernization theory across the political divides of the Cold War. To the extent that they privileged individual to ethnic integration, Romanian communists also espoused Lenin's and Stalin's initial belief that national self-awareness, although an unavoidable historic phase in the development of socialist societies, would eventually disappear under socialism.[118] Since the economic and cultural equalization that socialist modernity was supposed to produce international working class identity and lead ultimately to the eradication of national and religious affiliations alike, the regime identified modernization as its paramount task. The deputy Minister of Education Mihail Roșianu aptly summarized this widely held view at a conference for the superintendents of education in 1948:

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[117] Smolkin, 57. See also, Paul Froese, *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) and Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

[118] Terry Martin, 5-8; M. Frunză and I. Bălănescu, "Cu privire la problema închegării națiunii socialiste în R.P.R." in *Lupta de clasă* vol. XXXII, nr. 2-3 (February-March, 1952), 35-69.

> Thus, it is clear that religion doesn't disappear as a result of anti-religious propaganda, ideological struggle, [and] through this method of the materialist culturalization of the masses…The goal instead is socialist construction, the transformation of society's social base, that is the eradication of the [social] roots of religious superstitions.[119]

Since 'class war' and modernization processes were supposed to produce new socialist citizens as a matter of course, it was possible for proponents of either the political or socio-economic conception to espouse the view that national identity and religion would have to be overcome through politico-administrative measures or by improving the social conditions of the citizenry, respectively. By contrast the cultural narrative, which emerged by the late 1930s and was rooted in the Bolshevik party's self-conception as a cultural vanguard, had a broader agenda to struggle with national identity and religious belief as part of its effort to civilize the "backward masses."[120] In Romania, as elsewhere in the socialist camp, this cultural approach implied a more active ideological engagement with the masses in the form mass enlightenment. It also involved the promotion of various leisure activities. Accordingly, Romanian socialist citizens were to turn into self-taught people who attended lectures and evening courses, visiting libraries regularly. In their time of relaxation, they were also to attend films and lectures at local houses of culture (*case de cultură*), participate in amateur dance or theater troupes, or in the various clubs on

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[119] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 58/1948, f. 56.

[120] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 292. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 12. Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5. David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism. New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16-17.

literature, technology, natural science etc.[121] The stated assumption of these measures was that next to political and scientific-materialist lectures, socialist leisure would inevitably transform mass consciousness and everyday life.

These three interlocking narratives produced tremendous ideological confusion with regard to the status and future of both nationalism and religion – a confusion that had profound implications for the SDSC's execution of party instructions. Romanian party leaders issued resolutions announcing that the solution of the national question and religion was a function of the mutually reinforcing offensives launched on the political, socio-economic and cultural fronts. The Politburo's Resolution on the National Question welded the three discourses together and underscored the successful offensive against feudal and capitalist classes, the equal entitlement of nationalities to socio-economic and cultural development, and the importance of inculcating the spirit of brotherly conviviality and proletarian internationalism in mass consciousness.[122] Leonte Răutu's programmatic article on "religious freedom" in the early December issue of *Scânteia* proceeded in a similar vein. It mobilized the language of class war to justify the regime's several anti-clerical measures but also called for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and a struggle for "a life of welfare and culture" amidst the masses.[123] More importantly, such publications affirmed the subordination of the nationality and the religious question to the broader project of socialist construction and claimed to cement "the political-moral unity of the working class" under party leadership.

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[121] On socialist leisure in Eastern Europe see Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Susan Reid and David Crowley, *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the East Bloc* (Northwestern University Press, 2010).

[122] *Rezoluția Biroului Politic al C.C. al P.M.R. în chestiunea națională* (Bucharest: Editura P.M.R., 1948),14-16.

[123] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 39/1949, entitled "Article regarding religious freedom" with the note "title to be changed later" was signed by Leonte Răutu.

Yet, although these official documents drew inspiration from the Stalinist offensive of the 1930s, no doubt partly as a result of Soviet pressure, their primary goals were to mobilize popular support and introduce a new party line rather than to clarify the discursive incongruities. Thus, the discreteness of villains and victims in official rhetoric continued to be blurry. Analyses of the societal and epistemological underpinnings of nation and religion and prescriptions for desirable state practices also refracted ambivalence. As a result, it became possible for cultural workers to become adepts of any of the three views and engage in methods ranging from militant overzealousness, passivity and under-execution to outright refusal. Since numerous cultural workers proceeded exactly in this manner, the SDSC's internal reports continuously criticized the Society's apparatus and its various institutional affiliates for deviating from ideological prescriptions. An internal report addressed to the vice-president Vasile Buican, for instance, criticized the Society's trade union delegates for their widespread practice of closing factory gates and forcing workers to attend conferences. The report also singled out a certain comrade Plopeanu at the propaganda section of the North Station party cell in Bucharest for refusing to assist mass mobilization and for declaring that the facilitation of the SDSC's lecture "Comrade Gheorghiu-Dej: A Life of Service" was not party responsibility.[124] A featured review from May 16, 1951 in *Contemporanul*, on the other hand, chided both the SDSC's district branch and the central committee of Vâlcea region for their lack of enthusiasm and complacent attitude towards mass enlightenment. Furthermore, it reproved the apolitism of a cultural worker who, while delivering a lecture on the Chinese occupation of Tibet, missed a perfect ideological opportunity to underline the importance of class war against churches.[125] As both documents implied, the

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[124] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 67/1953, f. 253.

[125] E. Caragheorghe, "Cum îndrumează Comitetul Regional P.M.R. Vâlcea activitatea filialei S.R.S.C." in *Contemporanul* (May 16, 1951), 1.

wide spectrum of undisciplined behavior among cultural workers damaged the SDSC's public image and the regime's efforts at mass enlightenment.

The early programmatic documents also obscured the deep ideological rifts and the lack of a unified political will in the central and local organs of the party-state. These in turn further aggravated the systemic ideological incongruities that the Romanian regime had already inherited from Marxist-Leninist thought. Fissures among party leaders and government representatives on religious policy became particularly evident following the secularization of state education, which the Ministry of Public Education launched in August 1948. To pacify the mounting popular outcry of religious believers at the removal of school icons and at the state's broader offensive against religion, Deputy Minister Mihail Roşianu, a proponent of the socio-economic stance, instructed county inspectors of education to assume a position of neutrality to prayers, icons and other religious symbols in schools.[126] When the Secretariat met a couple of days later, Vasile Luca reminded his colleagues that the separation of church and state was a consequence of bourgeois-democratic revolutions, a historic stage that the Romanian agrarian state had not undergone. He suggested the re-introduction of catechesis in public education. While others among the "Muscovites" agreed that the laicization of schools had been both theoretically and politically premature, Luca's policy reversal called for objections mainly because it implied the RWP's capitulation to popular pressure. Instead, Ana Pauker underlined the significance of class militancy against priests and kulaks. Reading the resolutions of the 12th and 13th Congress of the CPSU held in 1923 and 1924, Teohari Georgescu suggested, on the

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[126] ANIC, C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 58/1948, f. 2-102. Mihail Roşianu, an educator by profession, was a member of the interwar communist underground in Vâlcea County, who came to have a considerable political career, among others, as the President of the Committee for Cultural Institutions (1950-1952), the Committee for Foreign Relations (1952-1957) and President of ARLUS (1968-1971). See Florica Dobre, ed. *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 518.

other hand, a moderation of anti-clerical rhetoric and the publication of popular scientific literature. By the end of the meeting, Gheorghiu-Dej undertook to champion the offensive against religion on all three fronts. Leonte Răutu's article on religious liberty appeared shortly. Yet, the lack of a coherent platform in the Central Committee demonstrated discord on the religious question, which arguably remained present at least until the purge of the Pauker-Luca-Georgescu lot in 1952, causing confusion on the lower echelons of the party's propaganda structure.

Beside the rifts in the Central Committee on central issues of propaganda, contradictions between the party's publicly stated ideological commitments and its state practices introduced additional confusion in the party apparatus. The nationality question was such a case. By denouncing "national unity" and transforming nationality mass organizations into simple conveyor belts of propaganda in 1948, the party-state adopted the model of individual integration and branded all attempts to claim collective rights or maintain separate ethnic institutions as "isolationist." The creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region (HAR) under Soviet patronage during the 1952 administrative reorganization of Romania contradicted this principle. Whereas the resolution had stated that the priorities of the proletariat trumped the nationality question and implied that class would override ethnicity, the establishment of an administrative region based on ethnic principles suggested that the nationality question was more complex and national identity had more permanence. As historian Stefano Bottoni argued, "After the death of the chief 'patron' of Szekler autonomy, for Bucharest HAR became Stalin's awkward heritage [and] a problem to be handled."[127] Thus, Romanian nationality policy after the early 1950s increasingly sought to reduce nationality rights and nationalize the RWP's ranks outside the

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[127] Stefano Bottoni, *Sztálin a székelyeknél*, 79-106.

Hungarian Autonomous Region. Such measures naturally alienated the Transylvanian Hungarian party elite and intelligentsia, whose support for the RWP rested on the party's initial advancement of "ethnic particularism." They increasingly came to identify Imre Nagy, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers in the Republic of Hungary, as a national leader.[128] Besides emerging center-periphery rifts on ethnic rights, an increasingly diversified nationality policy also left the question open regarding whether the new socialist patriotism was Romanian-centric or whether it still accommodated ethnic-particularism.

The political education provided by the SDSC's own school and the various party institutions of education did not help bridge the ideological incoherence at the heart of official discourse nor resolve the deep-seated disparities between ideology and administrative practice. While most party cadres in Agitprop and the SDSC's central apparatus earned degrees from the 'Ştefan Gheorghiu' Academy for Socio-Political Education or the A. A. Jdanov Upper School of Social Sciences, the staff members and creative intelligentsia active in the provincial framework of the Society rarely attended the foremost party schools in the 1950s. Instead, they acquired their political education by attending 3-6 month courses at the regional party schools and workers' universities.[129]

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[128] Stefano Bottoni, *Transylvania Rossa*, 131-164. Restrictions of nationality rights affected the HAR as well since the RWP never approved a statute that would have guaranteed its constitutional recognition. For instance, to the request of Pál Bugyi, the president of the People's Council in the HAR, Zoltán Fábián, an engineer who had studied in the Soviet Union in 1949-1954 and had acquired some familiarity with Soviet nationality policies, prepared an extensive proposal for the statute. As a result of Fábián's suggestion, the draft, which ended up in the hands of the CC member Vasile Patilineț, made reference to the Abkhaz Autonomous SSR within the Georgian SSSR, where Abkhaz was recognized as an official language besides Russian and Georgian, to request similar rights to Hungarians in HAR. Amidst the domestic turmoil that the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 caused in Romania, this proposal was shelved. József Gagyi's interview with Zoltán Fábián, 7/2001, MAT Oral History Project. In the context of radical turns in Romanian nationality policy after 1956, reference to both Soviet autonomy and the Declaration of Alba Iulia were avoided. See, Bottoni, 91-92.

[129] Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Nomenclatura C.C. al P.M.R.* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), esp. 28, 388-391.

Since the syllabi and study materials devised by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda were rather general, the SDSC's cadre apparatus acquired its ideological training through the numerous party instructions and the various articles and brochures published in the socialist print media. These materials only perpetuated rather than resolved existing ideological inconsistencies. More importantly, the SDSC encountered major difficulties in including its cadres in the party's system of education. In the shifting ideological ambiance of the 1950s, the numerous purges, each lasting for months at a time, contributed to massive cadre fluctuations and shortage. In the end, as the SDSC's vice-president Eduard Menzicescu conceded at a session with the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, "instead of educating valuable specialists in all domains," the Society often had to resort to working with "insufficiently qualified people."[130]

Given these circumstances, the SDSC's internal reports continuously complained about the ideological illiteracy and substandard education of SDSC's cadres, bemoaning the ideological mistakes that seeped into conferences, exhibits and the Society's publications. For instance, in a report compiled in the aftermath of a control visit (*muncă de control*) in the Hungarian Autonomous Region, an SDSC inspector described the set-up of the travelling exhibit "The Origins and Evolution of Man" aghast:

> The display "Atavisms and Rudiments" was placed next to the "Map of Human Races"; Miciurin and Lysenko were included under "Achievements in the R.P.R."; "Man rules over nature" was put next to "Races", etc. The political displays were not fore-grounded especially the final one with comrade Stalin and comrade Gheorghiu-Dej was put in the same line and before the classical thinkers of Marxism.[131]

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[130] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 1/1955, f. 65.

[131] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 7/1952, f. 28-48.

Reporting on the activity of the Timişoara branch to the SDSC's Executive Committee Bureau in

April 1958, Imre Robotos singled out a Hungarian translation of a conference on the RWP's

nationality politics to illustrate the systemic prevalence of this problem.[132] Instead of promoting a

sense of equal entitlement and ownership of the party-state among brotherly nations, the

translator creatively translated the ideologically acceptable "common territory" (*teritoriu comun*)

into "shared living-space" (*közös lakhely*), suggesting that "all who lived in the same flat or

house were of the same nationality." In addition to such "gross and comic nonsense," the

translator claimed that "the RWP solved the Jewish problem," using a language reminiscent of

national socialist anti-Semitism, and branded the entire Turkish nationality as servants of

imperial and bourgeois interests. Such ideological mistakes perverted the content and meaning of

Society's activity, Robotos argued, discrediting the SDSC's institutional cause and ridiculing

both the translator and the public lecturer in an irreparable manner.[133]

The concern with "ideological aberrations" and public ridicule informed several

discussions regarding SDSC reforms in the 1950s. The first proposal along these lines came at

the meeting of the Executive Council on April 30, 1953. These proposals noted that the Society

needed to focus on the preparation of lectures of "a high scientific and ideological level" and on

the cultivation of "well-prepared and specialized readers." It retained its organizational

responsibilities only over conferences, exhibits and other events that were organized in urban

public halls, factories and cultural institutions. Conclusively, the organizational and financial

burdens for conducting political and scientific education in rural houses of culture, factories and

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[132] Imre Robotos (1911-2011) was the former editor of the socialist Hungarian daily *Romániai Magyar Szó* and later *Előre*. Because he supported de-Stalinization following Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, he is marginalized. At the time of his report on the SDSC's Timişoara branch, he was the chief editor of the Hungarian section within the State Press for Literature and the Arts ("Editura de Stat pentru Literatură şi Artă").

[133] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 13/1958, f. 23-26.

collective farms entered into the jurisdiction of the State Committee for the Houses of Culture and the Central Counsel of Trade Unions and their local committees of culture. Furthermore, the SDSC was to provide lectures and hold events only at the explicit request of such organs.[134] In 1954-1955 and 1960-1961 the SDSC underwent additional reforms. Yet, existing concerns over the ideological gaffes of cultural workers remained a sore issue 1963, when the Society was dissolved under the banner of the reorganization of the Ministry of Culture into the Committee for Culture and the Arts.

In producing a preliminary institutional history of the SDSC as it attempted to align citizen's selves with the worldview of socialist patriotism and scientific-materialism, this study displayed the breakdown of the ideological and bureaucratic apparatus. It showed that despite devoting considerable resources to the social and spiritual emancipation of the masses from the mystifying imaginaries of the "Christian nation," the party hierarchy faced discouraging results by the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. Throughout its existence the SDSC continued to operate in an arbitrary and chaotic institutional context and was enveloped in a constant bureaucratic wrangling over jurisdiction with other mass organizations, the party apparatus and state administration at both the local and central level. In addition to the problems emanating from the dual party-state structure, the SDSC's success was also curbed by problems of financial resources, cadre shortage and propaganda training not to mention the ideological inconsistencies and contradictory state practices that emerged from post-war Soviet approaches to national identity and religion.

These systemic failures of the early Romanian communist state put the familiar scholarly argument about the chronic deficit in national and historical legitimacy of the Romanian

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[134] ANIC, Fond S.R.S.C., File 2/1953, f. 2-125.

Communist Party into a new perspective. In particular, the obstacles the SDSC encountered nuance our understanding of the historical contingencies that paved the regime's road towards de-Sovietization, national-communism, and Ceausescu's personality cult in the 1960s. First, I suggest that the persistent malfunctions of the propaganda state opened up spaces of indeterminacy, creativity and unanticipated meanings giving everyday citizens and cultural workers significant room to interpret political and scientific education in rather selective, incongruous even frivolous ways. Ultimately, through behaviors that ranged from accommodation and indifference to outright rejection, these social categories arguably shaped the demise of the Soviet-inspired SDSC in 1963. More importantly, these early collisions of the state's totalizing aspirations with a set of social actors and political and economic realities on the ground also helped shape the rhetorical devices and institutional mechanisms with which the Ceausescu's regime would later embark on the invention of a distinctly Romanian atheist socialist nation. In particular, the obstacles the SDSC encountered as it tried to adapt Soviet institutions and concepts help explain why the late socialist regime abandoned "red" life-cycle rituals and, instead, meshed socialist and interwar "bourgeois" methods of mass mobilization to launch mass cultural events such as the "Song for Romania" (*Cântarea României*) Festival.

CHAPTER TWO
MEDIEVAL MONASTERIES,
HERITAGE AND THE SOCIALIST SACRED IN CEAUŞESCU'S ROMANIA

In 1978, International Workers' Day fell on Orthodox Easter Monday. Visiting socialist

Romania from the United Kingdom at the time, the Anglican Sister Eileen Mary found a

surprising, yet apparently common, scenery at one of the Orthodox monasteries in Northern

Moldova. The atmosphere around Agapia, she later wrote, was "somewhat like that of an English

seaside resort on a bank holiday," except for the fact that the occasion was an Orthodox holy

day. People, who had attended midnight service "in their thousands," "now wandered around the

village in family groups dressed in their best clothes, taking photos, buying souvenirs at the

monastic shop, eating simple monastic food and attending parts of the services." Historic

monasteries in Romania were preserved with state assistance, she noted, and received many

thousands of tourists and pilgrims year round. Romanians were escaping "their high-rise flats

and twentieth century amenities, her conclusion went, "to find their roots again in the traditional

Romanian way of life which the monasteries represent[ed]" and from which most of them were

but "one generation removed." [134]

Sister Eileen Mary's sketch stands in sharp contrast to accounts of demolished religious

buildings that made the Ceauşescu regime so notorious in the late 1980s. To this day, the

inhabitants and architects of Bucharest, scholars, and journalists most often evoke the late

socialist party-state in terms of its blatant destruction of historic monuments. Their empty spaces

were to provide place for Ceauşescu's new grandiose civic centers and boulevards, whether in

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[134] Sr. Eileen Mary SLG, "Orthodox Monasticism in Romania Today," *Religion in Communist Lands* 8, no. 1 (1980), 24.

the capital or the provincial cities.[135] In particular, Bucharest's twenty-some bulldozed churches along with numerous other historic religious buildings, which were hidden behind high-density apartment complexes, have served to emphasize the regime's anti-nationalism and its simultaneous commitment to atheism.[136]

Yet, before Ceauşescu became infamous for his massive demolition and construction projects, party and state officials assimilated cultic buildings into the patrimony of the socialist state. The first attempts in this direction occurred in the immediate post-Stalin era under the first party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, when restoration projects opened in 1954-1957 at select churches. After 1965, numerous ecclesiastic buildings became sites for state-funded archeological digs and restoration programs. More importantly, they were integrated into the conduits of socialist tourism and a secular patriotic education, becoming centers for the making of the new socialist man. Lists of historic monuments and of outstanding renovations underwent careful political selection. Yet, in 1960-1977 the socialist regime funded the reparation and restoration of seventy-nine churches in contrast to only sixty-two civic structures.

Most of the churches retained their cultic function while simultaneously serving as museums and tourist destinations.[137] Some, like the princely monasteries of Putna and Argeş,

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[135] Because the literature on church demolitions in Bucharest is rather extensive I give only a few examples here. Silvia Kerim, *Vedere din parfumerie* (Craiova, 2000). Lidia Anania et al., *Biserici osândite de Ceauşescu: Bucureşti, 1977-1989* (Bucureşti: Editura Anastasia, 1995). Dennis Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 308-311. Jessica Douglas-Home, "Letter," *The New York Times*, 17 October 1987, 30.

[136] Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-209-12, Situation Report: Romania, 16 August 1985, "The Destruction of Old Bucharest Continues," 25-30. Dinu C. Giurescu, *The Razing of Romania's Past* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1990).

[137] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 27/1977, 14-16.

gave home to repeated church and state commemorations.[138] Cultic building also acquired

mobility in socialist commerce. Their images appeared on commemorative stamps and postcards.

These representations were also circulated in historical and architectural descriptions through the

socialist press, in the brochures of the Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture, and

in tourist guides. By the late 1960s, in fact, the state had cast a number of religious buildings as

carriers of socialist memory and identity. It encouraged citizens to take ownership of their own

integration into the socialist nation by sightseeing and caring for these built vestiges of the past.

Given the centrality of religion to Cold War politics and to Romania's pursuit of an

independent road within the socialist camp, party officials also relied on cultic buildings and

movable religious art for a number of reasons. Establishing the "liberalism" of the regime on the

international political scene, emphasizing "national sovereignty," and pursuing close cultural and

diplomatic relations with the "west" were all official priorities at the time. As the head of the

Department of Cults Dumitru Dogaru suggested, taking foreign church leaders or citizens to

restored church monuments in ethnically heterogeneous areas such as Transylvania were to

assure visitors of the freedoms minorities enjoyed and of the good inter-ethnic and inter-

confessional relations that existed in the country. Church monuments also served to enlighten

visitors about the numerical preponderance of the Orthodox Church and the Romanian people.

Especially in ethnically mixed areas, such monuments were mobilized to reaffirm national

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[138] In 1955, the Romanian Orthodox Church commemorated the seventy-year anniversary of its independence from the Ecumenical Patriachate of Constantinople at the Argeș monastery with representatives of the Central Committee. In 1966, the monastery also hosted state festivities commemorating four-hundred-fifty-years since its construction. In 1957, celebrations organized by the Union of Communist Students' Association (Uniunea Asociației Studenților Comuniști) also took place at Putna. In 1966, the monastery gave home to socialist mass festivals again during celebrations regarding the laying of the monastery's cornerstone.

sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the socialist nation.[139]

To establish the permissiveness of the regime on the international scene, crosses, icons and other religious artifacts were customarily circulated through foreign exhibits. "Romanian Art Treasures," for instance, toured Britain's major cities in 1965-1966. "Romanian Icons" opened in June 1971 in Düsseldorf, the Federal Republic of Germany, while "Romanian Folk Costumes and Peasant Paintings" was inaugurated in Tokyo in 1977.[140] In the meantime, immovable cultic structures along with the recent achievements of socialist industrialization – factories, hydro-electric dams, blocks of flats and high-rise hotels – served to brand Romania as an international tourist destination, indisputably modern yet the home of a rich national past available for "western" consumption.

The Romanian socialist state's symbolic and economic investment into church-monuments raises questions about the relationship between religion, the sacred, and socialist

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[139] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I., "Notă Informativă – 8 august 1968**,"** f**.** 296. Ibid, "Notă – 13 iulie 1968," f**.** 279-280. As Dogaru's words in the document suggest, these answers were directed against the Hungarian diaspora in North America, which lobbied with western governments and international human rights organizations on account of the regime's persecution of minorities and which, in the tradition of territorial debates after the world wars, often presented Transylvania as a Hungarian space. Andrew Ludanyi, "Hungarian Lobbying Efforts for the Human Rights of Minorities in Romania: the CHRR/HRRF as a Case Study," *Hungarian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1990), 77-90. Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). For how Saxon churches were used to mend Romania's image in the eyes of both East German and West German tourists see, James Koranyi, "Voyages of Socialist Discovery: German-German Exchanges between the GDR and Romania," *Slavonic and East European Review* 92, no. 3 (July 2014): 479-506, esp. 490-6.

[140] Archive of the Ministry of Culture and National Patrimony (Arhiva Ministerului Culturii și Patrimoniului Național, henceforth AMCPN), Consiliul Artelor Plastice - Monumente Istorice, File 4161/1965, "Către I.P.S. Mitropolit Iustin Moisescu, Arhiepiscopia Moldovei și Sucevei," f.1. According to the exhibition's catalogue, Rumanian Art Treasures: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries (Edinburgh, 1965), Romanian religious art was shown to visitors at the Royal Scottish Museum, the National Museum of Wales, and the Arts Council Gallery in London. AMCPN, Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă, File 4675/1971, "Aprobare gratuite pentru catalogul *Icoane din România* în limba germană pentru expoziția din Düsseldorf," f. 165. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 20/1977, f. 8-16. Author's note: the Archive of the Ministry of Culture has not been organized into funds; it lacks inventories and most files are without pagination. Therefore, when citing, I will indicate the title of the file and the document with the file's pagination, where available. In other cases, the document's pagination will appear in square brackets.

modernity. Conventional Marxist-Leninist understandings approached religious belief as "false consciousness" – more specifically, as a manifestation of counterrevolutionary politics, economic backwardness, and scientific ignorance. Propaganda materials most often professed that the advent of socialist modernity heralded the inevitable "withering away" of religion. Taking their cue from this ideological rejection of faith, studies overwhelmingly explored the various means by which communist states sought to disenchant society not only by physically repressing and removing religion from public space but also by ideologically overcoming belief in the hearts and minds of citizens. Communist states' oft-avowed opposition to religion also inspired historians to analyze how the party-state's periodic furor against religion translated into various forms of *spatial distancing*, for which the most obvious example was the demolition of church-monuments in the Soviet Union.[141] As Igor Polianski suggested, an important aspect of such processes of de-sacralization also included *temporal distancing*. This entailed the recasting of churches as anti-religious museums and the framing of faith as an allochronic, deviant, and socially exploitative ideology that would be successfully overcome by Marxist-Leninist science.[142]

By analyzing the emergence of church-monuments at the center of the Romanian socialist regime of heritage, this chapter examines the historicization and aesthetization of religion – in effect, its re-signification as national memory. The first two sections look at how the discourse on historical monuments, especially cultic buildings, evolved under the first party leader

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[141] Orlando Figes and Boris I. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Karl D. Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction: Urban Identity in Soviet Sevastopol after World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[142] Igor Polianski, "The Antireligious Museum: Soviet Heterotopia between Transcending and Remembering Religious Heritage." Paul Betts and Stephen Smith, eds. *Religion, Science and Communism in Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 253-274.

Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej at a time when the early socialist regime set out to disrupt historical memory by rearranging spaces, people, and property, as well as institutions and hierarchies of expertise. Amidst the regime's particular preoccupation with constructing new physical markers for the bright socialist future, I explore the reactions that marginalized churches and monastic structures elicited from the Securitate, the Ministry of Cults, the Central Committee as well as various experts – architects, historians and preservationists. I pay close attention to how the emergence of the national communist line after Stalin's death and the related shifts in nationality policy, church-state relations, and patriotic-atheist education affected the scant but initial restorations and official commemorations at cultic sites. These processes, I argue, prepared the way for certain monasteries to transition from their marginal status to sites worthy of conservation and socialist national memory.

The third section of the chapter explores the emergence of institutionalized care for cultic buildings and the commencement of massive restoration projects during late socialism. I trace how Nicolae Ceausescu's particular ideological priorities meshed with the aspirations of medievalist art historians and preservationists who were marginalized in the 1950s. The resulting shift in regimes of expertise, resource allocation and institutional hierarchy, I argue, was exemplified through the newly established Commission for Historical Monuments and the emergence of particular monasteries as officially sanctioned sites for socialist tourism and patriotic education.

The last section examines citizen's petitions and letters of opinion to political leaders in order to analyze how everyday people related to church-monuments. I argue that, while ordinary citizens reproduced key elements of official rhetoric, they also pressured the state to extend the cultic material culture it considered representative of its past. Everyday people constantly

provoked officials to clarify the ideological relationship between religion and the national past. What their engagement reveals is that, for the production of value around church-monuments in late socialist Romania to happen, the fit between the values assigned by the state and by everyday social actors needed to be minimal. Thus, the intersection between official and popular discourse cannot be taken as proof that the party leadership managed to form a consensus around the ideological meaning of cultic monuments.

The Early Socialist Regime of Heritage

After 1948, party leaders fully embraced their utopian desire to cast society anew. Accordingly, the new regime set in motion complex processes that re-signified and reordered spaces, people, property, not to mention institutions and hierarchies of knowledge. At the center of socialist modernization, cities were meant to embody and glorify "the new life." As the authors of a 1949 Central Committee report on the systematization plan for the capital noted, socialist urbanization constituted "an act of prestige for the local organs of state power." Yet, it was also "an action of great importance in the current political moment" because it announced the transformation of the fatherland under socialism.[143]

Not surprisingly, endeavors to remake Bucharest as a model for future socialist cities already reflected the interconnectedness of such strategies. Advancing socialist realist art and architecture, centralized economic and "scientific" urban planning, state expropriations and new housing policies, such urban visions helped legitimize the re-making of institutional structures and fields of expertise (most notably in architecture and urbanism). The re-constitution of urban space was also instrumental to the creation of socialist property and the empowerment of

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[143] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 220/1949, f. 6.

previously marginalized classes who were now to inhabit downtowns – the cultural, social and physical centers of a new society.[144]

This extraordinary investment in the revolutionary transformation of society needed symbolic and material grounding in a past that legitimized the viability of an alternative, socialist future. As Jan Assman argued, institutionalized forms of cultural memory such as History are disembodied from the realms of everyday experience and social bonds. As a result, such forms of memory necessitate re-incorporation through ritualized forms of communication, most notably spatial referents like monuments or artifacts.[145] Indeed, as for other modern states, the practice of reading history onto stone was a quintessential strategy through which the regime satisfied its desire for material self-representation and pursued its aspiration for a new social order. However, because of Marxism-Leninism's teleological philosophy of history and its emphasis on materialism, traces of the past contained in material culture also constituted the ultimate

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[144] Grama, 84-96; Liviu Chelcea, "State, Kinship, and Urban Transformations during and after Housing Nationalization, Bucharest, 1945-2004" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2004), 95-131; Ana Maria Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul communist, România, 1944-1989* (Bucharest:Simetria, 2011), esp. the chapter "Locuința și orașul socialist," 44-62. The restructuring of the institutional framework and professional expertise in architecture and urbanism began in 1949 and was concluded in 1952 with a resolution adopted by the CC and the Council of Ministers on November 13, 1952. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 103/1952, "Hotărârea privind construcția și reconstrucția socialistă a orașelor precum și organizarea activității în domeniul arhitecturii," f. 13-22.

Paradoxical at its core, this process reflected both the extension of political control and the regime's immense political interest and financial investment in architecture and urbanism, which it recognized as crucial for urban remodeling, the building of a planned economy, and the advent of a bright socialist future. Also, as Zahariade notes, the state's programmatic drive for the socialist city coincided with the project of modernist architects active already during the interwar years, among whom "the idea that Romanian cities represented large villages was quite widespread" and who impatiently welcomed the chance to experiment with more daring visions of the city, regardless of whether they felt close to Marxism-Leninism or not. Zahariade, 51-54.

[145] Jan Assman, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erli and Ansgar Nünning (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 114.

"objective" proofs which could legitimize the regime's claim that its new historical narrative corresponded to actual "scientific truth."[146]

The Dej regime's efforts to rearrange the physical markers of the past commenced during the first countrywide campaign of iconoclasm in 1947-1952. This drive resulted in the demolition of numerous monuments and sculptures erected by the Romanian monarchy and the relocation of others. A few, those deemed more adaptable to the regime's desired versions of the past, underwent physical and symbolic alteration.[147] As in the Bolshevik case, these steps hardly evidenced the regime's mindless furor. Such acts constituted, rather, a complex semiotic process through which the socialist state sorted through the visual symbols of power that belonged to previous regimes as it was searching for its own usable past.[148]

Yet, as Grama argued, the regime's efforts to construct itself a new body politic by redefining and rearranging heritage involved a more complex process of remaking institutional

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[146] Grama, 217.

[147] The state's nuanced approach to vestiges of the past was evident early on. Thus, in 1948, it decided to demolish the sculpture of politician Ionel I.C. Brătianu, one of the architects of Greater Romania, and the equestrian statue of Romania's first monarch, King Carol I. A year earlier, however, it chose to re-signify the Masoleum of Mărășești. Despite the joint Russian-Romanian offensive against the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army at the Battle of Mărășești (1917), the Romanian monarchy had commissioned this monument solely in the memory of Romanian soldiers.

The reinterpretation of the monument in 1947 proceeded through the re-burial of the Russian general Feodor Alexandrovici Coloacev, commander of Russian Army's 8th Artillery Division at the battle. Alexandru Panaitescu, *De la Casa Scânteii la Casa Poporului: Patru decenii de arhitectură în București, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2012), 238; "Masoleul de la Mărășești" at www.bucurestiivechisinoi.ro/2012/01/mausoleul-de-la-marasesti (last accessed 8 January 2014).

This internment achieved a complex symbolic operation. It "rectified" the nationalist interpretation of history and provided material proof of Russian-Romanian brotherhood. It also made a monument to the First World War usable to the Romanian and Soviet leaders who otherwise refused to commemorate this period of "imperial strife."

[148] James Rann, "Maiakovskii and the Mobile Monument: Alternatives to Iconoclasm in Russian Culture," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 766-791.

structures, regimes of expertise and cultural property. Thus, in May 1950, despite the efforts of

its members to ensure continuity in the new political context, the Commission for Historical

Monuments, which was responsible for shaping heritage in interwar Greater Romania, was

dissolved. Its staff was imprisoned or dispersed to other institutions. As the makers and keepers

of new cultural institutions, emerging elites overtook part of the former Commission's

responsibilities at Department for Museums and Monuments (*Serviciul Muzee şi Monumente*),

which was recently established under the aegis of the Committee for Cultural Establishments,

and at the Scientific Commission of Museums and Monuments (*Comisia ştiinţifică a muzeelor şi*

monumentelor), also a new institution within the Romanian Academy.[149] Within a couple of

months, the Committee sent out circulars to the provisional regional assemblies. In accordance

with the Law for the Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments dated 29 July 1919,

it recognized "houses, palaces, castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries" built before 1834 as

historical monuments worthy of preservation.[150] Soon, the Committee also called for the

establishment of "Collectives for the Historical Monuments" at the regional, county and city

level and the preparation of immediate registries and forbade demolition, renovations or any kind

of remodeling on buildings hundred years or older, without the express permission of central

authorities.[151]

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[149] Established on 17 March 1950 under the aegis of the Council of Ministers, the Committee for Cultural Establishment functioned until November 1953 when it was reorganized as the Ministry of Culture. The Scientific Committee of Museums and Monuments (*Comisia ştiinţifică a muzeelor şi monumentelor*) at the Academy came into being by Decree nr. 46/1951. See the legislation to this effect, "Decretul 63/1950 din 17 martie 1950," *Buletinul Oficial* no. 25 (17 March 1950); "Decree 462/1953 din 31 octombrie 1953," *Buletinul Oficial* 2, no. 44 (31 October 1953); "Decretul 46/1951 pentru organizarea ştiinţifică a muzeelor şi conservarea monumentelor istorice şi artistice," *Buletinul Oficial* 3, no. 35.

[150] Archive of the National Institute for Historical Monuments [Arhiva Institutului Naţional de Monumente Istorice, henceforth AINMI], File 3814, "Acte normative muzee şi monumente, 1947-1952," 8. Qtd. in Grama, 78.

[151] Grama, 71 and 78-79.

Such provisions certainly stood in the shadow of a new Soviet awareness regarding the place of monuments in national patrimony, which had emerged from Stalin's progressive reconciliation with Russian national symbols and as a result of destructions during the Second World War.[152] However, rather than simply demonstrating unequivocal care for the vestiges of the past as a result of Soviet influence, Romanian political interest in the thorough recording of items and sites, and the concentration of decision-making power over the fate of monuments at the center revealed political imperatives particular to an emergent governmentality.

Such preoccupations exemplified the regime's struggle to appropriate cultural property and to assert political control over time and space.[153] At the same time, the new regime of heritage also signaled a radical departure from the interwar traditions of the Commission of Historical Monuments. Under the influence of interwar religious conceptualizations of nationhood, the Commission had treated late-medieval, especially Orthodox churches and monasteries, as the chief category of national monuments. It had also identified them as major

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[152] David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 91-92. Jean-Louis Cohen, "Soviet Legal Documents on the Preservation of Monuments," *Future Anterior* 5, no. 1 (2008), 62-63.

[153] The frequent institutional reorganizations and re-allocations of patrimony in the 1950s suggest that this process was hardly streamlined and clear-cut. Thus, in 1953 with the establishment of the Ministry of Culture (previously State Committee for Cultural Establishments) and the State Committee for Construction and Architecture (henceforth SCCA, previously the Ministry of Public Works and in 1959-1974 the State Committee for Construction, Architecture and Systematization) monuments of culture were re-arranged as follows: the Ministry of Cults acquired custodianship over religious monuments; historical and archeological patrimony was transferred from the Academy's Department to the Ministry of Culture. Architectural heritage became the SCCA's care. AMCPN, Direcția Arte Plastice Contemporane, File 24625/1958, vol. 1, "Informare asupra situației monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [2-5]. This changed again in 1955, 1959, and 1969, as I explain in the next pages.

sources of inspiration for the vocabulary of a Romanian national style in architecture.[154]

However, by the late 1950s instead of civic or religious built structures, freshly uncovered

medieval archeological artifacts became the "perfect heritage" under Dej.

As Grama explained, this particular love affair indicated the wider influence of Soviet

feudal archeology as a privileged episteme in legitimizing Cold War geopolitics.[155] By proving

the pervasiveness of Slavic culture across the region, east European archeologists in the 1950s

and early 1960s helped resuscitate and adapt myths of Slavic kinship, which had underwritten

nineteenth century Russian expansion into Europe; thus, they gave temporal roots and material

proofs to a new discourse about socialist brotherhood "with the USSR at its core," which now

served as a foil for Soviet expansion. The distinct emphasis on the rewriting of history through

feudal archeological artifacts was intrinsic to this discourse because, according to Marx and

Engels, the feudal mode of production was indispensable for the emergence of socialism.

Documenting and recovering traces of feudalism became, thus, a key strategy to justify the

Marxist historical paradigm and the inevitability of socialism.

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[154] Grama, 82. On the emergence of the national style, see Carmen Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain. Construire Une Nation a Travers l'Architecture (1881-1945)* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2004). The old Commission's particular penchant for ecclesiastical structures and the enthusiasm of its members for a Romanian national style reflected the influence of the famed historian Nicolae Iorga. As an enduring member and later president of the Commission in 1930-1936, Iorga traveled extensively across the country and recovered such churches in his travelogues and historical works. Despite his agnosticism, Iorga viewed Orthodoxy as deserving of respect as long as it contributed to Romanian nationhood. Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *Nicolae Iorga: A Biography* (1998), 97. For Iorga's representative works in this sense, see *Istoria bisericii româneşti şi a vietii religioase a românilor* (Vălenii-de-Munte: Tipografia Neamul Românesc, 1908-1909) and *Sate şi mănăstiri* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Pavel Suru, 1916). What also explains the Commission's embrace of churches as privileged heritage is that the "taking over territory by means of religious buildings and their upgrading" constituted a key strategy by which the Romanian nationalizing state symbolically appropriated the newly acquired territories of northern Dobrogea (after 1878), Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia (after 1918). Augustin Ioan, *Power, Play and National Identity: Politics of Modernization in Central and Eastern European Architecture – The Romanian File* (Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1999), 16-17.

[155] Grama, 213-214.

Ironically, the particularly privileged career of archeology and archeological artifacts in the 1950s and early 1960s also owed much to the continued institutional and conceptual marginalization of the emergent Romanian School of Archeology under Vasile Pârvan in the interwar period. Indeed, the Dej regime recognized the value of this disciplinary realm for marginalizing dominant regimes of expertise and material representations of an Orthodox national past. It elevated archeology within its own institutional structure by renaming the Museum of Antiquities, where Pârvan's followers previously found a home, into the Institute of Archeology and including it in the Academy.[156]

Beyond the particular uses the early socialist regime found for archeology, medieval artifacts became desirable as a result of two particular traits, as Grama explained. Freshly unearthed from the ground, these findings were "new," ideologically uninhabited by previous regimes, and thus lent themselves more easily for the making of new pasts. Because of their mobility, they also endowed the early communist regime instantly with a significant heritage that could be "amassed, distributed and displayed" through the emergent network of museums.[157]

By comparison to archeological artifacts, monuments above ground led agitated lives during the 1950s. The first extensive socialist legislation and inventory, which matured progressively since the beginning of the decade, made the peripheral status of architectural heritage official. The *List of Monuments of Culture on the Territory of R.P.R*, a 1956 publication of the Academy, and the enclosed "Resolution nr. 661 of the Council of Ministers" classified monuments into four different categories (archeological, historical, architectural and art

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[156] The interwar Commission's endorsement of churches "as perfect heritage" formed grounds for intense debates over imaginaries of national history with the Museum of Antiquities and the emerging archeological school of Pârvan. For him, relics of antiquity constituted more adequate material representations of the past because they allowed the stretching back of the nation beyond medieval times. Grama, 64-65 and 145.

[157] Grama, 100-101.

monuments). Although it attributed their local care to people's councils and the Ministry of Cults (in the case of religious buildings and artifacts), at the central level their care became the responsibility of other institutions.[158] Thus, the Academy's custody over archeological artifacts and reservations (automatically deemed to carry historical value) reflected the continued centrality of these forms of materiality to the narratives of the past that archeologists at the Academy were producing.[159] By comparison, built structures categorized either as historical or architectural heritage came under the care of the Ministry of Culture and the State Committee for Construction and Architecture (henceforth SCCA).

The inclusion of civic and cultic buildings in the registry of cultural monuments certainly indicated that they carried *certain* value for the socialist state. Thus, architectural sites were declared historical if they recalled important historical events: "the revolutionary struggles of the people, the working class, and the party, the life and activity of progressive political personalities, people's heroes and creators in the fields of science, art and technology, the graves of such personalities" or "the history of technology, military, economy and everyday life." "Castles, fortresses, palaces, cultic buildings, mansions, urban and rural ensembles, ruins and remains of old constructions, bridges and grave sites" that did not meet the regime's historical criteria but had "special architectural value" and were therefore significant for "the history of architecture" were declared "architectural monuments."[160] This latter category included some secular structures that had been previously part of the interwar regime of national patrimony but

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[158] The categories used in 1955 for the classification of monuments were apparently in place two years earlier at the time when the Committee for Constructions, Architecture came into being as a result of recent legislation on the socialist reconstruction of cities and the organization of the field of architecture. AMCPN, Direcția Arte Plastice Contemporane, File 24625/1958, vol. I., "Informare asupra situației monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [4].

[159] Grama, 86.

[160] *Lista monumentelor de cultură de pe teritoriul R.P.R.* (Bucharest: Comisia Științifică a Muzeelor, 1956), ix-x.

which were now re-classified. Recently nationalized buildings expropriated from the class enemy

constituted the second sub-category of architectural monuments. The third group included the

bulk of religious buildings erected in 1878-1945 as well as churches and monasteries that had

once carried "historical value" according to pre-socialist Commission of Historical

Monuments.[161] To be precise, the *List* nominated approx. 2,400 churches as monuments of

architecture. Only one qualified as an archeological monument. No cultic buildings were listed

as historical monuments.

Within the socialist regime of heritage, historical architectural sites were certainly

considered more valuable to the socialist state than "architectural monuments." At the same time,

both types of constructions proved to be less politically valuable in the 1950s. Immovable and

already enveloped in the historical narratives of past regimes, they presented a more difficult task

in terms of ideological reinterpretation, centralization and display than the "new" and mobile

archeological artifacts.

Also, Dej's rejection of socialist realist architecture in November 1953 and the

subsequent re-integration of previously marginalized "autochtonous" experts in urban planning

set off a slow shift towards modernism. In fact, inspired by interwar modernist ideas such as the

city as a unit of production, functionality and efficiency "rather than gratuitous beautification,"

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[161] By calling on the 1919 law, which even the interwar Commission had regarded obsolete on account that it attributed historical value only to buildings and artifacts dating from before 1834, the Department of Museums and Monuments at first provided no legal protection against damage or demolition for civic and religious architecture erected after 1834. Built after the mid-nineteenth century, in the regime's eye, these sites were an outcome of the formation and modernization of the Romanian nation-state and the aesthetic preferences of an emerging middle class. Grama, 79. Since in the language of class struggle and socialist realism these structures exemplified bourgeois architects' betrayal of "the valuable artistic traditions of our people" and their enslavement to foreign capital, the regime refused to include them in "the past" it wanted to display. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2348, File 103/1952, "Hotărârea privind construcția și reconstrucția socialistă a orașelor precum și organizarea activității în domeniul arhitecturii," f. 13-22. The 1955 *List* revised the status of sites built after 1834. Along with other monuments that lost their historical value as a result of re-classifications, these constructions were now recognized as "monuments of architecture" under the broader Soviet-inspired category of "monuments of culture" and were at least nominally protected by law.

these architects found common cause with the Dej regime, which rejected Soviet guidance in urban planning and architecture as it embarked on the road towards indigenous socialism.[162] As a result, overall interest in the care for architectural monuments declined further in comparison to the early 1950s, when the post-war Soviet preservation movement held strong and when Stalin's call for the domestication of socialist realism under the banner "national in form, socialist in content" allowed for the appreciation of "progressive values," especially in architectural heritage ante-dating the nineteenth century. The scarcity and haphazard allocation of funding only confirmed the growing indifference to architectural monuments.[163]

The peripheral status of architectural or historical edifices in the new regime of heritage put their future preservation in question. While archeological sites and artifacts were central to the production of new histories and lay safely in the hands of "experts of the past" at the Academy's Institute of Archeology, the institutional allocation of edifices intimated their questionable destiny primarily because their care belonged to institutions with a mandate to shape a new social reality. The State Committee for Construction and Architecture supervised architectural sites and it shared custody over historical monuments above ground with

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[162] Zahariade, 82.

[163] According to a report prepared by the Central Committee's Department of Science and Culture in 1958, the Academy, the SCCA and the Ministry of Culture, institutions endowed by law with the care of cultural monuments, did not have the financial means necessary for the protection and restoration of built heritage. Out of the 19.380.000 lei assigned for such works in the state budget, 18,500,000 lei were at the disposal of other institutions, primarily the Ministry of Cults and local people's councils, which as the report noted, used these monies "without discernment and the necessary competence" and often "for other purposes." AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol. 1, "Referat privind problema monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [1-2]. Petre Constantinescu-Iași, Minister of Cults in 1953-1957, gave a rough confirmation, noting in an article that funds for church repairs administered by his institution increased from 200,000 lei in 1953, to 2 million in 1954, 9 million in 1957 and 18 million in 1958. Petre Constantinescu-Iași, "Respect față de monumentele istorice," *Monumente și muzee* 1 (1958), 18.

Department of Monuments and Museums at the Ministry of Culture.[164] While the Department

controlled material forms of the past alongside the Academy and thus produced and distributed

"new history" through its network of museums and curators, its parent institution, the Ministry of

Culture, and the SCCA ultimately assigned both historical and architectural monuments to

kulturniks and urban planners in charge of producing *new social relations* through new forms of

culture, economy and spatiality over the old: socialist monuments, houses of culture, proletarian

housing and industrial constructions.[165]

On the Margins

By virtue of their categorization as architectural monuments, cultic structures shared the

overall peripheral status of the built environment in early socialist patrimony. What particularly

amplified the ideological rejection of monasteries as material forms of the past was the national

and spiritual mission that the monarchy, the fascist right and certain Orthodox hierarchs had

bestowed upon monasticism in the interwar years.   Relying on longstanding critiques of

monastic decadence, King Carol II and later Ion Antonescu had pushed for thoroughgoing

reforms of monastic life during the late 1930s. At a session of the Council of Ministers in 1941,

Antonescu had briskly called on members of the government to deal with the "problem of our

monasteries": "There are beacons of intrigue and moral infection. We will either lead these

shrines onto the road of the nation's superior interests, or we destroy them. Transform them into

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[164] The Ministry of Culture also acquired responsibility over mobile works of fine art and historical artifacts (871 items); the two institutions shared responsibilities over paintings, sculpture and applied art located in architectural monuments (4,000 in number). AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol.1, "Informare aspura situației monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [4-5]. Monuments also appear to have been categorized based on "national, regional and local interest" after 1958. AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol. 1, "Referat privind problema monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [1].

[165] Grama, 59, 102, 109, 125-126.

effective centers of work and discipline!"[166] Such state efforts to employ monasteries for nation-building and social modernization energized the existing aspirations of reform-minded Orthodox clerics who sought to develop monasteries into "beacons of high spirituality," intellectual activity, economic self-sufficiency and agricultural modernization in order to advance an Orthodox national modernity.[167] Such reforms were especially fruitful in the diocese of Râmnic with the assistance of Justinian Marina, then director of the Theological Seminary in Râmnicu Vâlcea (1932-1945) and later the Romanian Patriarch (1948-1977). Other bishoprics, however, implemented such reforms only sporadically during the 1930s and the Second World War.[168]

Amidst allusions that monasteries were institutions of social exploitation, the state's renewed call for reform after 1948 served in part to justify the expropriation of ecclesiastical property. Such calls also reflected efforts to establish control over Orthodox institutions. In the context of post-war reconstruction and the unfolding class struggle of the 1950s, these materialities also encapsulated histories *against* which the state defined itself, both in terms of the past and the future it sought to embody. Beyond these ideological imperatives, however, the political meanings assigned to monasteries under Dej stemmed from the epistemologies and

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[166] M.D. Ciucă, A. Teodorescu şi B. Fl. Popovici, *Stenogramele şedinţelor Consiliului de miniştri-Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. II. Ianuarie-martie 1941 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naţionale ale României, 1998), 314.

[167] Historian of Romanian Orthodoxy George Enache argues that the pressure for reform came both from the state and from within the progressive circles of the church. Influenced by the nationalization of monastic holdings in the mid-19th century and the challenges of modernity, clerics such as Visarion Puiu, Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu, and Bishop of Râmnic Vartolomeu Stănescu, developed plans of reform that stressed the rational use of agricultural lands and the need establish theological seminaries, professional and missionary schools, artisans' workshops and social welfare institutions (orphanages, retirement homes, and hospitals). Among others, their goal was to prevent vagrancy and to assure that monks and nuns received high spiritual training, lived a genuine communal life ("viaţă de obşte"), and were involved in society. See "Monahismul ortodox român la început de veac XX. Apologeţi şi reformatori," *Ziarul Lumina*, 21 March 2010, at http://ziarullumina.ro/chipuri-si-fapte-din-viata-bor/monahismul-ortodox-roman-la-inceput-de-veac-xx-apologeti-si (last accessed 15 February 2014). qtd. In Adrian Nicolae Petcu, "Atelierele meşteşugăreşti din mănăstirile ortodoxe în perioada 1949-1960," *Caietele CNSAS* no. 6 (2010), 230-234.

[168] Petcu, "Atelierele meşteşugăreşti," 231.

conceptual labor of the Ministry of Cults and the Securitate.[169]

As in other socialist states, these two institutions shared responsibility over cult affairs and religious life. Reorganized in 1948, at the time of the adoption of the Law of Cults (Decree nr. 178), the Ministry of Cults (in 1957-1974 the Department of Cults) had the institutional mandate to assure the ideological and institutional integration of cults into the socialist system through administrative supervision and ideological control. By virtue of its overall function to integrate fear into state-making and to respond to the party's self-conception of being constantly under siege by enemies, the Securitate had the mission to find and uproot religious practice, which according to its view constituted anti-state activity at heart.[170]

Rather than being transformative simply through regulation and repression, the two institutions also generated new social relationships. Because of their staff and their position in the institutional ecology of the socialist state, these structures adopted a particular interpretive lens and produced knowledge about religion accordingly. The Ministry and the Securitate had taken shape through osmosis with interwar institutions and absorbed some of their personnel.[171] In order to compensate for their own "unhealthy" social origins, some cult inspectors and agents often built on pre-socialist narratives about the decadent state of monasticism.[172] Reports also

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[169] On the Securitate's functions and its conceptual labor, see Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archives of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2013), esp. 155-212. Below I extend her arguments to the Ministry of Cults.

[170] Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*, 24-25.

[171] Verdery and Anca Şincan attribute such continuities in personnel to the initial lack of experts in the 1950s. Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*, 10-11. Anca Şincan, "Of Middlemen and Intermediaries: Negotiating the State-Church Relationship in Communist Romania" (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2011), 10-11.

[172] For instance, one report from 1948 described monasteries as follows: "with a few fortunate exceptions, [they] are not beacons of morality and culture, and what was said in the past about their importance for Romanian civilization and culture, often enters the domain of myth." Archive of the Romanian Information Service [Arhiva Serviciului Român de Informații, henceforth ASRI], Fond D, file 7755, vol. 3, f. 118.

informed party leaders profusely about monasteries' pernicious pull on the masses, the growing

concentration of bourgeois intellectuals and legionaries and about monasteries' role as centers of

armed anti-communist resistance.[173] In part, some of these reports were rooted in reality.

However, inspectors and agents also reified the political meanings associated with these sites as

they de-contextualized the practices of ordinary citizens and monks to generate their own

overarching institutional narratives. Indeed, despite commonalities in their discourse, the

Ministry of Cults and the Securitate presented monasteries in a differentiated light as

"ideologically corrupt communities" or as places of pernicious "legionary conspiracy,"

respectively. In accordance with their particular views, these institutions also lobbied party

leaders to take different approaches: more moderate administrative measures or terror and mass

closures. I argue that this divergence in meanings and values assigned to monasteries emanated

from inter-organizational struggles characteristic to socialist institutions.[174] Thus, the two

institutions produced political meaning around monasteries in part to perpetuate their respective

function and to achieve political centrality and access to resources in the institutional ecology of

the socialist state.

Rooted in pre-1945 projects with which he had been intimately involved, Patriarch

Justinian Marina's efforts for improvements in monastic education and the transformation of

monasteries into centers of communal life (*obşte*) and artisan production protected Orthodox

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[173] For historical scholarship on the relationship of monasteries to the Iron Guard, intellectuals, and anti-communist resistance, see George Enache, *Monahismul ortodox şi puterea comunistă în România anilor '50* (Bucharest: Editura Partener, 2009) and Adrian Nicolae Petcu, "Participarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române la rezistenţa anti-comunistă," in Gheorghe Onişoru, ed. *Mişcarea armată de rezistenţă anti-comunistă, 1944-1962* (Bucharest: Kullusys, 2003).

[174] The similarities and differences in discourse became particularly crystallized in 1957-1958 as the Securitate and the Ministry of Cults competed over pre-eminence to direct the anti-religious measures against Orthodox monasteries. For the two positions, see Archive of the Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives [Arhivele Consiliului pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii, henceforth ACNSAS], Fond Documentar, File 74, vol. 7, 28-46 and 68-73. Qtd. in Enache, 45-48.

monasteries during the initial wave of anti-religious repression. The party leadership considered

the Patriarch's reforms as signs of compliance with state power and socialist principles of work,

collectivism and intellectual enlightenment. As a result, it deemed the Orthodox Church to be

devoid of "a structural deficit" and attributed reactionary cases as external, not congenital to

Orthodox monasticism.[175] Despite continued reports from the Securitate and the Department of

Cults, such circumstances allowed a veritable spiritual and economic flowering of monasticism

during the 1950s. Monasteries became targets for closures only in 1958-1961, during the last big

wave of religious persecutions.[176]

A couple of commemorations and restorations in the mid-1950s seemed to interrupt the

symbolic marginalization of cultic monuments. Grandiose public celebrations took place at the

princely monastery of Curtea de Argeş in October 1955, when the Romanian Orthodox Church

canonized the first Romanian saints in its history. In 1954-1957, the state also spent significant

funds on the restoration of the Hungarian Roman-Catholic St. Michael Cathedral and the

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[175] The two relevant documents here are the Statute for the Organization and the Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church (1948) and Regulations for the organization and the administrative and disciplinary functioning of monasteries adopted by the Holy Synod on February 25, 1950. According to the Regulations the main responsibility of monastic personnel was prayer and work; the document also included provisions for the establishment of workshops for the crafting of objects necessary for monastic life. Based on another decision of the Synod in 1950, monasteries became "communities" (*obşte*), which pleased the authorities "because it eased informative surveillance." George Enache, *Monahismul ortodox şi puterea comunistă în România anilor '50* (Bucharest: Editura Partener, 2009).

[176] In a 1958 report, the Securitate counted 191 monasteries with 6,400 monks, nuns, brothers and sisters in comparison to 178 monasteries with 5,300 monastic personnel in 1949. Archive of the Romanian Information Service [Arhiva Serviciului Român de Informaţii, henceforth ASRI], inv. D, file 7755, vol. 1., ff. 28-46. Qtd. in Cristina Păiuşan and Radu Ciuceanu, eds. *Biserica Ortodoxă sub regimul communist, 1945-1958*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: INST, 2001), 323. By 1960, there were apparently only 132 monasteries open, others were transformed into museums, hospitals, orphanages, etc. The numbers are confusing, however, because this report lists 224 monasteries in 1949 as opposed to the 191 indicated by the 1958 report. ACNSAS, fond Documentar, file 66, ff. 440. The delay in the closure of Orthodox monasteries and disbandment of some of their personnel stood in stark contrast with the fate of Roman-Catholic monasteries, which were closed already in 1949-1952, orders being legally dissolved without exception. By comparison, party leadership planned to reduce Orthodox monasteries only by approximately a half, "focusing on the dissolution especially of those established after August 23, 1944." ASRI, inv. D, file 7755, vol. 7, f. 46 in Păiuşan and Ciuceanu, *Biserica Ortodoxă sub regimul communist*, 331.

Calvinist Matthias Church in Cluj.

Rather than representative of new trends in socialist heritage and official memory culture, these events reflected official attempts to search for regime individuality and wither the political instability that enveloped the East Bloc in the mid-1950s. Carefully orchestrated to coincide with the seventy-year commemoration of the Church's autocephaly, thirty years after the proclamation of the Romanian Patriarchate and seven years following the "reunification" of Greek-Catholics with the Orthodox Church, the festivities at Argeş carried a complex propagandistic message. These festivities were meant to underscore the regime's openness and uniqueness in the socialist camp in front of both domestic and international audiences. Thus, the canonization of the first ethnically Romanian saints was instrumental for simulating religious freedom at a time when the forced unification with the Greek Catholic Church was showing signs of failure. These canonizations also spoke of the regime's efforts to capitalize on the church's relations abroad in the interest of developing new directions in foreign policy and in order to obtain support from a majority for which national and religious belonging largely coincided.[177]

In addition to presenting an image of openness and religious freedom, the restoration of the two most iconic Hungarian churches in Cluj, the ethnicity's cultural capital, represented the regime's attempt to quiet Hungarian protests. Romanianizing policies and the dismantling of ethnic institutions outside the Hungarian Autonomous Region deteriorated the party's relationship with Hungarian cadres and the wider public, who increasingly looked at the Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy not simply as a loyal communist but as a national leader. The struggles between the Soviet Party and Nagy's reformist government alongside the

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[177] Leuştean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War*, 65-70.

Hungarian Communist Party's new interest in "the problematic questions" of the Transylvanian

Hungarian minority created an uncertain political terrain for the Dej regime not the least because

of the high minority representation in the party.[178] In this context, the official approval and state

funding dedicated for the care of an ethnicity's heritage served to corroborate the impartiality of

Romanian nationality policy. It was simultaneously an attempt to manage the destabilizing

effects of Hungarian minority discontent and thereby ward off both Soviet and Hungarian

probing in Romanian affairs.[179]

The political pragmatism underlying these events and the overall marginality of religious

buildings in the early socialist heritage meant that numerous ecclesiastical structures could in

fact become expendable for the benefit of built structures in which the state recognized itself.[180]

Despite the regime's anxiety over triggering religious discontent, this became clear when three

Orthodox churches were torn down in 1958-1959 to make room for the Palace Hall, the famed

site of party congresses in Bucharest. It was also confirmed by the demolition of numerous other

cultic buildings following the construction of various dams and artificial lakes for the Hunedoara

Steel-and Iron Works and the Bicaz Hydroelectric Power Plant (1950-1960), the first and most

treasured mega-projects of Dej's industrialization efforts.

The plight of civic and ecclesiastical monuments during the regime's relentless forward

march towards a new society hardly went unnoticed. In fact, throughout the 1950s several

preservationists, art historians and architects sounded the alarm about the deplorable condition of

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[178] For a detailed examination of the policies of Romanianization implemented outside the Hungarian Autonomous Region in 1952-1954 and the evolution of relationships between the RCP, Imre Nagy and the minority, see *Stefano Bottoni, Sztálin a székelyeknél* (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro Print, 2006).

[179] The Ministry of Cults allocated 830,000 lei and 300,000 lei for the restoration of the Calvinist Mathias Church and the St. Michael Roman Catholic Cathedral, respectively. AINMI, file 3381, Corespondența Bis. R-Cat Sf. Mihail/1958-1964, f. 60.

[180] Grama, 102.

monuments. They clamored over the damaging effects of a rapidly expanding state bureaucracy, the rising popular demand for housing, and the lack of professional expertise in the execution of repairs, alterations and preservation projects. As an editorial in the review *Architectura* noted, during a research campaign led in 1951 by the Department of Architecture of the Polytechnic University and the Institute of Construction Design in Bucharest, students and practitioners of architecture discovered "numerous inadequacies regarding the maintenance and preservation of our national patrimony."[181] Transformed into communal apartments or appropriated for the new institutions of the party-state, civic buildings underwent extensive internal remodeling under the banner of strict functionality. Repairs, painting and reconstructions executed without any proper expertise and in blatant disregard of architectural styles caused irreparable harm, the authors noted. Some manors and town halls survived the demolition plans of village collectives and urban planners only due to the intercessions of students and practitioners of architecture or of committed citizens.

Churches were just as unfortunate. In the attempt to protect the painted Moldovan monastery of Sucevița from seeping water, some "well-intentioned citizens" cast its base in cement, as a result of which the water damage proceeded to the walls cracking the plaster and destroying the four-hundred-year-old frescoes of the monastery. In other cases, protest to official circles came because of the destructions caused by new housing constructions. For example, when the city council of Cluj-Napoca built a three-storied apartment building too close to the fifteenth-century Matthias church, architects in the city joined forces with artists and the

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[181] "Monumente istorice: Note pe marginea unor constatări," *Arhitectura* 2, no. 1 (January 1951).

Calvinist diocese to ask for the demolition of the new facilities, arguing that it not only

diminished the church's artistic value but gravely damaged its foundations.[182]

This situation persisted throughout the 1950s. According to a report of the Central

Committee's Department of Science and Culture from 1957, one third of monuments ranked

officially as being of "national interest" were in a dire situation, needing urgent consolidation

and restoration.[183] In another report, the Ministry of Culture added that despite its numerous

notifications to the Minister of Councils, subsequent measures only addressed the state of "an

exceptionally small number of monuments of culture."[184]

Such sources suggest that besides the official bias for new socialist forms of materiality

and attached fields of expertise, the various local departments of people's councils encroached

on architectural heritage as they struggled to manage contradictions between the ideological

drive from above (esp. new tenancy policies, the pursuit of monumental art and industrial

constructions) and existing challenges on the ground: the post-war population pressure, the

rapidly expanding socialist institutions' need for residential space, the consolidation of

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[182] AMCPN, Biserica Reformată Matia - Str. Kogălniceanu – Cluj, File 3362/1956-1964, f. 41.

[183] AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol.I, "Referat privind situația monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [2].

[184] AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol.I, "Informare asupra situației monumentelor de cultură din R.P.R.," [5].

agricultural land, and the post-war economic slump.[185]

The persistence of arguments for the value of ecclesiastical structures in *Arhitectură* and in the correspondence among institutions caring for monuments of culture suggests that preservationists, art historians and some architects, previously associated with the movement for a national style in the 1930s, engaged in significant cultural politicking around both secular and religious architectural heritage and invested considerable thought in raising its symbolic importance for the socialist regime. Indeed, monuments above ground in the 1950s became the terrain on which marginalized experts struggled for political and financial resources. In the process, they built on their interwar rivalries with modernists. They argued about forms of materiality and narratives of the past and deployed current themes in official language in pursuit of their own elevation in the hierarchy of institutions and regimes of knowledge at the expense of modernist architects, archeologists, and people's councils.

Indeed, in 1950-1953, at a time when the early socialist regime of heritage was still in flux, a number of architects, preservationists and art historians mobilized elements of official

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[185] Investment into new housing had constituted the frontispiece of numerous party documents, being considered of high priority for the material and cultural uplift of the working masses. However, despite its pronounced ideological commitments for the empowerment and social welfare of workers, the regime focused rather on reparations and remodeling of existing residential space, monumental architecture (Casa Scânteii, National Opera, constructions for the Festival of Youth in 1953), socialist monuments and industrial mega-projects. The post-war economic slump aggravated by the large reparations paid to the Soviet Union, the turbid political climate of the early 1950s and the regime's particular priorities to pursue legitimacy through futuristic self-representation and industrialization contributed thus to a scarcity of funding not only for restorations but also for housing projects. In fact, until about 1960 the state continued to fulfill the needs for office space of its increasingly complex and voluminous state apparatus as well as the popular demand for housing by relying on the stock of space expropriated from the class enemy or emptied by the former state.[185] Such strategies increased the population pressure on monuments and added to their mistreatment because they aggravated the existing, already substantial, housing crisis. The scarcity of housing reached critical levels in the post-war era also because of the destruction of residential space by Allied bombardment during the war, the industrialization efforts of the 1950s and the subsequent wave of post-war migration of approximately 200,000 citizens to the cities. Panaitescu, 234. The socialist state's overwhelming desire to commemorate its own historical narrative is evidenced by the twenty-nine resolutions that the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers passed in 1947-1969 authorizing the erection of fifty-three statues and monuments "consecrated to significant events in the history of the fatherland, of the proletarian movement or to political, scientific and cultural figures." AMCPN, Artă monumentală, File 3937/1953, "Stadiul realizării unor statui și monumente a căror ridicare a fost hotărâtă prin documentele de partid și de stat" (1969), [4].

discourse to endorse civic and religious buildings as important sources of inspiration for a new

socialist architecture. By doing so, they simultaneously advanced themselves in the socialist

regime of knowledge and institutional hierarchy. For instance, in the previously quoted op-ed

from the January 1951 issue of *Architectură*, the editors acknowledged the dual historical and

architectural importance of civic and religious buildings and called on the central and local

organs of government, architects and socialist citizens to emulate the Soviet preservation

movement. Since according to Stalin's teachings on nationhood, their argument continued, such

monuments embodied "national specificity," constituting the nation's contribution to "the

common lore of world culture" and the point of departure for a new culture that was "nationally

specific in form but the content of which tended to become socialist," the editors even called for

the establishment of a central institution to care for the maintenance, restoration and

popularization of such monuments.[186] In effect, by ignoring the classification of monuments of

culture and the institutional allocation in place, the editors of this article referenced Stalin's

preservation movement only to argue against Soviet models in heritage and to lobby for their

own institutional advancement and resources.[187]

Participating in the unfolding debates about "heritage" and "socialist modernization"

during initial plans for the reconstruction of Bucharest, Petre Antonescu, the famed proponent of

the interwar national style and erstwhile member of the Commission of Historical Monuments,

also imbued the historical aesthetics of socialist realism with notions of class war and of the anti-

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[186] "Monumente istorice: Note pe marginea unor constatări," *Arhitectura* 2, no. 1 (January 1951).

[187] This was not the first plea along these lines. As Grama notes, the Director of the Scientific Commission of Museums and Monuments wrote letters in 1950 to the Committee of Cultural Arts and the Committee for Cultural Establishments, protesting the separation of "historic monuments" from "art monuments" and arguing that all buildings carried both artistic and historical value. He suggested, in fact, that the old institutional distribution of monuments be re-established and that consequently a newly formed Commission for Historical Monuments acquire all the decision-making power and resource necessary for the care of monuments dated after 1,200. Grama, 80-82.

cosmopolitan campaign raging at the time in order to promote the late medieval monastery Mihai Vodă in central Bucharest as a privileged form of materiality.[188] After a "scientific visit" with urban planners and architects from the Institute of Construction Design and the Scientific Association of Technicians, he argued that visits to such "monuments of national architecture, which we hope will enjoy ample attention" helped "our architects" critically analyze and mold such elements of national specificity into new models suitable "for our age of socialist construction." Furthermore, forthright observation and grasp of such sites also allowed architect to discard influence of "decadent bourgeois architecture" and "constituted a decisive step in the fight against cosmopolitism," Antonescu added.[189]

In another article from May 1952, Gheorge Curinschi, the future prominent art historian of pre-modern religious architecture, similarly recovered churches and monasteries of the 15th and 16th century both as historical heritage and as repositories of a progressive vocabulary useful for the domestication of socialist realism and for the fight against cosmopolitanism.[190] Curinschi challenged the theorists of "cosmopolitan architecture" for claiming that "our old architecture

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[188] The architect, urban planner and preservationist Petre Antonescu (1873-1965) studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris and, after designing numerous public buildings, monuments and churches based on a re-interpretation of the Romanian repertoire of medieval monastic and ecclesiastical architecture, he became one of the most influential authors of the interwar national style. See his works, Petre Antonescu, *Clădiri & studii: case, biserici, monumente şi palate, încercări de architectură românească şi clasică* (Bucharest: Tipografia Guttenberg, 1913), *Biserici nouă: proecte şi schiţe* (Bucharest: Bucovina, 1943). For a discussion of his work and a short bio see, Luminiţa Machedon and Ernie Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest 1920-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 23-25, 362.

[189] Petre Antonescu, "Ansamblul architectural Mihai-Vodă," *Arhitectura* 2, no. 1 (January 1951).

[190] George Curinschi (Chişinău, 1925 - Bucharest, 1996) was a student of architect, art historian and preservationist Grigore Ionescu graduating in 1949 from the Institute of Architecture in Bucharest. Initially, he worked at the Institute for Construction Design (Institutul de Proiectare a Construcţiilor) and the Institute for the Study and Planning of Cities (Institutul de Studii şi Proiectare a Oraşelor). In 1953 he transferred to the Department of Historical and Art Monuments at the SCCA, dedicating himself to the study of architecture and preservation. After completing his dissertation, he worked briefly at the Department of Systematization as chief architect and in 1963-1968 he was technical director at the Department of Historical Monuments (SCCAS). In 1968 he embarked on a career in education but maintained contact with the field of restoration as a member of the Committee of Approval of Historical Monuments until 1972. He distinguished himself primarily as a historian of feudal architecture, preservationist and professor at the Institute of Architecture "Ion Mincu," Bucharest. See his

produced monuments of religious character, the elements of which could be of no use in contemporary creation," an unmistakable reference to modernist dismissal of Orthodox architectural traditions. For Curinschi, the architect's ability to express "the new content of our changing society" in the aesthetics of socialist realism depended on "the reconsideration of the entire artistic patrimony of our people."[191] Ecclesiastical buildings of this period exhibited "the progressive features of our national architecture," Curinschi explained, on account of the masons' social origins and the subsequent influence of popular aesthetics on religious architecture; at the same time, these monasteries and churches also carried historical value because they commemorated the internal class struggles leading to the foundation of feudal states and the progressive aspirations of feudal rulers, people and the Orthodox Church for political liberation against Ottoman rule.

Beyond the referencing socialist realism and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, Curinschi's emphasis on other themes prominent in early socialist discourse provide the opportunity to examine how church buildings could be the carriers of new pasts during this early period.[192] First, the anti-Ottoman and anti-Catholic narratives, which were characteristic of pre-1945 Romanian national historiography and are evident in this piece, were harnessed for socialist anti-imperialism (directed against "western capitalism" at this time) as well as for the ongoing oppression of Catholic churches. His valuation of the progressive historical and aesthetic role of the Orthodox Church, on the other hand, referenced the regime's close association with some

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"Memoriu de activitate" [Account of activities] dated 19 November 1974 and a bibliography of his works in Iurie Colesnic, *Basarabia necunoscută* (Chișinău: Editura Museum, 2004), 250-263.

[191] George Kurinschi, "Lupta poporului pentru independența împotriva robiei turcești," *Arhitectura* 3, no. 4-5 (April-May 1952), 37-43.

[192] Ibid, 40-41.

Orthodox prelates during the first years after regime's installation as well as the state's complex

attempts it made in order to use the church for its own legitimacy. Last but not least, Curinschi's

representation of 15th century feudalism as a golden age of state centralization, cultural

development, and political partnership among the feudal lord, the Church and the masses

rehearsed the Marxist-Leninist idea of feudalism as a key period for the emergence of socialism.

After 1953, with the decline of the Soviet heritage movement and the progressive

departure from the historicist aesthetics of socialist realism, such articles disappeared from

Arhitectură. Its pages changed to exclusively feature graphic presentations and photographs of

communal apartments, industrial complexes or urban planning projects stressing the modernist

notions of efficiency and economy.[193] However, these trends did not imply an end to

preservationist lobbying, which continued in correspondence between institutions and experts

throughout the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

Emblematic in this sense is the exchange between Virgil Vătăşianu, medieval art

historian and member of the Academy, and Ştefan Balş, architect and preservationist at planning

department of the Central Institute for Urban and Regional Systematization (Institutul Central a

Sistematizării Oraşelor şi Regiunilor - ICSOR), both of whom had played a central role in the

interwar movement for preservation and national style.[194] In 1958, a year after the closing of the

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[193] Carmen Popescu, "Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse," *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1, 109-128.

[194] Virgil Vătăşianu (Sibiu, 1902-Cluj, 1993) was a graduate of the University of Vienna in 1927. He served as the secretary of the Romanian School in Rome (1930 - 1931, 1934 - 1936 and 1938 - 1946) and taught at the University of Babeş/Babeş-Bolyai in Cluj. He became a member of the Romanian Academy in 1974.

Ştefan Balş (Bucharest, 1902-1994) was a preservationist, architect and historian of architecture. He studied under the proponents of the national style, Petru Antonescu and Paul Smărăndescu. After specializing in architectural restoration at the Romanian School in 1928-1930, he worked at the Commission for Historical Monuments. In the socialist period, he was responsible for numerous restorations of ecclesiastical and civic buildings in his capacity as director of the Department of Monuments of History and Art at the SCCA in 1953-

restoration area at the Roman-Catholic Saint Michael Cathedral in Cluj, Virgil Vătăşianu wrote

an extensive letter to the Academy's Scientific Committee of Historical Monuments. He

vehemently critiqued his own institution for not acquiring control over the restoration of a church

which, categorized as an architectural monument in the 1955 *List,* lay in effect outside the

Committee's legal mandate and jurisdiction. Vătăşianu also attacked architects at ICSOR and the

city's council for elaborating and executing the restoration project without the guidance of the

Academy's art historians and preservationists; they not only prohibited research into the history

of Gothic architecture but also compromised the quality of restorations in a sever manner. To

avoid similar cases, Vătăşianu reiterated the impassioned plea of other architects, art historians

and conservation specialists for the concentration of all heritage activities under the purview of

one institution and called in effect for a return to the traditions of interwar heritage, regimes of

expertise and institutional framework:

> I wished to notify the Committee in an attempt to either remedy the situation or to take
> measures so that in the future the Committee retains leadership and direct supervision of
> restoration works, assuring thus the gathering of scientific data, the correct preparation of
> restorations and the subsequent scholarly appreciation of accumulated observations. The
> example of these events also constitutes a serious practical illustration of the necessity to
> organize as urgently as possible a Committee for Historical Monuments that possesses
> competent and unique jurisdiction over all bodies called to carry out restorations.[195]

1972 and later as a staff member of the Department of Historical Monuments at the Council for Culture and Socialist Education (previously the Committee for Culture and the Ministry of Culture).

Established by Vasile Pârvan, architect Duiliu Marcu and Nicolae Iorga, among others, the Romanian School advanced the positive image of the country abroad while providing training and research opportunities for art historians, historians, linguists, literary scholars, archeologists, and preservationists on problems of national history. On the Romanian School and its association with the movement for a national style, see Veronica Turcuş, "Elevii Şcolii Române din Roma sub directoratul lui Vasile Pârvan: Direcţii de cercetare şi raporturi personale," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie George Bariţiu din Cluj-Napoca* XLIX (2010), 193-234.

[195] AINMI, Catedrala Romano-Catolică Sf. Mihail, Cluj, File 3376/1954-1957, f. 10.

Vătăşianu's intercession met with the aspirations of the Scientific Committee, which declared his

observations "pertinent," forwarding the letter to the Department of Monuments of History and

Art at the SCCA for study.[196] Ştefan Balş, in his double capacity as architect at ICSOR and

preservationist at the Department at the time, responded to the Scientific Committee promptly.

He rejected Vătăşianu's claims about the lack of proper expertise and guidance from the

Committee on legal and factual grounds but agreed with his plea for a single institution:

> Regarding the set-up of restoration projects, the law (H.C.M. 661/1955) requires that
> plans be executed by ICSOR under the supervision of the Department of Monuments of
> History [and Art] at SCCA. The Scientific Committee of Historical Monuments to which
> comrade professor V. Vătăşianu refers has no business with conducting restorations, its
> purpose being completely different. We note in passing that part of this Commission at
> the Academy of R.P.R. are professor and academician Duiliu Marcu, professor Horia
> Teodoru, professor Gr. Ionescu, who are all members of the SCCA's Registration Board
> as is architect Ştefan Balş from the planning department of ICSOR. Therefore, the
> affirmation that these restoration works were done without the knowledge of the
> Academy's Committee of Historical Monuments seems exaggerated. In conclusion, we
> cannot agree with prof. Vătăşianu's report except on the final part where he shows the
> necessity of establishing a single institution with sole authority over […] restoration
> works.[197]

This exchange epitomizes, on the one hand, how preservationists debated "proper expertise" in

their attempt to push against the existing regime of heritage and its privileged forms of

materiality (archeological artifacts) or reasserted their institution's jurisdiction and mandate in

face of challenge. Despite their embeddedness in competing institutions, both Vătăşianu and Balş

endorsed the establishment of Committee for Historical Monuments. At the same time, they

sought redefine heritage and to elevate the position and institutional resources of

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[196] AINMI, Corespondenţa Bis. R-Cat. Sf. Mihail, File 3381/1958-1964, f. 8.

[197] Ibid, 14.

preservationists, architects, and art historians marginalized in the existing networks of knowledge and expertise.

The continued lobbying on the pages of *Arhitectura* and in institutional correspondence appeared to bear results by the end of the decade, at a time when official memory culture decisively acquired national overtones. Following the partial return of Romania's national treasure, the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and Gheorghiu-Dej's triumph against contestants for party control (Mihai Constantinescu and Iosif Chişinevschi), political leaders showed unprecedented openness to consider intellectual grievances and even a willingness to re-think the socialist regime of heritage along autochtonous lines.[198] To commence this process, the Council of Ministers authorized the Academy to publish *Monuments and Museums* (*Monumente şi Muzee*), the first specialized review on conservation since 1949. In the inaugural issue, Petre Constantinescu-Iaşi, the former Minister of Cults, reconstructed the genealogy of the pre-socialist preservation movement and catalogued current hurdles, stopping short only of requesting the establishment of a central body.[199] The Council of Ministers additionally solicited reports from the CC's Department of Science and Culture and the Ministry of Culture on the condition of monuments.

The reports that emerged in October 1957 following the government inquiry punctuated some distinctive problems but also repeated some familiar arguments that preservationists, architects and art historians had already mobilized in their cultural politicking. The Department

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[198] On how developments in the late 1950s affected official memory culture, see Bogdan Iacob, "Stalinism, Historians, and the Nation: History-Production under Communism in Romania, 1955-1966" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Central European University, 2011), 100-157.

[199] The changes in official discourse apparently resulted in substantial increase in funding. The Committee of State Planning allegedly allocated an unprecedented 5,500,000 lei for urgent repairs. Constantinescu-Iaşi, "Respect faţă de monumentele istorice," 18.

noted discrepancies between the legal obligations of institutional custodians (the Academy, the

Ministry of Constructions and the Ministry of Culture) and available funding.[200] The Ministry,

by comparison, drew attention to the clumsy procedures in place for the elaboration of

restoration and repair plans. It also outlined the institutional chaos that resulted from the frequent

changes in the allocation of monuments.[201] The authors of the two reports concurred that the

overall neglect of monuments of culture resulted mainly from the allotment of their care to

institutions without proper professionals – the people's councils, the Ministry of Cults, and

unspecialized construction works under the former SCCA. But the overall lack of a centralized

authority was also a significant impediment.[202] As a result, both the Department and the Ministry

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[200] As I noted previously, according to the Department of Science and Culture, these institutions could not honor their legal duties "because from the total of 19.380.000 lei allocated for the restoration of monuments, 18,500,000 are at the disposal of the Ministry of Cults and the people's councils, which use them without discernment and necessary competence." Some people's councils even used these funds "for other purposes." AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, "Referat," [1-2].

This distribution of funds reflected the socialist state's simultaneous drive for centralization and its declared commitment for the enfranchisement of the masses through people's councils, which as Lenin put it, offered "the oppressed toiling masses the opportunity to participate actively in the free construction of a new society." V.I. Lenin, "The Soviets at Work," at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/mar/x03.htm (last accessed 6 February 2014), originally published in *Pravda* no. 83 (April 28, 1918).

[201] The Ministry of Culture noted: "the system for the preparation of restoration projects is unwieldy. The designs and the technical documentation for the repairs and restorations needed by monuments of culture, regardless of the cost of such works, is prepared by the Central Institute for the Design and Planning of Regions and Cities and for Bucharest by the Design Institute Bucharest, following requests by the executive committees of people's councils on the territory of which these monuments are located. These institutions are so overburdened that a documentation ordered in the current year can be completed only the following year, and restorations the year after, until which time the monument in question deteriorates." AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol. 1, "Informare," [4].

[202] As the Ministry of Culture noted, "People's councils lacked specialized personnel who could research and observe the state of monuments and take measures on time. Only six regional people's councils had departments of architecture and urbanism responsible for the monuments of culture in the region. […] The frequent changes in the allocation of monuments produced a chaotic state: the fact that there are three institutions and there is no central authority to address problems." Ibid. In addition to stressing the lack of competence at the people's councils and the Department of Cults, The CC's Department of Science and Culture attributed the bad state of monuments to "the lack of a central coordinating institution responsible for all problems regarding monuments of culture […] the lack of construction works specialized in the preservation of cultural monuments."

called for the establishment of a committee under the aegis of the Council of Ministers with its own apparatus of preservationists and a specialized construction factory.[203]

By spring 1958, the Council of Ministers drafted a bill on the establishment, structure and duties of the State Committee for Historical Monuments and submitted it for review to several organs of the state: the State Committee for Planning, the Ministry of Finance, the Department of Cults, the Ministry of Culture and the Academy, among others. State planers and representatives of the Ministry of Finance took similar positions; they rejected the idea of a new committee with regional offices and specialized construction works. Instead, they suggested that monuments become the responsibility of either the Ministry of Constructions or the Ministry of Culture.[204] By comparison, the bill endorsed by the Academy and the Ministry of Culture asked for the establishment of a Committee for Historical Monuments that had regional branches under the control of local people's councils. Having complete authority over monuments, this Committee was also to receive funds to support restorations, research, and travel grants for international study.[205]

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[203] Out of the two institutions, the Department was the most outspoken. It asked for "the establishment, organization and functioning of the State Committee of Historical Monuments." Under the aegis of the Council of Ministers, the Committee was to inherit the responsibilities, personnel, documentation and financial resources of all institutions that were thus far in charge of monuments. AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, "Referat," [2].

The Ministry's appeal was more veiled. It mentioned that the creation of a unique institution had been discussed since March 1954, with no results, and suggested that the Council of Ministers call on staff to assemble documentation for the administrative resolution of the problem. AMCPN, Direcția Artelor Plastice, File 24625/1958, vol. 1, "Informare," [4]. In the bill that it later put forth, the Ministry's proposals came very close the Departments. See discussion below.

[204] AMCPN, Comitetul de Stat pentru monumente istorice: înființare și organizare, File 3973/1958, "Informare cu privire la proiectul de decret și H.C.M. pentru organizarea și funcționarea Comitetului de Stat pentru Monumentele Istorice," [1-2].

[205] Ibid, [3-9].

In the end, the Council of Ministers decided against the preservationist lobbying. It discontinued the review *Monumente și Muzee* in 1959 and it transferred historical and architectural monuments to the care of the Department of Historical and Artistic Monuments at the State Committee for Construction, Architecture and Systematization (henceforth, SCCAS; previously the SCCA). Thereby, it not only limited the resources of both the Academy and Ministry of Culture but also curtailed the material forms on which the Academy's narratives of the past would be based.[206]

This concentration of material forms (historical and architectural monuments) and resources under the SCCAS coincided with nation-wide efforts of socialist urban reconstruction and intimated the regime's priority of building new life on top of the old.[207] At the same time, the classification of monasteries as "architectural monuments" remained in place. Portrayals of monasteries as sites of ideological corruption and legionary conspiracy advanced by the Department of Cults and the Securitate acquired official credence for two reasons. First, some intellectuals recently released from political detention in 1954 gathered at these locations. Second, after the Hungarian Revolution and amidst Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign (1958-1961), party leaders looked at the economic and spiritual flowering of monasteries with increasing suspicion. Not surprisingly, Patriarch Justinian soon lost the trust of official circles

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[206] Based on Art.2., Section J of Decree 781 (19 June 1959), the State Committee for Construction, Architecture and Systematization (previously SCCA) received the responsibility to direct and supervise the conservation and restoration of historical and architectural monuments; to organize studies required for the elaboration of research projects; to approve all surveys and projects; to organize the design and execution of important works of restoration; and to administer funds for restorations and allocate resources for urgent interventions. Accordingly, the Academy retained responsibility over archeological sites and the Ministry of Culture over paintings, sculpture, applied art and monumental art. AMCPN, Consiliul Așezămintelor Culturale: Trecerea unor sarcini [asupra] monumente[lor] de cultură, File 3988/1960, f.1-8.

[207] The implementation of the socialist reconstruction and economic planning of cities re-commenced in 1957 with the establishment of regional institutes of design, which in 1959 were transferred as departments of systematization, urbanization and planning under the jurisdiction of regional people's councils following the Resolution for the Improvement of Urban Planning within the Local Councils adopted by the Council of Ministers on 20 November 1959. Panaitescu, 31. Grama, 130.

and came to be perceived as "the initiator and leader" of a reactionary monastic movement.

Within a few years, the Department and the Securitate also closed approximately half of

Orthodox monasteries and reduced monastic personnel to a quarter of its size.[208]

	Eparchy	Monasteries open as of 1/1/1959	Monasteries open at the passing of Decree 410/1959	Closed in 1/1/1959-3/31/1960	Monasteries remaining after 3/31/1960
1.	Bucharest	35	33	12	23
2.	Jassy (M)	57	45	37	20
3.	Craiova (W)	16	16	5	11
4.	Sibiu (T)	10	7	3	7
5.	Timișoara (B)	13	13	5	8
6.	Arad (B)	6	4	3	3
7.	Oradea (T)	4	4	3	1
8.	Cluj (T)	10	6	5	5
9.	Galați (D)	6	6	-	6
10.	Buzău (W)	21	19	1	8
11.	R. Vâlcea (W)	29	29	5	28
12.	Roman (M)	17	12	92	12
13.	TOTAL	224	194	92	132

Table 1. Evolution of the number of monasteries in 1959-1960. The letters in brackets indicate the regions Banat, Transylvania, Moldova, Dobrogea and Wallachia. ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, File 66, f. 440.

	Eparchy	Nr. of monastic personnel on 1 January 1959	Evicted between 1 January- 1 March 1959	Remaining as of 1 March 1959	To be evicted in accordance with Decree 410/1959	To remain in place
1.	Bucharest	1,301	254	1,047	538	509
2.	Jassy (M)	2,040	1,006	1,034	633	401
3.	Craiova (W)	192	86	106	21	85
4.	Sibiu (T)	71	20	51	17	34
5.	Timișoara (B)	53	32	21	12	9
6.	Arad (B)	75	55	20	5	15
7.	Oradea (T)	10	8	2	-	2
8.	Cluj (T)	85	45	40	5	35
9.	Galați (D)	437	251	186	33	153
10.	Buzău (W)	853	548	305	255	50
11.	R. Vâlcea (W)	654	341	313	203	110
12.	Roman (M)	443	329	114	61	53
	TOTAL	6,014	2,975	3,239	1,783	1,456

Table 2. The situation of monks and nuns in Orthodox monasteries in 1959. ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, File 71, f.481.

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[208] Enache, *Monahismul ortodox*. 38-41.

Notwithstanding these closures, attempts to elevate medieval monasteries in the existing

hierarchy of the socialist regime of heritage began in 1960-1961. The regime embraced the de-

Russification of Romanian culture as a result of the party's growing dissatisfaction with

Khrushchev's thaw and Soviet economic plans for Romania within the COMECON. In this

context, such a shift in the early socialist heritage indicated a rapprochement with the Patriarch

and the Orthodox higher clergy. Orthodox clerics became cultural ambassadors abroad and soon

utilized the Church's foreign relations to ease the regime's economic and political opening

towards the West.[209] The effort of the Department of Cults to prepare displays of official

histories for visitors at two hundred-nineteen cultic buildings, the growing number of tourist

guides, the commencement of the first restorations and plans to expand and re-categorize

monuments also indicated a new direction.[210]

New trends in state-church relations and in the regimes of value dominating socialist

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[209] As a sign of protest, Patriarch Iustinian withdrew to the monastery Dragoslavele for a month during which he composed a grievance to the address of the Council of Ministers and otherwise tried to block the decree by avoiding its application, by calling on monastic personnel to remain in place, by reassigning them to administrative posts or by sending them back to the monasteries at the first opportunity. Enache, *Monahismul ortodox*, 51-52. See also, ACNSAS, Fond Documentar 71, f. 429-430 and 432-435.

Regarding the party's reliance on the church's foreign connections, see Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War*. Kaisamari Hintikka*, The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961-1977* (Helsinki, 2000).

[210] AMCPN, Istoricul a 188 lăcașuri de cult, File 4090/1963, f.1. In 1963 albums and tourist guides of three monasteries were printed or in the process of printing in four languages (Romanian, German, English, and Russian); similar publications were planned for twenty-six other monasteries in 1964-1965 in the newly inaugurated series for tourists *Short Guides to Historical Monuments* (Mici îndreptare de monumente istorice) and *Short Albums of the State Committee for Construction, Architecture and Systematization* (Caiete album CSCAS). This number was planned to double in the following year. AMCPN, Note, referate, monumente, File 4125/1964, "Nota în legătură cu lucrările despre monumentele istorice bisericești," [1-3].

In 1959-1964, restoration works commenced on thirty-six shrines (mainly Orthodox, Roman-Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran and Muslim) and several others underwent urgent repairs. See "Cronică: Principalele lucrări de restaurare a monumentelor istorice din Republica Socialistă România, 1959-1969," *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice* 39, no 1 (January 1970), 73-78. The extension of the list of monuments took place in 1963. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitatie și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 27/1977, "Notă privind activitatea de restaurare a monumentelor istorice, precum și modalitatea de realizare (istorie)," f. 10. The new list was not published and I did not come across it in the archives.

heritage did not mean that monasteries acquired positive political credentials. In fact, the Securitate maintained special structures for their observation and ideological supervision throughout the socialist period. Neither did cultic buildings displace previous forms of "perfect heritage." Archeology and the material traces it recovered continued a privileged existence until the 1980s. Their instrumentality to authenticating the historical necessity of socialism remained. Once de-Sovietization commenced, "alongside built structures, archeological artifacts became indispensable for giving socialism proto-Romanian roots and for erasing Slavic connections in Romanian culture.

Monasteries and Churches as Perfect Heritage

Following in Dej's footsteps, at the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party Ceaușescu recast normative temporalities underlying socialist construction in Romania so far. By declaring the victory of socialism and correspondingly renaming the body-politic the Socialist Republic of Romania, he professed the historical simultaneity of Romanian and Soviet advancement towards communism, one of the core doctrines of non-alignment Dej had initiated in 1960 at the Third Party Congress. But Ceaușescu's truly unprecedented affirmations concerned the permanence of nations under socialism, indeed their very indispensability to "mankind's advance towards socialism and communism."[211] The projection of the socialist nation and, by implication, of the party as its guardian into the future required a commensurate but reverse turning back in time. Firstly, this meant the construction of a narrative about the continuity of the Romanian revolutionary movement at the origins of which stood some partially recovered figures of early Romanian socialism while the party marked its inevitable peak. This

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[211] See the section of his speech entitled "Socialist Order: the Flowering of Nations and the Socialist State" in *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist Român* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 69.

self-insertion into the history of homegrown socialist traditions involved another change in nomenclature, most notably the re-naming of the Romanian Workers' Party as the Romanian Communist Party. Secondly, this stretching both ahead in time and backwards into the past further involved a movement away from the proletariat as the progressive subject and driving force of history towards the nation - a process that signaled the marrying of the teleology of national continuity and socialist development into one homogeneous temporal framework.

This cognitive reordering of official time perceptions needed anchoring in space. As the capital, Bucharest was the center of such efforts to homogenize the regime's new temporal and spatial referents. Accordingly, the Central Committee engaged in an unprecedented dead-body politics deciding to rebury over two hundred "representative figures" of the 1950s, the interwar underground, and the early socialist movement at the masoleum of socialist heroes (*Monumentul eroilor luptei pentru libertatea poporului și a patriei, pentru socialism*).[212] Furthermore, for the inauguration of the National Museum of History in 1972, the Romanian Embassy in Rome also acquired from the Vatican the copy of Trajan's Column, which was held to portray the nation's ethnogenesis and which was commissioned in 1939 under Carol II after the original.[213] Yet, the retrospective carving of a desired past into the vast territory of the state required a more ample effort. Indeed, in the company of select party leaders, Ceaușescu personally toured various regions across the country in 1965-1966 with a mission to re-signify built structures in line with new conceptions of historical time. Planned according to carefully orchestrated scenarios, these work visits (*vizite de lucru*) spoke of Ceaușescu's efforts to capture the trust and loyalty of the

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[212] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 95/1967, f. 29-31, 32-36, 37-38, 42-46. Those reburied included Ana Pauker, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Ilie Pintilie (a member of the communist underground, who died in the prison of Doftana during the earthquake of 1940), and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (widely celebrated as the father of the Romanian socialist movement).

[213] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 169/1966, f. 1-4.

party's second rank and the local citizenry while effectively rehearsing with them the new language of the regime.[214] At the same time, the destinations of the party leader's travels were not simply local party and mass meetings or inspections of model industrial constructions. They included memorial houses and monuments of forgotten national heroes, both secular and religious. Indeed, during his tours of the regions, the First Secretary lavished copious attention on select monasteries, which he now recovered as material testimonies to the nation's past.

Received with salt and bread in the old custom of welcoming guests, Ceauşescu addressed on such occasions a rather mixed audience of believers and non-believers – party cadres, Orthodox hierarchs and priests, and socialist citizens – and used a rather circumspect language of forgetting and remembrance. Veiling their sanctity and cultic function into oblivion, he re-signified monasteries as secular monuments to exemplary national heroes and a progressive nation, calling them "veritable schools of patriotism" indispensable for the construction of socialist civilization. At the conclusion of his visit at the monastery of Putna, for instance, Ceauşescu and party leaders in his company signed the following inscription into the *Golden Book* of visitors:

> We visited with great emotion the Putna monastery, where he, who was Moldova's glory and the defense shield for [our] ancestral land, has his eternal home. Stephen the Great, legendary hero, whose struggle and deeds dedicated to the fatherland's and the people's liberty and independence, along with other great rulers of the country, stands at the foundation of Romania. These evocative places that testify to the antiquity of our traditions of struggle, culture and civilization are a veritable school of patriotism and trust in the people's power, which completely sovereign over its destiny, today continues the glorious traditions of its ancestors, building a new blooming socialist fatherland. The

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[214] Beyond a reach for popular legitimacy, these visits and the administrative-territorial reorganization of the country from regions to counties in 1968 reflected Ceauşescu's attempt to root out the autonomies of power in the regional party branches and to fashion a new base of provincial party support. See Zoltán Csaba Novák's introduction in his collection of documents, *Aranykorszak: A Ceauşescu- rendszer magyarságpolitikája* (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro Print, 2011), 31-32.

anniversary of five hundred years since the construction of this monastery is a new opportunity to honor the splendid patriotic traditions of the Romanian people.[215]

At this and subsequent visits, Ceauşescu evoked into socialist memory other monasteries and founding fathers of the nation and state from the medieval period in a language that referenced the familiar themes of sovereignty, independence and national continuity. Most, like the ruler Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512-1521) resting at the monastery in Curtea de Argeş, Wallachia's former capital, had not been recalled in official settings for years. In addition, Ceauşescu made explicit claims that homage to these figures and places of national memory constituted, in fact, the celebration of socialism's victory. At the necropolis of another great voevod, Mircea the Elder (r. 1386-1418), the *Golden Book* contained the following lines:

> We visited the Cozia monastery with great interest – one of the most representative monuments of our ancient arts, the home where the great lord of Wallachia, Mircea the Old sleeps his eternal sleep. The struggle of Mircea and of other brave voevods of the Romanian lands for literacy, independence and national being has come to its brilliant conclusion in our free, independent and sovereign fatherland – the Socialist Republic of Romania.[216]

The framing of monasteries as testimonies of a secular past represented a radical departure from the political and symbolic significance that monastic structures carried in the 1950s. It also stood in contrast with the continued Soviet categorization of cultic buildings as architectural monuments, which remained in place even after the resurgence of the Soviet

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[215] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 79/1966, f. 22-23.

[216] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 71/1966, f. 46-48.

conservation movement in the late 1970s.[217] Instead, these Romanian cultic structures became

the grounds for the appropriation, commemoration and aesthetization of the national past and

were put in service of cultivating the affective dimensions of socialist patriotism.

The re-signification of select monasteries and their elevation in the socialist regime of

value indicated the budding centrality of religion to late socialist representations of the past. It

also revealed that, for the regime's, ideal social relations were increasingly understood in terms

of national rather than class belonging. Their status as monuments indispensable to the

construction of a socialist civilization also announced a significant growth in the cultural,

institutional and financial resources available for preservationists and for church restorations. In

the meantime, the Central Committee resolved to allow religious service in most.[218] By the mid-

1970s most monasteries completed their metamorphosis in the socialist regime of heritage. They

were re-classified as historical monuments in the 1974 Law on National Patrimony along with

civic structures erected before 1834. As a result, they underwent extensive restorations and

became popular sites of tourism and patriotic education.

Medieval ecclesiastical monuments appealed to the late socialist leaders because they

offered the possibility to marry Marxist ideology with nationalism. They also grounded new

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[217] I thank Catriona Kelly for sharing the information about the categorization of church buildings. The Soviet approach to the museification of religion never gained significant ground among eastern European socialist regimes, although there were a few isolated cases where churches were re-worked into anti-religious museums, most notably the Patriarchal Church in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria. Aneliya Dimitrova, "Staging the Nation: Bulgaria's Medieval Capital from Civic Tourism to Socialist Heritage Restoration and Beyond" (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2012). Albania is an exception because following Enver Hoxha's declaration in May 1967 that Albania was the world's first atheist state cultic buildings were turned into sports arenas, hotels, and museums or destroyed in this country.

[218] At the CC meeting on 31 January 1969, the head of the Department of Cults Gheorghe Nenciu advocated, in contrast to initial proposals, that religious service be allowed in cultic buildings officially recognized as monuments. These sites were too geographically isolated as a result of which they were frequented almost exclusively by foreign tourists. The danger of forbidding the religious use of these structures, he warned, would invite commentaries that likened Romanians to Soviet Russians. The new measures that the CC accepted as a result did not forbid religious practice in monuments. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Stenograma ședinței din 31 ianuarie 1969 pe tema propagandei ateist-științifice," f. 41.

historical interpretations in materialities that were both familiar and novel. As I suggested, feudal traces of the past allowed socialist states, in general, to justify the Marxist teleology of development from feudal modes of production to socialism.

In the 1960s the medieval period was increasingly identified in Romanian national historiography as the time when the cultural boundaries of the nation began to coalesce with political boundaries. In this context, medieval cultic buildings provided temporal and spatial markers for a new discourse about the quintessentially national genealogy of a home-grown socialism.[219] The privileged career of medieval monasteries and churches in the 1960s and 1970s also owed much to the marginalization of these material forms and the fields and networks of expertise they sustained during the Dej period. By resuscitating myths of a "golden age," art historians, preservationists and architects now helped overwrite myths of Slavic brotherhood and championed instead narratives about the birth of the Romanian socialist nation. Medieval monasteries appealed to the regime for two additional reasons. Because they were immobile and also constituted the oldest and most imposing structures, they furnished the state with material markers of national territory and served as proofs for the greatness of medieval Romanian civilization at a time when debates about the belonging of Soviet Moldova reemerged between Romanian historians and their Soviet colleagues.[220]

Beyond pointing to an adaptation and instrumentalization of regimes of expertise and pre-socialist narratives of the past, the particular insistence of the late socialist regime on built ecclesiastical structures went hand in hand with Ceauşescu's "dead-body politics," which lay at

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[219] Iacob, 280-281.

[220] On these debates, see Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceauşescu, 1965-1989* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2011), 45-60. The same underlying logic elevated the position of wooden churches in Transylvania as debates unfolded with Hungarian historians.

the heart of his personality cult.[221] By recovering the burial grounds of exemplary national heroes, which medieval monasteries often were, Ceaușescu appropriated the symbolic capital of famous dead bodies. Thus, he re-inserted himself into the imagineries of kinship so central to the affective dimensions of nationhood.

During the late 1960s, Ceaușescu's political and economic reforms, though admittedly limited, had brought a time of national effervescence, consumer liberalization and economic growth, opening new sites for patriotic education and socialist leisure.[222] As architect and preservationist Ion Mircea Enescu recalled, access to patrimonial architecture across the country was limited in the 1950s due to a lack of hotels and proper means of transportation.[223] In fact, most material forms that the state harnessed for patriotic education – socialist monuments or archeological artifacts housed in museums – invited citizens to the embodiment of the socialist future, the city. Vacationing, on the other hand, understood in the 1950s predominantly as proletarian tourism, took citizens to cure places where, through medical therapy and rest, they recuperated labor productivity so central to a regime that privileged work as the foundation of personal worth, social progress and welfare.[224] As consumption and leisure became central to Cold War culture wars in the 1960s, the Romanian state charted new methods in patriotic education that increasingly included active tourism. This type of sightseeing focused on historic

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[221] Katherine Verdery, *Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 27-33.

[222] Jill Massino, "From Black Caviar to Blackouts: Gender, Consumption and Lifestyle in Ceaușescu's Romania" in *Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe ed. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 227. Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 92.

[223] Uniunea Arhitecților Români, *Arhitecți în timpul dictaturii* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2005), 69.

[224] Diane Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 12-13.

and natural sites of attraction and was meant to educate citizens about "their socialist fatherland" through travel.[225]

In this context, monasteries re-signified as secular monuments were also conceived of as sites for patriotic schooling and were considered valuable because they offered the possibility of travelling into the past. Indeed, the regime encouraged all social categories and generations to visit these ecclesiastical buildings. The Bureau of National Tourism and the Bureau of Tourism for Youth organized sojourns for socialist citizens, published guidebooks and postcards, while schools took students for study trips there. Although these ecclesiastical structures had enjoyed a privileged status in monarchist heritage and were enveloped in pre-socialist narratives of Orthodox nationhood, their elevation in socialist heritage did not translate into an acknowledgment of their role in Romanian "national awakening" during the nineteenth century. Thus, official publications routinely ignored their cultic and spiritual function, indicating the regime's attempts to balance its commitment to scientific atheism with its reach for domestic legitimacy and international support.

Restorations often facilitated citizens' travel through history. Materialities were often re-arranged to enhance the "historical authenticity" of monasteries while simultaneously increasing their touristic value. Indicative of such efforts were the restorations at Putna. The chief architect Ioana Grigorescu proposed the demolition of a nineteenth century building unrepresentative of

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[225] The Central Committee approached tourism as a venue for patriotic education while discussing reforms already in 1959. A report presented at this occasion stated as follows: "Touristic activity promotes familiarity with the beauties and riches of the fatherland, historical monuments and socialist constructions, [and contributes to] the education of workers and youth in the spirit of patriotic love, devotion to work for the construction of socialism, [and] the safe-guarding of peace." ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, inv. 3109, File 1/1959, "Referat cu privire la reorganizarea activității turistice în RPR," f. 26.

However, the second wave of reforms in 1966 brought the decisive shift in doctrines of socialist rest. While the state planned to double revenues from active tourism until 1970, medicalized spa vacations were expected to increase by only a meager 17% increase. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R, Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 150/1966, "Propuneri privind noua organizare a turismului în România," f. 18.

Putna because of its amorphous architecture and lack of historical value.[226] "To liberate the monument's points of perception and perspective," she recommended "reorganizing the environment necessary for the monastery's domestic life." "Reshaping sight-seeing routes, paving the roads of access and establishing a parking lot for cars" were also necessary to ensure that these "do not block the view on the monument." "Landscaping and the endowment of external space with alleys, paths, kiosks, tables and benches for visitors" were required as well. With regards to the general aspect of the surrounding environment, Grigorescu proposed the demolition of the current farmstead and "the installation of an open amphitheater for field celebrations [*serbări câmpenești*]." For the enhancement of touristic programs, Grigorescu likewise argued for "the restoration of the wooden church in the village" on the grounds that, according to popular tradition, it had belonged to Moldova's first ruler Dragoș I (r. 1347-1354). These plans, she concluded, emphasized the history of Putna, "its period of flowering during the period of Stephen the Great, its tragedy and ruin, and later the persistent staunchness of different rulers to revive life at this cultural beacon." In this way, Greuceanu stressed, restorations would "enable the visitor to traverse this history."[227]

Medieval monasteries also became instrumental to Ceaușescu's aggressive pursuit of political and economic relations with the west. As I noted earlier, at the beginning of 1960s the foreign relations of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Orthodox hierarchs became instrumental to Dej's foreign policy. Ceaușescu continued with this trend with an added

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[226] With a diploma in architecture in 1947 from the Institute of Architecture "Ion Mincu" in Bucharest, Ioana Grigorescu (b. 1915) worked as a preservationist at the Department of Historical Monuments at SCCAS. She coordinated and authored restoration projects and repairs at the monasteries of Slatina (1963-1972), Secu (1963-1972), Sihăstria Secului (1966-1969), and Putna (1966-1972). With other architects, she also led projects at the monastery of Dealu-Târgoviște (1963-1972), Sucevița (1960-1970), Humor (1960-1971), Voroneț (1960-1961), Dragomirna (1961-1971) and Galata–Iași (1960).

[227] AMCPN, Lucrări de cercetări și demolări la mănăstirea Putna, File 4442/1968, "Memoriu justificativ," [3].

ingredient: caring for church monuments through restorations and the instrumentalization of icons for foreign exhibits was central to representing a palatable image of the regime to the west at a time when "religion" increasingly became a ground for cold war cultural and ideological competition.[228]

But beyond their centrality to symbolic politics, medieval monasteries that were integrated into touristic circuits constituted economic assets to a regime that strove to maximize its market share in western European tourism in order to balance Romania's trade deficit.[229] A proposal prepared for the meeting of the Permanent Presidium of the Central Committee on the reform of tourism in 1966 made this very argument: western tourists were important to increase foreign currency revenues for the purposes of external balance of payments. Apparently, Romania lagged behind socialist countries such as Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic when it came to profits accrued from international tourism.[230] The number of tourists had more than doubled in 1958-1965 and Europe captured 70 percent of profits in the global tourist industry. Thus, the proposal identified western tourists as the chief means for tripling Romanian foreign currency gains during the next five-year plan. As the authors argued, "an analysis of the international tourist market showed that for the conditions of our country the number of tourist entries from Northern and Central Europe could be significantly increased" because vacationers

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[228] Diane Kirby, ed. *Religion and the Cold War* (London: Palgrave, 2003).

[229] ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, inv. 2574, File 150/1966, "Protocolul ședinței Prezidiului Permanent al CC al PCR privind propuneri referitoare la noua organizare a turismului în România din 22.11.1966," f.13-15. That medieval monasteries became important in this calculation is evident from the fact that the Bureau of National Tourism organized tours around such sites and also published guidebooks in English, French, and German.

[230] The foreign currency western visitors spent in the country, for example, made up a faint 4 percent of Romania's exports while revenues from foreign tourists, in general, amounted to an even lower 1.9 percent of profits gained from commodities sold abroad. According to the new five-year plan, capitalist visitors were expected to generate 325 million lei in 1970. By comparison, the Romanian state hoped to accrue on 95 million lei from socialist tourists.

from the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and the Scandinavian countries yearned for

"warmer climates, especially the seaside" but also demanded holidays in "alpine regions."[231]

Ceaușescu's own remarks before the Central Committee Secretariat on 8 April 1969 were also

telling in this regard. When explaining the urgency of restricting the travel of Romanian citizens

to the west, the party leader asserted clearly:

> I am for a substantial reduction in the number of trips abroad to the West, even for
> activists… I am asking for a reduction in the amount of hard currency allotted to tourism;
> this should be reduced to 25 percent because we cannot waste hard currency abroad…
> We are short of hard currency and we have organized this kind of tourism in order to
> bring tourists and hard currency into the country, not in order to waste our hard currency
> abroad.[232]

With these in mind, it is not surprising that the serial publications and guides published

under the aegis of the National Tourist Office lured western tourists to monasteries in the

Carpathians. In the 1968 issue of *Holidays in Romania,* for instance, a guide promised visitors a

unique tour that led "through the gentle slopes of Bucovina's hills, […] around the painted

monasteries, in a region with the smell of resin and villages with painted roofs."[233] In fact, the

integration of monasteries and other cultic buildings into the circuits of international tourism

appears to have been sufficiently wide-spread in Eastern Europe to invite complaints from Soviet

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[231] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 150/1966, 17.

[232] Florica Dobre and Dan Taloș, eds. *Români în exil, emigrație și diasporă: documente din fosta arhivă C.C. al P.C.R.* (Bucharest: Pro Historia, 2006), 181. Qtd. in Dragoș Petrescu, "Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate as Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 2 (April 2015), 350.

[233] National Tourist Office, *Holidays in Romania* (Bucharest, 1968), 28-29. See also, Mihai Iancu, Demostene Popescu, *România: Ghid-atlas turistic* (Bucharest: Stadion, 1971) published in Romanian, English, German, French and Russian.

tourists about the lack of sites attesting the great achievements of socialist construction and Soviet influence.[234]

The shifts that Ceaușescu's ideological re-evaluations unleashed in the mid-1960s helped anchor monasteries as testimonies of a desirable history. Notwithstanding important continuities, archeological artifacts seized to monopolize the category of "perfect heritage" under late socialism. Medieval built structures, especially churches and monasteries stepped into the foreground of a new time-space politics as institutions, expertise, disciplinary realms and legislation consolidated around these materialities.

After Ceaușescu's tour across the country, an indication for such a shift came in early October 1969 with the adoption of "Decree no. 674 for Measures on Construction, Architecture and Systematization."[235] With the transfer of the Department of Historical Monuments from the State Committee of Construction and Architecture to the Committee of Culture and the Arts, the regime moved custody over structures above ground from institutions of the present and the future to a department whose mission lay more squarely in the cultivation, study and preservation of "the past." Although still categorized as "monuments of architecture," cultic buildings seemed to lose from their political ambivalence as a result. Yet, this institutional reshuffling foreshadowed political actions of far greater significance for the repositioning of ecclesiastical structures within socialist heritage. In fact, with the gradual re-establishment of the pre-socialist Commission of Historical Monuments in 1969-1972, the regime revived institutional traditions and regimes of expertise that had treated late-medieval, especially

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[234] Anne E. Gorsuch, "Soviet Tourists in Eastern Europe," in *Turizm: the Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, ed. by Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca, 2010), 215.

[235] ANIC, CC al PCR, Fond Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, 27/1977, "Situația sintetică a lucrărilor de restaurare a monumentelor istorice și de arhitectură," f. 2.

Orthodox, churches and monasteries as a major category of national monuments alongside archeological artifacts.[236]

The first stage of this institutional rearrangement was manifest in the launch of the Bulletin for Historical Monuments. In 1970 the Committee of Culture decided "to continue the tradition of the bulletin's old series." It also brought together an editorial board of "old experts" "to assure the scientific stature of this publication."[237] Dispersed in the 1950s to various institutions and called upon to fashion a material culture of the past acceptable for the Dej regime, these experts - art historians, museum curators, archeologists and conservationists - had played an active role in the Committee for Historical Monuments (CMI), promoting medieval ecclesiastical churches as perfect heritage for imaginaries of Orthodox nation-hood.[238] Under the banner of the *Bulletin*, these experts naturally became instrumental to a new kind of heritage-making. As the Ministry of Culture stated in a letter to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, the Bulletin's mission was "to study, preserve and popularize valuable monuments in our country, revealing the historical conditions and cultural moments tied to their edification,"

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[236] The old Commission's particular penchant for ecclesiastical structures owed much to the role that historian Nicolae Iorga, an enduring member and later president of the Commission, played in the promotion of Orthodox conceptualizations of Romanian nationhood. But the Commission's endorsement of churches "as perfect heritage" formed grounds for intense debates over imaginaries of national history with the Museum of Antiquities and the emergent archeological school of Vasile Pârvan, for whom relics of antiquity were more adequate material representations of the past because they allowed the stretching back of the nation beyond medieval times. As Grama explained, the continued institutional and conceptual marginalization of Pârvan's ethnic ontology during the interwar period ironically contributed to the particularly privileged career of archeology and archeological artifacts in the 1950s and early 1960s, as the Dej regime recognized the value of this disciplinary realm for marginalizing dominant regimes of expertise and material representations of an Orthodox national past. Grama, 80-86.

[237] AMCPN, Direcția Muzee și Monumente, File 4511/1969, "Nota nr. 18067 din 29 iulie 1969," f. 78. The editorial board included former members of the interwar Commission: architects Ștefan Balș, Richard Bordenache, archeologists and historians Constantin Daicoviciu and Dionisie Pippidi, and art historians Vasile Drăguț, Grigore Ionescu, and Virgil Vătășianu, among others. Iuliu Șerban, "Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice," at www.patrimoniu.ro/ro/bcmi-istoric (last accessed February 27, 2014).

[238] With impressive publication lists and conservation work, most of these experts had established themselves in the history of medieval art, architecture and restoration during the interwar years.

and thus to make a considerable contribution "to the knowledge of our fatherlands history and our precious historic and artistic patrimony."[239]

The anchoring of medieval religious buildings in institutional traditions, structures of value and networks of expertise that interlinked "old" with "new" culminated in 1972. Invoking the eighty-year jubilee since the establishment of the pre-socialist Commission of Historical Monuments, the socialist state renamed the Department for Historical Monuments after its predecessor. It thereby provided greater scope for the revival of the Commission's cultural memory and for its work in the making of socialist life.[240] Art historian and the new head of the

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[239] On this account, the Ministry of Culture also suggested that the Ministry of Education include the Bulletin in its catalogue of orders for 1970 and make this resource available for students and faculty in high-schools and higher education. AMCPN, Direcția Muzee și Monumente, File 4511/1969, Letter to Nica Nicolescu, Secretary General at the Ministry of Education (31 July 1969), f. 85.

[240] In fact, the institution established in 1892 was first named the Commission for Public Monuments and only subsequently the Commission of Historical Monuments (1906-1948). This obfuscation of names and dates for the purposes of a jubilee speaks to the socialist state's attempt to reach for continuity with "national traditions" as far back into the past as possible, while being oriented to Western trends in preservation. The Venice Charter (1964) classified all monuments of the past under the generic term "historical monuments," and then into sub-categories such as "archaeological monuments," "architectural monuments," "monuments of plastic arts," "commemorative monuments," "monuments of landscape architecture," and "technical monuments." Curinschi, *Restaurarea monumentelor*, 13-23.

Commission Vasile Drăguț[241] along with historian Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu,[242] architect Horia

Teodoru[243] and art historian Virgil Vătășianu – preservationists who had long awaited a better

position in the institutional ecology of the socialist state – celebrated this juncture in the

anniversary issue of the *Bulletin.* They invoked the founding fathers of the Commission, their

epistemology, the canon of their works and the legislative traditions that had undergirded the

Romanian preservation movement from the nineteenth century until the late 1940s. Drăguț

paused at length on the influence of the Romanian Critical School on the preservation movement

in the early twentieth century and inadvertently referenced the prominence of medieval

ecclesiastical buildings in the interwar regime of heritage. He also evoked Nicolae Iorga's role in

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[241] Vasile Drăguț (Craiova, 1928 - Bucharest, 1987) was a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest (1946-1949). Throughout his activity, he maintained close relations with the Orthodox clergy, contributing to numerous church publications on Orthodox sites of religious practice. He was buried in the monastery Râmeți, where he helped discover what is allegedly the earliest evidence (1377) describing the organization of the Eastern Church in Transylvania. As head of the Commission in 1972-1977, he came into open conflict with Ceaușescu, whose demolition plans he protested against with Grigore Ionescu, Dionisie Pippidi, Dinu Giurescu, Radu Popa and Aurel Trișcu. "Vasile Drăguț," *Revista Monumentelor Istorice* 72, no. 1 (2001-2003). "Prof. Dr. Vasile Drăguț," *Mitropolia Ardealului* 33, no. 1 (January-February, 1988).

[242] Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (Costești, 1904 – Bucharest, 1976) was a university professor, medievalist, archivist and specialist in the auxiliary fields of history who directed the State Archives in 1938-1953. As heir to the Romanian Critical School, he edited and annotated the works of one of the "founding fathers," Dimitrie Onciul. As a medievalist, he contributed to research on the beginnings of Romanian political organization and to the archaeological excavations at the monastery of Curtea de Argeș in the 1920s, at which he participated besides D. Onciul. See Constantin Moisil's letter to Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, 30 May 1946 in Lungu, Corneliu-Mihai et al., eds. *Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu: Corespondență, 1928-1976* (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale Române, 2004). Matei, Alexandru, "Bibliografia operei profesorului Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (1922-1974). Partea I. Cărți, Studii și articole. Izvoare,*" Revista Arhivelor* 33, no. 4 (1976), 450-456.

[243] Horia Teodoru (Ploiești, 1894 – Bucharest 1976) studied architecture at the Institute of Architecture in Bucharest and the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, later specializing in urbanism and conservation as a fellow at the Romanian Academy in Rome in 1926-1928. He worked at the Commission of Historical Monuments until its dissolution in 1949, when he commenced a teaching career at the Academy of Plastic Arts in Bucharest. His work as an architect in the interwar period (Dalles Foundation in Bucharest, among others) attests to a modernist style but as a preservationist he devoted significant attention to the restoration of historic monuments, especially medieval churches. *Dicționarul universal al arhitecților* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1987), 314-315.

Other preservationists had published works along these lines throughout the 1960s. See, for instance, Grigore Ionescu, "Conservarea și restaurarea monumentelor istorice din țara noastră în anii puterii populare," *Arhitectura* 15, no. 4 (April 1964): 54-58. Gheorghe Curinschi, *Restaurarea monumentelor* (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, 1968).

militating for the unaltered (historically authentic) conservation of monuments over and against

French-inspired methods of creative restoration that involved the aesthetic correction and

modernization of monuments.[244]

A Commission established on such rich legacy also had new duties in the current

conditions of "our socialist society." Drăguț explained that the studies, inventories and

restoration works the Commission completed were not simply "technical" anymore. Instead, by

giving "the politics of restoration balance and consistency," the Commission participated "in the

entire scientific and cultural process" of socialist transformation and was called upon to fulfill

"an eminently broad-ranging cultural mission." In the end, despite the differences in the gravity

of their calling, "the numerous and intimate links" between the pre-socialist and the new

Commission underscored, in Drăguț's conclusion, "a certain consensus in the history of modern

and recent Romanian culture, an awareness shared among generations of learned men in our

country […] for the inalienable preservation of monuments considered to be concrete testimonies

of history in their complex reality."[245]

Indications that cultic buildings qualified as remnants of the past entered a final stage in

1973. In June, Dumitru Popescu, the President of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education,

submitted a draft for a new decree to the Council of Ministers proposing, among others, to

amend the language of previous legislation by substituting the generic Soviet-inspired term

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[244] Vasile Drăguț, "Răspunderea unei aniversări," *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice* 41, no. 3 (1972): 3-6. In terms of basic interventionist theories in heritage, Iorga and other Romanian preservationists in his time rejected the school of the French restorer Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814 – 1879), for whom restoration meant "to reestablish [a building] to a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time." Instead, they appear to have sided with British conservationist John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Italian architect and art historian Camillo Boito (1836-1914), who enunciated the thesis of "historic restoration," advocating the historical study of the monument in the interest of "authentic" conservation, which allegedly kept intact the monument's evolution through history. Gheorghe Curinschi, *Restaurarea monumentelor,* 13-23.

[245] Drăguț, "Răspunderea unei aniversări," 3.

"monuments of culture" with "historical monuments," a term "traditional in Romanian and international legislation."[246] Popescu's proposal had important implications for medieval ecclesiastical buildings because it intimated their juridical re-categorization from "monuments of architecture" to "historic monuments."[247] Although approved by several organs of the state, the Council of Ministers appears to have deemed the adoption of such a legislative measure premature given the new inventory underway. Following law 64/1969, the Council for Culture and Socialist Education (former Committee for Culture), the National Archives and the National Bank were already engaged in a nation-wide effort to detect and record all movable and immovable artifacts of national interest in a centralized registry.[248] Notwithstanding the delay, the legislation on national patrimony that emerged at the conclusion of this inventory used the terminology Popescu's draft suggested. Re-signified as "historic monuments," cultic buildings proceeded as a result from the ambiguous margins to the center of socialist heritage, being now on par with archeological sites, lay feudal structures and socialist memorials.[249]

In fact, this new law on national patrimony signaled the end of a cycle in the life of monasteries. The law marked their gradual and convoluted transition from being "beacons of legionary activity" that corrupted the socialist project in the 1950s to the *lieux de memoire* of the

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[246] AMCPN, Direcția Economică – Oficiul Juridic, File 4723/1972, "Expunere de motive [H.C.M. privind declararea ca monumente istorice a unor obiecte arheologice, de arhitectură, artă plastică și memoriale], f. 4.

[247] This list was subsequently amended by the Decision no. 1619 of the Council of Ministers dated 3 October 1957 and in 1963 another revision commenced, being concluded only in 1974 with the publication of the new law on patrimony (Decree 63/1974). ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 27/1977, f. 9-10. So far, I have not come across the two lists for the purposes of comparison.

[248] These included artifacts of artistic, historical or documentary value as well as precious metals and stones. "Legea nr. 64/1969 pentru aprobarea Decretului 724/1969 privind protejarea și păstrarea bunurilor de interes național ce reprezintă valori artistice, istorice sau documentare, precum și a unor obiecte conținând metale prețioase și pietre prețioase de valoare deosebită," *Buletinul Oficial* no. 148 (19 December 1969).

[249] "Legea nr. 63 din 20 octombrie 1974 privind ocrotirea patrimoniului cultural național al Republicii Socialiste România," *Buletinul Oficial,* no. 137 (2 November 1974).

1970s central for socialism's attainment. It is not surprising in this context that, at the juncture of its dismantling in November 1977, the Department of Historical Monuments (reorganized in 1974 as the Central State Commission of National Cultural Patrimony) reported to Ceaușescu the restoration of seventy-nine ecclesiastical buildings compared to sixty-two civic structures.[250] As the Department of Agitation and Propaganda noted, the underlying criteria for these restorations had been "the cultural-artistic importance of the site, its significance as a historical document attesting the existence and continuity of the Romanian people, the urgency and difficulty of intervention, the need to include the entire territory of the country in restoration and […] the rational use of restored sites as economic, cultural-didactic and touristic destinations."[251]

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[250] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 27/1977, f. 12-13. The actual report mistakenly indicates seventy-one ecclesiastical structures, whereas the detailed lists appended confirm seventy-nine. See ibid, Annex 1, f. 14-62.

[251] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, 27/1977, "Notă privind activitatea de restaurare a monumentelor istorice, precum și modalitatea de realizare (istorie)," f. 11.

Nr.	County	Civic structures		Ecclesiastical structures		Total		Use after restoration		
		Nr.	Cost of restoration in lei	Nr.	Cost of restoration in lei	Total nr.	Total cost of restoration In lei	Touristic and economic	Touristic and as museums	Touristic and religious
	Total	62	119,305,864	79	100.297.395	141	219,603,259	7	84	50
1	Bucharest	8	12,396,024	3	2,192,698	11	14,588,722	-	8	3
2	Alba	2	2,575,334	6	6,286,369	8	8,861,703	1	5	2
3	Arad	1	2,907.000	-	-	1	2,907,000	1	-	-
4	Argeș	1	576.171	6	6.905.000	7		-	2	5
5	Bacău	2	1,829,358	-	-	2	1,829,358	-	2	-
6	Bihor	-	-	3	1,575,669	3	1,575,669	-	-	3
7	Bistrița-Năsăud	2	2,590,835	1	150,000	3	2,740,835	1	2	-
8	Brașov	3	12,894,010	2	9,768,207			2	1	2
9	Buzău	1	980,815	-	-	1	980,815	-	1	-
10	Cluj	3	2.502.409	13	6.316.963	16	8.819.372	-	10	6
11	Constanta	6	23,216,087	1	416,880	7	23.632.967	-	6	1
12	Dâmbovița	2	7,708,105	2	1,038,966	4	8,747,071	-	3	1
13	Galați	1	48.528	-	-	1	48,528	1	-	-
14	Gorj	2	1,903.094	2	837.178	4	2,740,272	-	4	-
15	Harghita	-	-	1	184,808	1	184,808	-	-	1
16	Hunedoara	1	5,697,608	2	664,357	3	6,361,965	-	2	1
17	Iași	4	6,440,675	7	14,619,041	11	21,059,716	-	8	3
18	Ilfov	1	3,663,695	2	1,108,681	3	4,772,376	-	1	2
19	Maramureș	1	188,232	4	1,793,167	5	1,981,399	-	3	2
20	Mehedinți	4	6,165,199	1	2,349,967	5	8,515,166	-	4	1
21	Mureș	2	9,792,726	3	460,767	5	10,253,493	-	2	3
22	Neamț	1	4,457,561	4	13,497,454	5	17,955,015	-	1	4
23	Olt	-	-	1	759,000	1	759,000	-	1	-
24	Prahova	2	857,313	1	536,173	3	1,393,486	-	2	1
25	Sălaj	-	-	1	111,616	1	111,616	-	1	-
26	Sibiu	3	1,371,455	2	915,942	5	2,287,397	-	4	1
27	Suceava	4	4,208,527	10	26,249,492	14	30,458,019	-	6	8
28	Timiș	1	1,573,418	-	-	1	1,573,418	1	-	-
29	Vâlcea	3	1,032,106	-	-	3	1,032,106	-	3	-
30	Vrancea	1		1	1,559,000	2	3,288,579	-	2	-

Table 3. Monuments restored in 1960-1977. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 27/1977, f. 14-16.

Popular Consumption

Ceausescu's speech at the 9th Party Congress and his tour of the regions in 1966 elicited great enthusiasm especially from the urban sections of society. Answering his call for popular contributions to the commemoration "of our historic past," amateur writers flooded state

publishers with poems, novels, epics, and other patriotic literary works of historical

inspiration.[252] Publishing houses and houses for "popular art" (*casele creaţiei populare*) rejected

a bulk of these pieces on account that they were ideologically questionable, not "at the level of

today's readers" or did not meet the aesthetic requirements of "literary composition and style."[253]

But citizens also turned to the socialist press, mainly *Scînteia* and *România Liberă,* the State

Committee for Culture and Arts (Ministry of Culture before 1963, Council for Socialist Culture

and Education after 1970) or even to Ceauşescu himself. Relying on the well-established

socialist genres of public-letter writing, they often petitioned for the publication of biographies of

national heroes. Or, they solicited tourist guides, brochures and postcards of historic monuments,

including monasteries. On other occasions, citizens argued for the historic and touristic value of

historical buildings and lobbied for funds towards restorations often assuming a critical tone

towards the official politics of heritage.[254] Most of these authors were men, who identified

themselves as members of local people's councils, parishioners, priests, veterans, retirees or

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[252] AMCPN, Biroul de reclamaţii şi sesizări, File 22655/1966, f. 221-226, 245, 321, 336; AMCPN, Consiliul pentru Răspândirea Culturii şi Ştiinţei, File 25435/1966, f. 98 verso.

[253] AMCPN, Biroul de reclamaţii şi sesizări, File 22655/1966, f. 200, 211-216. The Committee's archive did not preserve these manuscripts, making it difficult to reconstruct in-depth the editors' and censors' broad ideological and aesthetic considerations or the authors' discursive engagement with cultural politics.

[254] On the genres of citizen's letters see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1996):78-105.

workers.[255]

Ceauşescu's appropriation of monasteries as sites of patriotic education and socialist tourism encouraged this outpouring of public interest. So did experts from county museums who educated ordinary citizens about the historic significance of civic and cultic monuments in their region in local dailies.[256] Later on, the 1974 law on patrimony consecrated "the constitution, care, studying and the public circulation of national cultural patrimony" as part of the patriotic duty of every citizen. Such acts were to be "expressions of the working people's new, socialist consciousness, [and manifestations] of new social relations in our society."[257]

Most writers took pains to present themselves as socialist patriots, relating their devotion in a vivid emotional language that rehearsed the official emphasis on monasteries as testimonies of the nation's secular past and sites of attraction for ordinary citizens, international

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[255] The sample for this section include about a dozen letters from citizens, local people's councils and parishes culled from the archives of the Ministry of Culture and National Patrimony. I found most letters in the collections of the Office for Notifications and Complaints (*Biroul de reclamaţii şi sesizări*, or in short *Biroul sesizări*) and of the Department for Museums and Monuments. (*Departamentul pentru Muzee şi Monumente*). The relevant ones for this chapter were in files 4190/1965, 22653/1966, 22655/1966, 22656/1966, 25435/1966, 4407/1968, 4462/1969, 4465/1969, 4463/1969, 4498/1969, 4526/1969. My sample may be biased in favor of letters that lobbied for the care of monasteries and churches because the archives of the Ministry of Culture from the socialist period lack inventories. Most often I pulled files off the shelf or picked them up from the cement floor because the writing on their spine indicated that they contained citizens' letters. Others I came across by chance in the collections of various departments dealing with monuments and museums, the plastic arts, or among the files of the Council for the Dissemination of Culture and Science (*Consiliul pentru Răspândirea Culturii şi Ştiinţei*).

Because the letters I have found fall exclusively within the years of 1965-1969, commonly understood as a time of limited liberalization, this period is overrepresented here. Some of the letters, not mentioned here, included petitions for the construction of secular monuments to the nation or the care of folk monuments (houses and other structures from villages), especially Files 4190/1965, 22656/1966, 4519/1969. It is impossible to know how many letters ended up at the different branches of the Ministry and what portion of these dealt directly with monasteries and heritage. Quantitative data on the basis of which I could speak of their statistical distribution in terms of time periods and geographic origins has not been compiled. Nor, have I encountered sources that indicate the average rate of daily letters received at the Ministry.

[256] An example for an annual digest of articles published on this topic in the counties is at AMCPN, Direcţia Muzeelor şi Monumentelor, File 4407/1968, vol. II, esp. f. 244-245.

[257] "Legea nr. 63 din 30 octombrie 1974 privind ocrotirea patrimoniului cultural naţional," *Buletinul Oficial* nr. 137 (2 November 1974), Art. 5.

tourists, and artists. On the occasion of the five-hundred-year anniversary of Putna's construction

in July 1966, Ion Părpală, a worker from Urziceni, Bucharest region appealed to the SCCA's

Department for Publishers, proposing the publication of a monograph on Stephen the Great's

over forty historical monuments "in great numbers." Although barely known by many, Părpală

observed, these "great artistic and cultural achievements of the fifteenth and sixteenth century

were a rich fountain of inspiration for artists and intellectuals from the country and abroad." "I

think of the art at [the monasteries of] Voroneț, Putna, Dragomirna, Sucevița, Moldovița, and

Neamțu […] that mirror the age-old art and culture of our people to the entire world." Părpală

suggested, therefore, that a council of specialists publish a monograph "accompanied with ample

photographs, sketches, [and] paintings" to popularize these monuments across the country's

borders as "a matter of national pride."[258]

In his letter to the President of SCCA Pompiliu Macovei, Stere Ciobotaru, a retired

lawyer from Craiova, established his credentials as a socialist patriot by summarizing the official

politics of heritage. He enumerated his sojourns to the country's monuments through the

National Tourist Office, admitting that his desire for the uplifting sight of monuments of nature,

socialist cities and Moldovan monasteries could not be quenched. For these reasons, Ciobotaru

reminded Macovei, "the competent organs had to be actively concerned in every county with the

enhancement of such sites and the attraction tourists from home and abroad." In the hope of

"cultivating a sentiment of care for historic monuments and tourism in the county of Vrancea,"

he petitioned the president to re-open four monasteries that were closed in 1959 as part of the

state offensive against Orthodox monasticism. Evoking the end to hostilities between the feudal

rulers of Moldova and Muntenia, Matei Basarab (1558-1654) and Vasile Lupu (1595-1661),

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[258] AMCPN, Biroul de reclamații și sesizări, File 22655/1966, f. 194.

Stere argued that these monuments marked a historical moment in the making of the Romanian nation. The monastery of Vărzărești, in particular, he added, did not even need costly repairs and "a couple of monks could take care of its maintenance."[259]

The Orthodox village priest Radu Dăscălescu from Suceava county similarly invoked the historic significance and artistic value of three local cultic buildings. Erected by Moldovan rulers, these apparently enjoyed great popularity among domestic and foreign tourists. The Department of Cults and the Committee for Culture and the Arts needed to employ a guide who could enlighten visitors about the aesthetic and historical value of these monuments, Dăscălescu argued. Also, while the "church of Petru Rareș" (b. 1532) had electricity and "was well-liked by visitors," the Roman Catholic Church of Alexander the Good (b. 1421) lay in ruins and funds were necessary for its consolidation. More importantly, the White Church of Stephen the Great, "a monument of great historical importance for our people and an edifice of great art," needed lighting. Dăscălescu pleaded with Macovei: "We come to [you] Mister Minister to ask you to be so kind and grant us help with approximately 15,000 lei, a sum with which we can introduce electric light so that visitors do not leave the monument without admiring it in its full splendor."[260]

Parishioners also approached the Committee to ask for assistance in recovering religious artifacts from other churches and monasteries. Thus, Constantin Crăciun and Constantin Nichita from the village of Văleni near Piatra Neamț wrote to the ministry requesting that it give orders

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[259] AMCPN, Direcția Muzeelor și Monumentelor: Reclamații, sesizări ale oamenilor muncii, File 4529/1969, f. 40-41. The three additional monasteries were Soveja, Dalhăuți, and Cotești.

[260] AMCPN, Direcția Muzeelor și Monumentelor, File 4462/1969, f. 78. Victor-Dan Kisilevici, "Operațiuni de conservare la Biserica Sf. Gheorghe - Biserica Albă din Baia, județul Suceava" in *Monumentul: Lucrările celui de-al IV-lea Simpozion "Monumentul. Tradiție și viitor"* at http://monumentul.ro/monumentul/?page_id=2553 (last accessed 3 July 2016).

to the monasteries of Bistriţa, Bisericani, Agapia, Văratec and the Bishopric of Iaşi to return more than a hundred icons attributed to the distinguished iconographic school of Văleni, which had functioned there during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The village's pride, the parishioners admitted, the icons were to be exhibited in the newly established historical museum. These mirrors of "our glorious past" attested the bravery and patriotism of local people, whose vigilance protected these relics from the destruction of foreign invaders. "The [people's] council paved roads for us, erected edifices, gave us electricity and a school with sixteen teachers," Crăciun and Nichita wrote, suggesting that a museum with such national patrimony concluded the socialist transformation of the village.[261]

On other occasions citizens called on party leaders to compete with the cultic heritage of national minorities and to popularize a past that emphasized the imperial suppression of Romanian national aspirations only to underscore their eventual triumph. In August 1965, for example, Ion Receanu, a retiree from Alba Iulia addressed a letter to Ceauşescu himself. He expressed his delight with the First Secretary's "courageous affirmations" in front of the 9th Congress and in front of foreign representatives "regarding the inalienable and indivisible [sic!] rights of socialist Romania." "Regardless of how healthy our social origins is," Reuceanu continued, "we cannot deny that we are a noble people, […] a people endowed with many qualities because in a short while we could realize such grand achievements in our country with the wise guidance of the Party."

Reuceanu went on to utter a desperate plea for the hallmarking of "our national patrimony" in the city. He was concerned with the numerous tourists, who passing through the

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[261] While the systematization of villages acquired notoriety in the late 1970s and 1980s, Ceauşescu had already announced the transformation of rural settlements through economic planning and socialist architecture at the National Party Conference in 1966.

historic city, "besides the canalization from Roman times," saw only "only very faintly marked

historical monuments from our national patrimony." Instead, he observed "they see a fortress

built by the Austro-Hungarians [sic!] […] and a grand Roman-Catholic church, in which our

compatriots [Hungarians] take great pride claiming that it is 800 years old." To amend this

situation, Reuceanu was of the opinion that a statue of Mihai the Brave be erected at the north

gate – in front of the Roman-Catholic Episcopal cathedral where the ruler had entered the Alba

Iulia fortress. Additionally, he called Ceauşescu's attention to the small bust of Lady Stanca,

Mihai Viteazu's wife, in Făgăraş, asking that it be hallmarked since it indicated "the place where

she had been imprisoned after [the Habsburg general] Basta killed Mihai."[262]

One of the most idiosyncratic letters came from Ioan Tăutu. A self-described "poor son

of the people" and a veteran of the Second World War living in Oradea, he wrote Macovei a

letter that blended the genres of self-denunciation and petition.[263] Having enlisted to "liberate our

Fatherland from the fascist yoke," Tăutu confessed to his royalist sentiments and his service on

the eastern front during the war, while weaving himself an identity as an anti-fascist patriot with

pro-Russian sentiments. His reason for approaching the minister was "the icon of August 23."

Tăutu had commissioned this artifact at great financial cost after his return from the front in

order to commemorate the country's "liberation" by Soviet troops, his experience during the war,

and his love for "the freed Romanian people."[264] With the former king represented amidst the

natural beauties of his home region, working class housing and the village in his home village,

the icon also contained a text in which Tăutu sang praise to the liberated mountains, the people's

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[262] AMCPN, Propuneri pentru deschideri de noi muzee, File 4190/1965, f.59-60.

[263] AMCPN, Biroul de reclamații și sesizări, File 22653/1966, f. 74-77.

[264] Tăutu claimed that it took him two years, until 1947, to pay off the icon from his salary and he even had to sell his clothes.

folk songs and art, and the wooden churches of Transylvania. Having seen the collections of

artifacts from monasteries across the country in the Museum of Religious Art at the Palace of the

Republic, Tăutu pleaded with the Committee and the Department of Museums and monuments to

recover the icon from his village church and exhibit it in one of the newly established

museums.[265] Not commissioned "out of interest" but because of his love for August 23, the icon

"honored socialism and the entire Romanian people," Tăutu argued, and would bring leaders

prestige beyond the borders.

In line with the paternalism of other socialist states, the officials of the Romanian party-

state encouraged such public letter writing as a means to ensuring citizens' political literacy and

participation in the building of socialism. The frequent appeal to leaders as guardians of the

nation in these letters also enforced their sense of legitimacy and their idea of the essentially

democratic nature of state socialism.[266] Accordingly, the editorial councils and the Department of

Historical Monuments, where public letters often arrived, honored such inquiries and requests.

They crafted detailed replies about publication plans and introduced new titles on the list. Thus,

within a month to receiving his suggestion to publish a monograph on the monasteries erected by

Stephen the Great, the SCCA informed Părpălă that the state publisher Meridiane had already

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[265] The Museum of Religious Art functioned at the time in the church inside the former royal residence, Cotroceni Palace. It is unclear when it was actually opened. Tăutu's letter contradicts the official history of the church displayed on the website of the Romanian Presidency, which dates the opening of the museum to 1968. See www.presidency.ro/?_RID=b_prezentare&exp6=biserica (last accessed 20 June 2014).

[266] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), esp. chapter 5. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176-177. *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. chapter 9. Lewish H. Siegelbaum, "'Dear Comrade, You Asked What We Needed': Socialist Paternalism and Soviet 'Rural' Notables," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 107-132.

According to Ferenc Fehér, paternalism had meaning because this type of "charismatic legitimation" went hand-in-hand with repression. See "Paternalism as a Mode of Legitimation in Soviet-Type Societies," in T. H. Rigby and Ferenc Fehér, eds., *Political Legitimation in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 66-67.

brought out a couple of monographs on these monasteries in its popularizing series "Pocket Guides to Historic Monuments." Furthermore, the Academy had published in 1964 an ample scholarly collection entitled *Moldovan Culture during Stephen the Great* and the first volume of *History of Romanian Art,* scheduled to appear in 1967, was to have an entire section on these monuments as well. Notwithstanding such titles, the SCCA assured Pārpăla that the comprehensive monograph he suggested would be transmitted to Meridiane to be included in future publication plans.[267]

When there was popular request, the different divisions under the aegis of the State Committee for Culture and the Arts (henceforth SCCA) also launched inquiries into the state of monasteries and religious artifacts and decided upon citizens' solicitations regarding restorations. Reuceanu's pleas for the erection of a statue marking Mihai the Great's conquest of Alba Iulia were very well received. In a couple of months, he received a response announcing him of the official decision to erect the proposed monument, which was unveiled in November 1968 at the semi-centennial anniversary of Transylvania's unification with Romania.[268] The Committee also sent a delegate to locate Tăutu's icon of August 23 but since it could not be found at the church of his home village where he had donated the artifact, Tăutu's proposal could not be resolved.[269]

Public letters to high officials did not always secure the desired result. Thus, Ciubotaru's request to re-open monasteries that commemorated the end of conflict between Romanian principalities seemed unpalatable to a regime that increasingly read the nation's ethnogenesis

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[267] The volume authored by two medievalists was published by Meridiane two years later. See Nicolae Grigoraş and Ioan Caproşu, *Biserici şi mănăstiri vechi din Moldova până la mijlocul veacului al XV-lea* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1968).

[268] AMCPN, Propuneri pentru deschideri de noi muzee, expoziţii, File 4190/1965, f. 61.

[269] AMCPN, Biroul de reclamaţii şi sesizări, File 22653/1966, f. 80.

back to times immemorial and stressed the organic unity and brotherly love at the heart of national being. As a result, the three monasteries remained closed for public visits throughout the socialist period. A museum in Văleni that did not commemorate secular national heroes but was to pay tribute to national history through icons was also not what the regime had in mind at a time when villages seemed the last frontier to be incorporated into the body-politic of the socialist state.[270] The Committee similarly denied funds for the electrification of the White Church, as a result of which Dăscălescu, the Orthodox priest, introduced electricity with the help of workers from the Electric Networks Plant without the knowledge of the local delegate at the Department of Monuments and Museums.[271]

While public letters were purposefully crafted for a specific audience, these sources allowed scholars elsewhere to reconstruct citizens' world views and trace how official discourse shaped popular mentalities. In the process, such studies observed not only citizens' acquisition of political literacy, their creative re-workings of authoritative scripts, and their ideological transgressions but also noted how public letters allowed officials to reassert and clarify the ideological boundaries of state socialism. My close reading of citizens' epistolary exchanges with the state exemplify the various degrees to which ordinary people re-produced some key elements of official rhetoric, most notably the emphasis on monasteries as secular sites of national memory, patriotic education and tourism. However, these letters also indicate that what citizens construed to be officially acceptable interpretations of relics and monuments was sometimes quite idiosyncratic. In some cases, the Committee could still deem artifacts like

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[270] Although the re-fashioning of villages according to state socialist ideals acquired notoriety especially in the late 1970s and 1980s, Ceaușescu had launched the new phase already in 1966 at the National Congress.

[271] Victor-Dan Kisilevici, "Operațiuni de conservare la Biserica Sf. Gheorghe - Biserica Albă din Baia, județul Suceava" in *Monumentul: Lucrările celui de-al IV-lea Simpozion "Monumentul. Tradiţie şi viitor"* at http://monumentul.ro/monumentul/?page_id=2553 (last accessed 3 July 2016).

Tăutu's icon as worthy of recovery while it excluded others - the three monasteries in Vrancea and the museum of icons in Văleni - that pressed more forcefully against the confines of socialist heritage. Notwithstanding their value for studying popular engagement with official language, citizens' epistolary exchanges with the party-state do not reveal whether they appreciated monasteries as sites of religious practice or sacred nationhood. It is safe to assume that these letter writers exercised self-censorship, omitting arguments they suspected to be officially objectionable, and they strove instead to present themselves as citizens with a socialist consciousness.

The story of how church-monuments became part of "perfect socialist heritage" highlights how religion came to be promoted as a treasured past in late socialist Romania. As this chapter showed, during the on-set of de-Sovietization in the early 1960s, official circles recognized the centrality of religion in Cold War politics and wished to emphasize their openness and uniqueness in the socialist camp both to domestic and foreign audiences. As a result, Dej had put an end to the anti-clericalism of his earlier years, and political commitment to "scientific-atheist enlightenment" within the regime's broader civilizing agenda had progressively weakened. Party leaders also relied heavily on the Orthodox Church in foreign policy to assure an economic and political opening towards the west. Meanwhile, initial attempts to elevate cultic monuments in socialist heritage indicated an official desire to obtain support from believers at home.

Despite his efforts to deny the umbilical cord that bound him to the previous regime, Ceaușescu amplified these aspects of cultural diplomacy and symbolic politics after 1965. Thus, churches became sites of official memory, patriotic education, and international tourism because assigning positive historical value to cultic heritage and, by extension, Orthodoxy, was

instrumental for buttressing the new regime's legitimacy both at home and abroad. This strategy produced a number of distinct, yet related, results. On the one hand, as citizens' letters attest the decisive shifts in the politics of heritage during the late 1960s helped shore up widespread popular enthusiasm for a new party leadership that was recognized as "the guardian of the nation," in marked distinction from the Dej regime. It also enabled previously marginalized interwar experts who had viewed churches as the key category of national monuments to re-emerge at the center of socialist heritage-making after decades of lobbying for their own resources and professional interests. In this sense then, this chapter demonstrates that we cannot understand the domestic opposition from ordinary citizens and preservationists that Ceaușescu's demolition of church-monuments elicited in the 1980s without analyzing how the regime had ironically created conditions for such a broad response. On the other hand, as Chapter Four will demonstrate, the official embrace of cultic buildings also provided an impetus for the renewal of the atheist project in the late 1960s. While in the official view medieval monasteries were to instill socialist citizens with a quintessentially secular understanding of the past, the atheist ideological establishment soon pointed out that the circulation of church-monuments as national symbols in socialist publications and tourism contributed to an upsurge in popular religiosity. Reports noted that ordinary citizens and the lower party ranks often seemed to reach the conclusion that the state endorsed religious practice. This realization, I argue, helped trigger numerous sweeping inquiries into popular religiosity, which in turn strengthened the need for the ideological re-evaluation of atheist education and also contributed to the regime's anti-religious iconoclasm after 1977.

CHAPTER THREE
CEAUŞESCU'S THAW AND RELIGIOSITY:
THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE CONSIDERS ATHEISM, 1965-1974

During Nicolae Ceauşescu's short-lived liberalization and at the climax of his massive

popularity worldwide, the Central Committee showed a fresh desire to overcome popular

religiosity for the sake of atheist convictions. Ceauşescu himself announced the need for

continued "militant attitude" against "outdated mentalities" at the 9th Congress in July 1965.[273]

As Radio Free Europe later observed, the official desire to "normalize atheism" was clearly

indicated in the 1965 Constitution by provisions guaranteeing citizens' right "not to profess any

religion."[274]

This chapter explores the revived interest to overcome faith starting from the late 1960s.

Although apparently contradictory, the regime's commitment to eradicate faith alongside the

political and symbolic instrumentalization of churches discussed in the previous chapter were

part of the same effort to manage the meaning and course of Romanian socialism. To reveal

shifts in official approaches towards atheism, this chapter explores efforts to renew the atheist

drive in 1965-1974 in the context of the broader ideological transformations of the early

Ceausescu era. I show that, while the party-state's anti-religious commitment constituted a

response to the dynamics of religious life during the thaw and also emanated from the regime's

anxiety to maintain ideological control, the transformation of atheism in the 1970s was made

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[273] *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist Român, 19-24 iulie 1965* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 93. ANIC, Fond C.C. al PCR, Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 25.

[274] Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-187-16, "Situation Report: Romania, 14 October 1970", 14 October 1970, 9. This was a significant departure from previous constitutions. While the 1948 Constitution guaranteed "the freedom of conscience and the freedom of religion" (Art.27), its 1952 version provided only for "the freedom of conscience" (Art.84). By comparison, art. 30 of the 1965 Constitution stipulated that "anyone was free to profess or not to profess a religion."

possible by official openness to revisionist Marxism. Indeed, the opportunity to depart from the vulgar Orthodox Marxist perspectives on religion that characterized the Dej era allowed atheist experts to stress that Marxist-Leninist theory did not give accurate explanations for the persistence of belief or provide directions for how to disenchant socialist society. Such arguments proved pivotal, in turn, for ushering in a new cohort of specialized cadres and preparing the way for the quintessential transformation of atheist work during the Ceaușescu era – the subject of Chapter Four.

One of the most interesting questions about religion and ideology in this period is why the regime became invested in the atheist enterprise at the height of political liberalization in Romania. As the previous chapter noted, the death of Gheorghe-Gheorghiu Dej provided opportunities for the new regime to appropriate and intensify the moderate policies that had come to characterize relations between the Orthodox Church and the state after the last antireligious campaign in 1958-1961. Reliance on the church's foreign connections and the treasuring of religion as the national past constituted means for obtaining political and financial support from "the west" and for shoring up popular allegiance at home. This attitude was extended to the main minority confessions for added reasons: to establish the regime's liberalism in terms of nationality policy and, at the same time, to underscore national sovereignty over ethnically heterogeneous areas such as Transylvania – especially in front of foreign visitors.

In light of this pragmatic approach to religion, then, one of the objectives of this chapter is to clarify the relationship between two aspects of the regime's secularizing project: anti-clerical policy and atheism. As I demonstrate, the Ceaușescu regime's efforts to exhibit a certain care for religious institutions and their built heritage was deceptive and should not be mistaken for an *ideological* reconciliation between communism and religion. What changed by the early

1970s was not the objective to overcome religion but the approach by which to do it. Indeed, whereas anti-clerical policy and atheist education were fellow travellers up to the early 1960s, a decade later these two components of the anti-religious endeavor diverged. They came together again only in the 1980s, at the height of re-Stalinization.

The Thaw

Ceaușescu's emergence as the party's Secretary General on 22 March 1965, three days after his predecessor's death, inaugurated watershed transformations in every aspect of socialist life. His assertion at the 9th Party Congress that the party's mission was to raise the Romanian people "higher to the pinnacle of socialism, well-fare, and happiness" soon ushered in a period of "good life."[275] Indeed, the People's Republic appeared to have ripened into an "autochtonous socialism." The national past and sentiment were back. Passports were more readily available. The cultural and physical frontiers towards "the west" slowly opened up. Consumption became more luxurious, socializing and cultural life more effervescent, and a brighter future seemed finally within the grasp of ordinary citizens.[276]

While pursuing a consumer thaw and civic contentment, the regime also showed a novel interest in enlivening of ideology. Ceaușescu's contention at the 9th Congress that the Marxist-Leninist forefathers did not foresee all the obstacles to socialist construction constituted a call for Marxism as "a live science."[277] His statement that each communist party had to adapt ideology to the social realities particular to their country echoed Marxist revisionist ideas about the need to

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[275] Nicolae Ceaușescu,"Raportul C.C. al P.C.R.," in *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist*, 22.

[276] Dragoș Petrescu, "Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate as Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 337-353.

[277] Ceaușescu, "Raportul," 90.

depart from Stalinist norms in the interest of democratization. The desire to reframe ideological issues was palpable with the temporary marginalization of Leonte Răutu, the grey-eminence of agitation and propaganda since 1948. Repeated denunciation of "ossified" (Soviet) dogma also enveloped party meetings at all levels.[278] This new line was unmistakable by 1968. The Central Committee embarked namely on the political rehabilitation of Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu, Teohari Georgescu, Ana Pauker, and others – former R.C.P. activists, who had been condemned allegedly in violation of socialist legality under Dej. It was also in this pivotal year that Ceauşescu declared sympathy towards the Czechoslovak leadership at the moment of the Warsaw Pact invasion.

Ceauşescu's speeches and the new party resolutions signaled intellectual destalinization and the departure from bureaucratic administrative methods as well. Besides legality, socialist democracy, and national sovereignty, cultural and political education gained emphasis. Party documents likewise stressed the need to go beyond the formalism and campaign-like character of ideological activities. In its "Recommendations for the Improvement of Mass Political Work," the Department of Agitation and Propaganda rebuked party organizations for conducting propaganda almost exclusively "at the indication of central party organs," with no apparent party discipline or commitment.[279] During the numerous control visits, local communists also came under fire from the Orgburo for insufficient ideological preparation, economic misconduct, and the lack of comradely behavior.[280] In fact, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, secretary of the Central

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[278] Cristian Vasile and Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Perfectul acrobat: Leonte Răutu, măştile răului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), 98-99.

[279] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 52/1966, f. 22.

[280] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Organizatorică, inv. 2781, File 7/1966, f. 86-87, File 50/1966, f. 143-146, File 57/1966, File 35/1967, f. 142-146.

Committee reminded regional party secretaries in November 1966 that, since little work had

been done to enlighten the masses in problems of morality, ethics, behavior and everyday life,

the inculcation of civic-moral values became a new priority in the party's overall education

work.[281] As Katherine Verdery writes, this renewed preoccupation with the beliefs and behavior

of socialist citizens evidenced that, besides coercion, *ideological persuasion* became the

trademark of late socialism in Romania.[282]

At the same time, in keeping with the regime's Stalinist commitments, Romanian official

circles were anxious over retaining the ideological reins. The Central Committee soon

institutionalized party control with the creation of a separate Ideological Commission, the role of

which was to streamline activity in ideology, political education and culture.[283] To ensure

ideological control, the regime likewise mobilized tremendous resources and rearranged

institutions as well as the highest party ranks.[284] From his loyal supporters Ceaușescu promptly

established the Executive Committee and the Permanent Presidium, the new decision-making

bodies of the Central Committee.[285] Party leaders decided to enliven youth education about

conduct in society and the family by thoroughly reforming the methods and organization of the

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[281] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 43/1966, "Stenograma întâlnirii din 14-16 noiembrie 1966 cu secretarii comitetelor regionale de partid care se ocupă cu problemele ideologice," f. 206.

[282] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 41-42. As Gail Kligman argued, the law of 1966 banning abortion was the clearest indication of the regime's interest in controlling the individual body of citizens and the private sphere of family. Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 22.

[283] Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1965-1989* (Iași: Polirom, 2011), 103.

[284] As Burakowski notes, these institutional reforms were particularly significant because during the Dej period there were no dramatic changes in state administration, only "corrections." Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Ceaușescu*, 184.

[285] Mihnea Berindei, Dorin Dobrincu and Armand Goșu, *Istoria comunismului din România, vol. 2: Nicolae Ceaușescu – Documente, 1965-1989* (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 6. For the revitalization of pioneer activity in 1966-1967, see ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, Files 27/1966, 44/1966, and 169/1967.

Communist Youth Union and the Organization of Pioneers.[286] These efforts also extended to

institutions of repression, the cultural establishment, and the academia. As Dennis Deletant

writes, the rehabilitation of the Pătrăşcanu lot prepared the way for the reassertion of party

control over the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the Securitate. Under the banner of the need

to extend "socialist legality," both institutions were drawn under a measure of judicial

supervision and their former head Alexandru Drăghici, Ceauşescu's key rival, was removed from

his various positions in the Central Committee."[287] By 1970, the preoccupation with ideological

discipline also involved the Committee for Culture, which was reorganized as the Council for

Socialist Education and Culture. The Romanian Academy suffered a serious blow the same year.

All of its institutions in the social and human sciences were transferred to the newly established

Academy of Socio-Political Sciences – in Ceauşescu's words, "a body of ideological and

political government directing social research."[288] These efforts to transform ideology and

culture lasted several years and culminated in the adoption of a series of landmark measures: the

official announcement of the "mini-cultural revolution" in 1971, the adoption of the *Code of*

Principles and Norms for Communists' Work and Life, Socialist Ethics and Equity in 1974, and

the establishment of the "Song for Romania" National Festival in 1976.[289]

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[286] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 27/1966, "Protocolul şedinţei Secretariatului CC al PCR din 14.III.1966," f. 30.

[287] Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate*, 75-76.

[288] Bogdan Cristian Iacob, "Avatars of the Romanian Academy and the Historical Front: 1948 versus 1955," in Vladimir Tismăneanu ed., *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe* (New York: CEU Press, 2010), 260. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 29/1969, "Stenograma consfătuirii de lucru cu oamenii de ştiinţe, cercetători şi cadre didactice din domeniul ştiinţelor sociale – 13 noiembrie 1969," f. 45.

[289] *Codul principiilor şi normelor muncii şi vieţii comuniştilor, ale eticii şi echităţii socialiste* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1974), 23-24, 31.

The Party's concern with religious belief and atheism belonged to this period of ideological renewal and emanated from the Ceauşescu regime's preoccupation with directing the nature of Romanian socialism. Beginning in 1966, shortly after the 9th Party Congress, the regime revived its ideological battle against mysticism, signaling an end to the relative relaxation of anti-religious efforts in the late Dej years. The 1966 atheist campaign lasted approximately nine months, was geographically circumscribed – converging primarily on regions with high concentrations of national minorities, neo-Protestants and illegal "sects" – and appears to have had a limited echo in the predominantly Orthodox areas of Romania.[290] Notwithstanding, the campaign provides an important vantage point on the transformation of atheist work. As it happens, the Ceauşescu regime's first call to arms against religiosity stands in contrast to the more exhaustive endeavors that began in 1969 and highlights the metamorphosis that atheism underwent over the course of the 1970s. At the turn of the decade, namely, atheist experts examined the dynamics of religious life during the thaw through more nuanced, reformed Marxist ideas, a change of perspective that put its mark on the future of atheist propaganda.

The 1966 Campaign

The signal for the 1966 campaign in atheist education came in the form of a resolution from Ceauşescu's newly constituted body in the Central Committee, the Permanent Presidium.[291] Beginning February, Central Committee activists inspected various party organizations, branches of the Communist Youth Union, people's councils, trade unions, and institutions of education

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[290] Out of the 16 regions, 10 constituted the focus of the campaign: the Transylvanian regions of Maramureş, Crişana, Hunedoara, Cluj, the Mureş-Hungarian Autonomous Region, and Braşov; Suceava in Moldova; and Oltenia, Ploieşti, and Bucharest in Wallachia.

[291] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, "Informare cu privire la munca de răspândire a cunoştinţelor ştiinţifice," f. 9.

and culture in order to mobilize the entire cadre apparatus for atheist education. Their findings were not encouraging. Popular religiosity was undergoing a revival and atheist education was on the defense. These discoveries caused considerable alarm. As Agitprop noted, the neglect of one area of ideological work created a fertile terrain "for the appearance and persistence of conceptions alien to our ideology" and effectively jeopardized the entire effort to develop socialist consciousness.[292] These developments confronted party leaders with key questions: "What phenomenon was taking place at the ideological level? What were the political consequences of this phenomenon? And what needed to be done to withdraw the population from under the influence of religious propaganda?"[293]

As Agitprop tried to make sense of this state-of-affairs, it returned to two dogmatic interpretations that defined the anti-religious discourse of the Dej-years: the political and cultural narrative.[294] Given the axiomatic tenet of socio-economic determinism, the Marxist-Leninist political narrative described religion as a reactionary class phenomenon. Believers were deemed, in turn, to be citizens of questionable political loyalty who were the pawns of religious organizations. This understanding inspired an administrative approach to religion, which included attempts to enclose religious practices "within church walls" and to reduce confessional institutions and clerical activity to a minimum. The political narrative also carried with it certain assumptions about how to measure the strength of religion in socialism. In line with other ministries of religious affairs in socialist countries, the Department of Cults assessed the vitality

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[292] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, "Informare privind activitatea organelor și organizațiilor de partid din regiunea Brașov pentru propagarea cunoștințelor științifice și combaterea misticismului," f. 10.

[293] Ibid, f. 3.

[294] Romanian anti-religious rhetoric during the early socialist years adapted Soviet discourses on religion to domestic conditions. For the Soviet version of these narratives see, Victoria Smolkin, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty': Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971" (PhD Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2010), 56-59.

of religious life primarily *quantitatively*, by compiling statistical information about religious

organizations. To a much lesser degree, it also paid attention to the qualitative aspects of

churches' activity in order to deduce their popularity with the masses. Thus, local inspectors

gathered information on the following: the intensity and methods of priestly activity (in religious

education and pastoral service, in particular); the institutional strength of churches (the number

of priests, churches, and theological seminaries); the frequency of ritual practices among

believers (the observance of major holidays and life-cycle rituals - mainly baptisms, weddings,

and burials; attendance at masses and pilgrimages, etc.); and the economic health of parishes and

bishoprics. The Department of Cults calculated the latter from believers' ritual fees and their

donations in money, labor, and goods to clergy salaries and the maintenance of cultic buildings.

As historian Victoria Smolkin noted, such categories indicated that communist officials

conflated organized religion with popular religiosity.[295] Indeed, in the Dej period, cult inspectors

invariably suspected local priests whenever believers gathered at pilgrimage sites or spread

rumors about miracles or an impending global apocalypse. Having established a nexus between

pastoral activity and financial gains, officials also saw the profit motive behind clerical service

and identified priests as social parasites who preyed on ignorant believers. This aspect of the

political narrative acquired a new angle especially in the context of collectivization drives, when

priests became associated with deviance and criminality.

Emphasis on the subversive nature of religion propelled ideologists to formulate a

cultural narrative according to which religion was "backward" and called for an active

ideological engagement with believers through enlightenment measures. Part of the broader

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[295] Ibid. Also noted in Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Czech Sociology of Religion under the Communist Regime 1948-1989" in *Sociology and Ethnography in East-Central and South-East Europe: Scientific Self-Description in State Socialist Countries* ed. by Ulf Brunnbauer, Claudia Kraft und Martin Schulze Wessel (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), 60.

agenda to inculcate "culturedness," this approach focused on the political and materialist education of believers. The assumption was that by revealing the pernicious politics of religious organizations and by disproving metaphysical cosmologies with scientific facts, believers would inevitably abandon faith. Because rituals were recognized as important to the practice of religion, indeed for the socialization of believers, ideologists stressed the importance of providing citizens with alternatives – "cultured" leisure activities such as literary and art clubs, film evenings, and amateur theater and folk dance performances. Due to the didactic verve of the cultural narrative, lectures constituted the preferred method and when it came to the religious question, lecturers were expected to draw out the multiple ways in which religion was incompatible with socialism, science, and modernity overall. When assessing the success of these efforts, party leaders naturally employed the same categories with which they measured religious life. They zealously compiled statistics about the number of lectures and cultural activities organized by the various institutions of the party-state down to the village level. They often compared the upkeep and economic health of culture houses to that of local parishes. In qualitative terms, the top party echelons also evaluated the vigor of atheist efforts by comparing the passion of various cadres to that of the local priest. Party leaders likewise kept a keen eye on whether the population considered socialist activities or religious practices more attractive.

Given that these two narratives juxtaposed religious organizations with the local institutions of the party-state, the Agitprop naturally blamed the religious revival on the increasing activity of priests and the simultaneous "passivity" of the rank-and-file. Thus, the Agitprop's final report criticized local cadres for lacking militancy in liberating citizens from "the darkness of mysticism."[296] Despite multiple instructions from the central organs, the need to

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[296] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 17-19

intensify the battle against religious belief was rarely discussed at the local meetings of party and state institutions and was marginal in the ideological training of cultural activists.[297] Even when some organizational initiative was evident, reports noted that scientific brigades refrained from confronting religious worldviews: lectures "did not reveal the theoretical, scientific-atheist implications of natural scientific knowledge" and fulfilled a narrow role of "simple scientific information," being unattractive and unconvincing to believers.[298] In fact, Agitprop observed that out of the total 276,000 lectures in 1965 less than 1.4 percent "battled" religion in an explicit manner.[299] Although the amateur artistic and sports movement was cited as a particularly effective means to involve believers in leisure activities, in many villages its theater, folk dance, and musical groups had come to naught. Reports often noted, however, that church-organized orchestras, brass bands, choirs, artistic programs and sports games thrived in the very same parishes.[300] Indeed, local party organs and people's councils were criticized for abandoning the material base of the artistic and sports movement: the socialist culture house. While the clergy managed to increase church income, introduced electricity in cultic buildings, and mobilized believers for volunteer work in order to renovate parish holdings, most houses of culture

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[297] Ibid. In its earlier report about the region of Brașov, Agitprop found that in 1964-1966 the regional party committee organized only one lecture entitled "Science and Religion" for propagandists in the Sibiu district (*raion*) Ibid. File 17/1966, f. 37. This problem was noted even in the region of Cluj, where the regional committee was praised for "naturalizing" ideological education in all aspects of its work, see ibid, File 19/1966, f. 3 and 8.

[298] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 13

[299] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 20.

[300] Ibid. f. 17. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 18-20 and File 19/1966 f. 9, and 13-14.

encountered difficulties in gathering enough funds to erect appropriate headquarters with the necessary sanitation and electricity.[301]

Top party organs also explained the popular attraction to religion by noting that priests used more attractive methods to win believers over. Besides offering various material stimulants (sweets, crosses, icons, or aid in cash, food, and clothing), the Lutheran, Calvinist and Roman-Catholic churches presented themselves as guardians of Hungarian and German national values. For this reason, Agitprop surmised, they adapted popular traditions and renewed traditional minority associations (e.g. the Saxon neighborhoods or brotherhoods and sisterhoods for youth).[302] Particularly versatile in religious education, priests relied on poems, religious games, and musical recitals or used vinyl players, tape-recorders, and slide projectors. All of this was naturally to underscore the "deviousness" of religious officials and their attempt to undermine the political loyalty of citizens to the party state.[303] But Agitprop also insisted on these findings to outline the stark contrast between popular care for churches and houses of culture, the latter of which lacked comparable technological apparatus and display materials (documentary films, slides, illustrations).[304] Even when available, such resources were employed only sporadically in

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[301] The generosity of believers towards various churches was noted in both the Agitprop's final report and in the regional reports. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 16, 21 and File 17/1966, f. 4.

[302] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 5.

[303] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 22/1966, f. 6.

[304] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 4-5, 13-14, 25. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 46/1966, f. 20. According to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda out of the 9,616 houses of culture in the country less than thirty percent had adequate offices, less than fifteen percent had television or slide projectors. By comparison, there were 10,000 churches. ANIC, Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 12 and 21. At the November meeting with regional party secretaries Ion Moraru drew attention to the same problem. As he noted, the network of socialist houses of culture was uneven across the regions and therefore insufficiently developed. "If in Banat we do not have culture houses in 9 villages, in the region of Jassy 700 out of 770 do not have financial resources […]. We have entire districts in this country where there is no appropriate culture house in any village." ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 43/1966, f. 116.

atheist work and "languished most often in closets and drawers without being used."[305] "And how could houses of culture conduct atheist propaganda," inspectors wondered, if their material situation propelled directors to establish a symbiotic relationship with the local parish. One such example came from the village of Tărlungeni (Brașov), where the culture house lent benches to the church for religious service in exchange for parish tables needed at socialist events.[306]

Central Committee inspectors attributed the rank-and-file's indifference towards the resurgence of church activity to cadres' "weak scientific-education" and their lack of familiarity with Marxist-Leninist teachings on religion. To underscore the gravity of the situation, Agitprop recited numerous cases when local cadres harbored strong relationships with their parishes regardless of the creed. Especially in rural areas, it was customary for party cadres to financially support churches "with maximum donations," participate in religious rituals, and send their children to religious education.[307] In the regions of Cluj, Mureș and Ploiești, records showed that, only in the fall of 1965, 700 party members accepted to be elected as curators in parish councils. Members of the Communist Youth Union were also noted for entering Orthodox and Protestant theological schools.[308] As Agitprop poignantly asked: having compromised their consciousness, "what example of ideological discipline, or political orientation could such communists provide for the rest of society?"[309]

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[305] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 14.

[306] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 11.

[307] Ibid, f. 7-8. See also ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 19/1966, f. 9, File 22/1966, f. 9 and File 38/1966, f. 19.

[308] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 20.

[309] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 5.

Such questions indicated that from the perspective of the party elite, being a model communist remained *ideologically* incompatible with any form of religiosity. As a result, the cadre who served both the Party and God had a "compromised" consciousness and needed to be persuaded to see the light. Arguments about the lack of ideological awareness among the rank-and-file certainly made sense in 1966. Fifty percent of the cadre apparatus joined the party only a couple of years earlier and came predominantly from the Romanian peasantry in rural areas, where Orthodox life had continued relatively unperturbed.[310] With the dissolution of the Soviet-inspired Society for the Dissemination for Science and Culture and the renewed closeness with the Orthodox higher clergy after the last anti-religious campaign, the ideological militancy against religion subsided as debates with the Soviet Union in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance propelled the party to root itself into Romanian society.

What the Agitprop did not admit, until years later, was that the confusion of the lower party rank regarding the party line on religion was to some extent genuine and it emanated from the relations with the Orthodox Church and overall liberalization of the political sphere.[311] Indeed, party cadres and propagandists did not necessarily distinguish between church policy and the party's ideological stance. The director of the culture house in the village of Cisnădioara, for instance, "did not understand why it was wrong for her to give donations to the Evangelical

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[310] Ioan Chiper, "Consideraţii privind evoluţia numerică şi compoziţia etnică a P.C.R., 1921–1952" *Arhivele totalitarismului* 6 (1998), 25-44. In April 1962, at the start of the CAER dispute with the Soviet Union, the Central Committee changed the requirements for party members, no longer requiring citizens to prove their "healthy social origins." As a result, in 1962-1965, the party apparatus grew by approximately 200,000 members per year and its social composition changed radically in favor of the peasantry. Intellectuals also became overrepresented in comparison to their overall numbers in society. Stelian Tănase, *Elite şi societate: Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948-1965* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 193. As Kenneth Jowitt noted, beyond gaining access to „material perquisites and general advantages" associated with membership, these categories joined because of "anti-Soviet nationalist sentiments" and the benefits that industrialization promised expecially for the technically proficient sectors of the intelligentsia. Kennet Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 213.

[311] As I show later in this chapter, the contradictions and confusion that liberalization introduced in terms of the party line on religion was addressed seriously for the first in an Agitprop meeting on 31 January 1969.

Church on a regular basis."[312] And Central Committee inspectors became irritated with one collective party secretary, in particular, because he refused to accept that his membership in the parish council was a "grave" matter.[313] In fact, because of the discrepancy between the party's position on church policy and religious belief, some local cadres did seem to argue that the 1965 Constitution safeguarded the right to profess religion.[314] From this *legal* perspective then, party membership and faith were quite compatible; rather, it was the party's requirement for members to renounce their religion which contravened "socialist legality."

The Meaning of Religion

It is important to stress that, while the Agitprop spoke of the overall "intensification of religious life," political understandings of religiosity were hardly generic. In accordance with orthodox Marxist tenets, party leaders scoffed at the genuineness of all forms of religious philanthropy and pastoral care – whether church social welfare programs, care for the ill and dying, or spiritual guidance – and they suspected clerical parasitism and treachery instead. But not all kinds of religion were considered to be dangerous to the same extent. As a matter of fact, the political narrative inherited from the Dej period distinguished religiosity by age, confession, ethnicity, and the "foreign factor." Reconstructing this typology is instrumental for understanding the changes that conceptions of the believer and atheist education underwent by the late 1970s.

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[312] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 11.

[313] Ibid, 8.

[314] Ibid, f. 5.

As the Ceaușescu regime mobilized society for building communism, it became clear that the advent of a "bright socialist future" and of an atheist society hinged ultimately on the regime's success in prevailing upon the youth. Because from the state's perspective, the youth "did not have established religious sentiments and convictions," they constituted the most suitable category for the inculcation of scientific worldviews and the struggle against religion.[315] Captivating the support of the next generation was also instrumental because the hearts, minds, and labor force of young people could secure the (re)production of communism on the long term, both in the ideological and material sense. Lastly, in the tradition of modern ideological regimes the Romanian party-state seized upon the youth as a metaphor to present its political purposes as progressive, pure, and nationally invigorating.[316]

For these reasons, Central Committee inspectors during the 1966 campaign were particularly preoccupied with youth religiosity and viewed this problem in light of broader questions about political socialization in education, the family and communist youth organizations. Thus, the schools and the Ministry of Education were criticized for negligence in the atheist education of youth while pedagogues were urged to become more vigilant about students' family lives and daily activities outside the school. But reports also showed that teachers were often reluctant to draw out the explicitly materialist-atheist implications of their teachings and were unwilling to use house visits and parent-teacher meetings to confront religious families. In fact, rather than withdrawing youth from the influence of the local priest, school boards customarily decided against such cultural events even on Sundays purportedly to

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[315] Ibid, f. 27.

[316] Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity.* Karin Taylor, *Let's Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Berlin: LitVerlag, 2006), 11-20. Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

avoid "overburdening the students."[317] In reaction to this indifference, Agitprop warned that

avoiding to address the opposition between religious cosmologies and scientific materialism

allowed the family and the church to play a disproportionate role in youth education to the

detriment of the state. The unfavorable effects were quite apparent in the rising levels of

religious education among children and students. In the region of Cluj, reports indicated that in

urban areas 15-30 percent of pupils attended Protestant programs, while in rural areas their

number grew to 70 percent.[318] Central Committee inspectors reported that in some villages in the

region of Brașov 90 to 100 percent of children participated in religious education.[319] This

situation was quite "anachronistic," Agitprop opined, because teachers, instead of fulfilling their

role in the cultural and atheist education of the masses, abutted churches both indirectly and

directly. Not only did teachers customarily avoid speaking out against religion but they also

practiced religious rituals themselves.[320]

Besides various educational institutions, the Union of Romanian Student Associations,

the Communist Youth Union, and the National Organization of Pioneers had key roles in atheist

education. Thus, central organs urged communist youth organizations to join houses of culture in

developing "new and healthy traditions that appealed to man's aspirations for a life rich and

varied in interests and manifestations": youth Thursdays, carnivals, and balls as well as rituals

for communist weddings, the presentation of identity card, and for coming of age. The leisure

time of youth and socialist rituals were of particular concern because reports implied that young

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[317] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 5

[318] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 19/1966, f. 1, 7- 20.

[319] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 5.

[320] Ibid, f. 31.

people found the material incentives of priests, their various educational methods or artistic activities attractive. The young also seemed emotionally susceptible to the "exalted style of religious practices and rituals."[321] In other words, religion's appeal to the youth was a key problem because the future of Romanian communism hinged on the regime's ability to recreate itself through the younger generation. As Agitprop pointed out, whereas religion "mutilated children spiritually" and curbed the development of "an optimistic self with trust in life and love for work," an upbringing in the atheist spirit restored youth to their vanguard role in communism, making them "assiduous propagators of science and culture" in the family and the wider society.

In the new political atmosphere of Ceauşescu's thaw, central organs were especially wary about the increased efforts of neo-Protestants regarding the education of youth and their overall influence on Romanian religious life. Of fairly recent appearance, Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, and Evangelical Christians alongside some banned "sects" were considered the least indigenous and constituted possibly the most inter-ethnic religious communities.[322] As in other socialist states, for Romanian party leaders, every sectarian was on the extreme side of "religious fanaticism and bigotry." Indeed, sectarians were often cited for their utter isolation from socialist politics, culture and society and they were described as hostile towards the state.

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[321] Ibid, f. 3, 13, 18, and 19; see also File 38/1966, f. 17 and 21.

[322] These religious organizations appeared on the territories that became Romania after 1918 during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Elis Neagoe-Pleşa and Liviu Pleşa, "Cultele neoprotestante din România în perioada 1975-1989," in Adrian Nicolae Petcu, ed. *Partidul, Securitatea şi Cultele, 1945-1989* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2005), 350-394.

From the legal sects, Baptists (approx. 53,000) were the most numerous in the regions of Banat, Crişana, and Cluj; Seventh Day Adventists (approx. 34,000) in the regions of Bucharest, Ploieşti, Suceava, and Mureş; Pentecostals (approx. 46,000) in the regions of Cluj, Crişana, and Banat; Evangelical Christians (19,000) in the regions of Bucharest, Braşov, Iaşi and Suceava. Illegal sects – Jehovah's Witnesses (approx. 11,000) and Reformed Adventists (3,000) – were the most active in Cluj, Maramureş, Mureş, and Braşov. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966.

Their rejection of medical assistance, their withdrawal from work, elections, and military service, and their refusal to send their children to school appeared to be a rejection of modernity as a whole.[323] From the perspective of the Central Committee's Agitprop, the influence of foreign sectarian organizations provided additional reasons for concern. Having increased the number of their adherents from 74,000 to approximately 200,000 since their legalization in 1948, neo-Protestant sects were not only the fastest growing religious organizations in urban and rural Romania but also had the highest number of priests per believer. Foreign missionary activity only amplified the resilience of this religious community. Entering the country under the guise of tourists, numerous neo-Protestant missionaries organized clandestine meetings, held sermons, and distributed pious literature. Additionally, reports warned, religious propaganda from the "west" and other socialist countries "infiltrated" state borders by post and by radio broadcasts specially destined to Romanian believers.[324]

In areas where religion was intimately linked to nationality, party leaders read the upsurge in popular religiosity and clerical activity as evidence for anti-Romanian mobilization and political unreliability. The fact that reports from the 1966 campaign focused predominantly on the churches of the main national minorities revealed the extent to which ethnicity continued to modify the religious question. Indeed, Agitprop and the Department of Cults provided ample

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[323] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, "Informare cu privire la munca de răspândire a cunoștințelor științifice în rândul maselor," f. 17-18.

[324] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, "Informare cu privire la munca de răspândire a cunoștințelor științifice în rândul maselor," f. 17-19. Although according to this report, the state reduced the number of clergy by thirty percent in 1960, neo-Protestant sects had a pastor for every 200 believers in stark contrast with other cults, which averaged a priest per 1,200 believers. See also ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 19/1966, 18-19.

evidence emphasizing that religious vitality was predominantly a Transylvanian problem.[325] As

they noted, catechesis among German Lutherans and Hungarians who belonged predominantly to

the Roman-Catholic, Calvinist, and Unitarian creed, was "more intense."[326] On account of their

claim that these churches were "guardians of national traditions, culture and language,"

Hungarian and German clerics were also reported for "propagating national isolation and distrust

towards the nationality politics of our party state."[327] Two dioceses, in particular, presented a

special problem to the Romanian party-state. The German Lutheran pastors under the Bishopric

in Sibiu were noted for giving various national folk customs such as carnivals and communal

feasts "a religious color." They likewise mobilized believers to attend mass and maintain

cemeteries via traditional mutual aid and youth associations that had purportedly fulfilled a

strictly economic and social purpose in the past.[328] High levels of participation in religious

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[325] As the Department of Cult noted, religious education did not constitute a problem in the case of the Jewish minority because the number of believers was steadily decreasing as a result of emigration. Dobrogea, another ethnically and religiously diverse region, was not a concern for the regime either because there was little preoccupation with religious education among Armenian Christians, Ukrainians of the Old Rite, and Muslims. Archive of the State Secretariat for Cults [Arhivele Secretariatului de Stat pentru Culte, henceforth ASSC], Fond Departmentul Cultelor, Secția Studii, inv. 35, File 86/1967, vol. 8, "Report," 5 January 1967, f. 5. Besides their small numbers, these nationalities were not a cause for concern also because, after eliminating most of their educational and cultural institutions in 1948, the Ceaușescu regime considered the assimilation of Jews, Armenians, Ukrainians, Turk and Tatars to be a practically completed process. Zoltán Novák, *Aranykorszak,* p. 22 in manuscript.

[326] Ibid, 6-9. To indicate the significance of the close correspondence between religious belonging and nationality in Transylvania, Agitprop reminded party leaders that of the 1.2 million Roman-Catholics, 690,000 Calvinists and 67,000 Unitarians, most were Hungarians. An additional 33,000 Hungarians belonged to the Evangelical Bishopric in Cluj. Most Germans (the Saxons) adhered to the Evangelical Church of the Augustan Confession in Sibiu (184,000), while others (the Schwabs), fewer in number and settled mainly in the Banat, were Roman-Catholic. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 12.

[327] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, f. 5

[328] Both forms of Saxon communal organization went back for centuries. Neighbourhoods (Nachbarschaften) were mutual aid associations that included all married Saxons under a democratically elected male "elder" (Altknecht), while unmarried girls and men automatically became members of the youth organization of their respective sex (Schwesterschaften and Bruderschaften) after confirmation. Contradicting the Department's claim about the secular nature of these associations, Andreas Möckel notes that in the interwar period both were supervised by the local Lutheran church council. See Andreas Möckel, *Umkämpfte Volkskirche: Leben und Wirken des evangelisch-sächsischen Pfarrers Konrad Möckel, 1892-1965* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 46. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, File 38/1966, f. 17.

services were similarly reported in the Archbishopric of Alba-Iulia. Priests in this diocese often

carried out "chauvinist agitation" during their sermons. Believers routinely decorated their parish

with flowers in Hungarian national colors for religious feasts and the episcopal visitations of

Archbishop Áron Márton.[329]

In part, the socialist state's concern over historic Transylvania and the Partium originated

from the inclusion of these regions into Romania after the First World War. Not only were these

areas ethnically and confessionally heterogeneous but their late incorporation into the Romanian

nation-state meant that the interwar regime achieved negligible results in their national and

religious assimilation. In fact, responding to the aggressive nationalism of Greater Romania, the

German and Hungarian communities engaged in "minority nation-building," effectively

establishing "parallel societies" in which the churches effectively overtook the functions of the

missing nation-state in economic organization, cultural life, and education.[330] From the point of

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[329] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 22/1966, "Unele aspecte privind influența cultelor şi sectelor religioase (Maramureş)," 7 April 1966, f. 6. Because the control of the Archbishop of Alba-Iulia extended over the entire territory of historic Transylvania and the Partium, Áron Márton had jurisdiction over most Roman-Catholics in Romania. The Archbishopric of Jassy and Bucharest controlled Moldova and Wallachia where the number of Catholic believers was much smaller.

Áron Márton (1896-1980) was named Bishop of Alba-Iulia in 1938, being elevated to the rank of Archbishop of Alba-Iulia by Pope Pius XII in 1948 as part of the Vatican's resistance to communism. Bishop Márton distinguished himself as an important figure in Hungarian minority-building already during the interwar period. As a result of the anti-religious campaigns of the Dej regime, he was imprisoned in 1949, released in 1956 and was put under house arrest in Alba-Iulia from 1957 until 1967. The bishop had strong support among Catholics, especially in the Hungarian Szeklerland and his region of origins (Harghita county). He drew believers in tremendous numbers to the pilgrimage in Csíksomlyó (especially 1946-1949), and during his chrismation tours and pastoral visits in the late 1940s and 1957. In fact, out of all minority clerics he was the one who commended the most attention from the Central Committee, the Securitate and the Department of Cults. The reason for this was in part that he was a long-time adherent of the staunch anti-communist Cardinal József Mindszenthy in Hungary. The archbishop was released from house arrest in 1967 at the request of Cardinal König of Vienna. This decision was a direct outcome of the regime's desire to mend its image with the Vatican and with Catholic believers at home. See Péter Sas, *Az erdélyi római katólikus egyház, 1900-1948* (Budapest: Mundus Kiadó, 2008). Stefano Bottoni, *Sztálin a székelyeknél: A Magyar Autonóm Tartomány története, 1952-1960* (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro Print Könyvkiadó, 2008), esp. 313-332.

[330] Although these arguments were made about Hungarian minority-building, I extend these to the German community as well. Nándor Bárdi, *Otthon és haza: Tanulmányok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetéről* (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro Print, 2013), 13-14, 437-447. Zoltán Kántor, "Kisebbségi nemzetépítés – a romániai

view of the Ceauşescu regime then, the religiosity of these nationalities was inherently suspect

not only because it contravened materialism but because it also implied a rejection of Romanian

statehood and the idea of the socialist nation, then in the process of being re-defined.[331]

What further aggravated an already adverse situation in the eyes of the party leadership

were the effects of Catholic modernization in Transylvania. To adapt the Church to the

requirements of the twentieth century and to push for Catholic moral-spiritual renewal, the

Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) increased the role of laity in church government, allowed

the vernacularization of liturgy, commenced dialogue with other religions and atheists, and

called on Catholics to engage with the social problems of the world.[332] In a note to the Council of

Ministers, the head of the Department of Cults Dumitru Dogaru warned that the Vatican Council

"constituted an ideological front against atheist communism" and was expected to have "direct

repercussions in the country."[333] Indeed, as the Council came to a close, party leadership

observed the surging activity of Catholic clergy and believers at the hands of Archbishop

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magyarság, mint nemzetépítő kisebbség," *Régió: Kissebség, Politika, Társadalom* 11, no. 3 (March 2000): 219–241; Zoltán A. Biró, *Stratégiák vagy kényszerpályák. Tanulmányok a romániai magyar társadalomról* (Miercurea Ciuc, Pro Print, 1998), 50–94. On how the German Lutheran Church was instrumental in developing Romanian German consciousness and strategies for minority-building see Bernhard Böttcher, *Gefallen für Volk und Heimat: Kriegerdenkmäler deutscher Minderheiten in Ostmitteleuropa während der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 314-116. Harald Roth, "Zum Wandel der politischen Strukturen bei den Siebenbürger Sachsen 1918 bis 1933," in *Minderheit und Nationalstaat* ed. by Harald Roth (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), 99-113;

[331] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 17. It is important to note that on 15 January 1966 (a month before it began mobilizing the regions for atheist education), Agitprop hosted a debate on the new questions of Romanian nation-building. The goal was to depart from the Soviet line and the traditions of the 1950s. The document which emerged from the meeting and was adopted later on described nationalities as "newcomers" to Romanian lands in the spirit of the thesis on Dacian-Roman continuity. This implicitly meant that nationalities were assigned secondary citizenship. The document also denied the necessity of collective nationality rights. This context added to the reasons why German and Hungarian confessions were regarded as politically unreliable. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 180/1966, f. 172.

[332] William H. Swatos, ed., *Encyclopedia for Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 539.

[333] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Organizatorică, inv. 2781, File 14/1966, vol. I., "Notă întocmită de Departamentul Cultelor – 5 februarie 1966," f. 39.

Márton, whose circulary letters emphasized the religious education of children, added special

masses to the ritual calendar, and called believers to renew their commitments to the Church in

keeping with the Council's goals.[334]

Although this remained unsaid in Agitprop reports on the 1966 campaign, what also

informed the focus on Transylvania and the Partium was the increase in Greek-Catholic activity

in the aftermath of the Council. Notwithstanding the role of the Uniate clergy in Romanian

national awakening beginning the late eighteenth century, the political reliability of Greek-

Catholics had been questioned by Orthodox nationalist circles already in the interwar period.

This was in part because demographic data in the newly acquired territories raised fears about

the de-nationalizing influence of the Vatican.[335] From the perspective of the socialist state,

Greek-Catholics were also a security risk and a source of foreign political influence. In this

sense, thus, the forceful merging of the Uniate cult with the Orthodox Church 1948 pointed to a

meeting of interests between the Romanian Workers' Party and the interwar national aspirations

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[334] Sources mention two letters issued in September 1965 and January 1966. For the bishop's letters see ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, f. 43-46. ANIC, Fond C.C. al PCR, Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 17 and ASSC, Fond Departmentul Cultelor, Secția Studii, inv. 35, File 86/1967, vol. 8, "Indicații la catehizare," f. 38-39.

[335] On the Transylvanian School and the Romanian national movement, see Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848* (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999) and *Orthodoxy and Natonality: Andreiu Şaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977). On the interwar period see, Hans-Christian Maner,"Die griechisch-katholische Kirche in Siebenbürgen / Rumänien, 1918-1939: Zwischen nationalem Anspruch und interkonfessioneller Wirklichkeit," in eds. Hans-Christian Maner and Norbert Spannenberger *Konfessionelle Identität und Nationsbildung: die griechisch-katholischen Kirchen in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007).

Statistical evidence from 1939 and 1940 showed the following demographic distribution for Orthodox and Greek-Catholic believers. In the Banat 56.1 percent were Orthodox and 3.6 percent Greek Catholic; in historic Transylvania 27.8 percent were Orthodox and 31.1 percent Greek Catholic; in Maramureș 36.8 percent Orthodox and 25.2 percent Greek-Catholic; in Bukowina 71.9 percent Orthodox and 2.3 percent Greek Catholic. See *Anuarul Statistic al României* 1939 și 1940 (Bucharest, 1940), 74.

of political Orthodoxy.[336] Despite the particular attention that the Securitate and the Department of Cults paid to the *de facto* "unification of the Romanian Orthodox Church," Uniate believers and clerics continued to present a problem. They not only kept their practices clandestinely and in great numbers but also "agitated" for the re-establishment of their cult oftentimes even after formally joining the Orthodox creed. July 1956 had been a peak period, for instance. Special masses were held in a couple of centers in Transylvania and 20,308 believers petitioned the Department of Cults letters to re-establish the Greek Catholic Church.[337]

Ten years later the reports of the regime attributed the upsurge of Greek Catholic mobilization to the Second Vatican Council, which in the spirit of ecumenical dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy, brought attention once more to the status of the Uniate churches in communist states. Thus, two exhibits, "The Silent Church" in Rome and "The Church in Suffering" in West Germany centered on Greek-Catholics in Eastern Europe while at each of the Council's session special liturgies were held for the "garrotting of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania." In Romania, the Department of Cults blamed Archbishop Áron Márton for disseminating news about the Council and for supporting the activity of the clandestine Greek-Catholic bishops who were released after the general amnesty of 1964.[338] As a result, the

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[336] This exchange between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the party-state was hardly between political "equals" and did not mean that the RWP embraced religious-national ideals. Rather, this "re-unification" of Greek-Catholics served a triple purpose of reducing the influence of the Vatican, gaining national legitimacy with the Orthodox majority, and co-opting the Romanian Orthodox Church.

[337] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă, 29 noiembrie 1966," f. 177. Ovidiu Bozgan, "Mișcarea petiționară greco-catolică din 1956," in Ovidiu Bozgan ed. *Studii de istoria bisericii* (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 2000).

[338] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă, 5 mai 1966, f. 158. The clandestine bishops were: Ioan Dragomir (1905-1985), Bishop of Maramureș; Ioan Cherteș (1911-1992), Bishop of Cluj; Ioan Ploșcaru (1911-1998), Bishop of Lugoj; Gheorghe Iuliu Hîrtea (1914-1978), Bishop of Oradea; and Alexandru Todea (1912-2002), Bishop of Alba-Iulia. They were all secretly ordained in 1948-1950. Shortly afterwards, they were arrested for "subversive anti-state activity," spending various amounts of time in jail and under house arrest. After 1964, most of them maintained contact with the Vatican and were considered by the Department of Cults to be "staunchly committed to the reconstitution of their church." ANIC,

Council's works were broadly commented upon even among "reverted" Uniate clerics and

believers "as evidence for the overwhelming superiority of Catholicism in the contemporary

world." In the regions of Maramureş and Crişana, in particular, members of "the Greek-Catholic

resistance" and some "oscillating elements" became convinced that it was the moment to declare

their pro-Catholic sentiments and ask the party leadership to re-examine the legal status of their

church. On this account, some lauded Hungarian socialism for allowing the existence of the

Greek-Catholic Bishopric of Hajdúdorog. Others effectively questioned the new regime's

devotion to national traditions, noting with irony that, neo-Protestant sects with "foreign origins"

were legal whereas the "indigeneous" Uniate creed so central for Romanian national awakening

continued to be banned.[339]

In addition to these political attitudes, reports of the Department of Cults found further

confirmation for the unreliability of Uniates in the prevalence of Greek-Catholic insignia

(statues, holy water fonts, and icons), devotional practices and Marian associations in

Transylvanian Orthodox parishes.[340] Unlike legalized creeds, whose activities could be

circumscribed to specific locations and supervised by the state, Uniate communities often

gathered outside church walls in private homes. Additionally, from the perspective of the

Romanian regime, Greek-Catholics were perceived to be particularly vulnerable to "mixed

marriages."[341] In fact, when marrying Roman-Catholics, Uniates were deemed to have

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Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă," 27 May 1968, f. 257-270. See also, Berindei et al., 387, footnote 7-11.

[339] ASSC, Fond Departmentul Cultelor, Secţia Studii, inv. 35, File 86/1967, vol. 8.

[340] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă," 29 November 1966, f. 175-184.

[341] A large percent of Roman-Catholic baptisms originated from mixed marriages with other cults. To underscore the significance of Catholic "proselytism" through marriage, the Department of Cults gave extensive statistical information. For example, during 1940-1962, at a parish in Timişoara 27.74% of marriages were mixed (309 out

committed the capital crime of having gravitated "towards authorities and centers hostile to our

[national] unity."[342] What concerned the Department the most, however, was the attitude of the

Orthodox Church. Even though Catholic marriage regulations were "not only a problem of faith

but a national one," Orthodox priests "did not seem particularly bothered by this question."[343]

This meant, the Department concluded, that the intermarriage between Orthodox, formerly Greek

Catholic, Romanians and Hungarian Roman Catholics resulted in children who "could be easily

denationalized through religious education."[344] As a result, as the regime revived its atheist

efforts, officials of the party-state paid increased attention to Greek-Catholics. Orthodox clerics

were called upon to renew measures and consolidate the unification. Official historical

publications also began emphasizing that the Greek-Catholic Church, historically subservient to

the politics of the Vatican, "sought to impede the national unification of the Romanian people in

decisive moments of history, 1848 and 1918, as well as more recently during the Dictate of

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of 1,114) and 23.25% at a parish in Caransebeș, the latter contributing to 20% of baptisms. In 1950-1962, the rate of intermarriage was 55.7% (181 out of 325) at a parish in Mediaș and 58.7% (80 out of 150) at a parish in Sighișoara. In regions with more compact Hungarian populations, the rates were even higher. Thus, during 1946-1962 in Valea lui Mihai, a village in the Crișana region, 353 mixed marriages out of 493 (71%) amounted to 53% of baptisms (630 out of 1,182) in the same interval. ASSC, Fond Departmentul Cultelor, Secția Studii, inv. 43, File 86/1964, vol. 8/1, "Referat din 21 septembrie 1964: căsătoria mixtă la cultul romano-catolic," f. 62-63.

Problematically, from the point of view of the Department of Cults, the lack of marriage regulations in the case of the other main confessions only helped the Hungarian Catholic cause. Thus, the main minority churches sanctioned mixed marriages "without establishing any conditions regarding the religion of the spouses or the children." According to the same document, the two Hungarian Calvinist dioceses in Cluj and Oradea adopted similar canon laws to resist Catholic proselytism in 1942 but these "had expired." The situation was the same with the marriage regulations of the Hungarian and German Evangelical churches. Ibid. This latter claim is contradicted by reports citing German Lutheran pastors who forbade intermarriage. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 17/1966, File 38/1966, f. 17.

[342] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă," 29 November 1966, f. 175-176.

[343] The quote is from a 1964 document. ASSC, Fond Departmentul Cultelor, Secția Studii, inv. 43, File 86/1964, vol. 8/1, "Referat din 21 septembrie 1964: căsătoria mixtă la cultul romano-catolic," f. 58-66. But the problem of intermarriage was approached through the angle of denationalization in 1966 as well. See footnote 341.

[344] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă," 29 November 1966, f. 183-185.

Vienna." Given the 1,600,000 former Greek-Catholics in Transylvania and the Partium, the

Department of Cults stressed that the "consolidation of the Orthodox Church" was a "supreme

state interest." After all, out of all religious organizations, the Vatican had the strongest potential

for causing "ideological disorientation" and undermining "the unity of our people." [345]

In addition to Orthodox clerical passivity, Transylvania and the Partium were ironically

troublesome also because Catholic and (neo-) Protestant concerns over religious education

provided arguments for the Orthodox Church to increase its own influence over the Romanian

youth. Indeed, in this sense, the Department of Cults and Agitprop seemed to be of two minds

about whether the majority church should mobilize or not. From the perspective of the state,

Orthodox catechesis had been traditionally considered to be less ideologically dangerous. A note

by the Department reflected this official position. It suggested that, whereas Catholic and

Protestant religious education "was a deeply rooted tradition" emphasizing belief and an active

commitment to religious life, the religious upbringing of children and students was not a

distinctive concern in Romanian Orthodoxy. In this tradition, religious education emphasized

ritual practice, rather than belief. In fact, the Synod's new regulations on catechesis adopted on 5

October 1950 had urged priests and church singers to prepare "believers of both genders and of

all ages" for ritual practice; instead of acquiring a theological education, believers were thus

expected to learn readings, prayers, and songs primarily for mass. The mobilization of the

Catholic and (neo-) Protestant clergy, however, chipped away from this distinction. Orthodox

priests began to establish church choirs, consecrated churches, and organized pilgrimages with

the participation of a great mass of believers. In the Cluj region, for instance, 15,000 believers

gathered on the dedication day for the monastery of Nicula, "three times as many as in previous

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[345] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, vol. I, "Notă," 29 November 1966, f. 175-184.

years."[346] More importantly, Orthodox clerics paid increasing attention to the religious education

of youth to the point where they adopted Catholic and (neo-) Protestant practices such as Sunday

schools, religious evenings, and Bible hours even in homogeneous Orthodox communities.[347] It

was this new focus of Orthodox clerics to inculcate belief as opposed to simple ritual observance

that aggravated party concerns over the religiosity of the Romanian youth in Transylvania.

Indeed, that Agitprop otherwise turned a blind eye to both believers and clerics from the majority

confession underscores the fact that in the 1966 atheist campaign party leaders continued to

consider Orthodoxy the least subversive religion much in line with a typology borrowed from the

Dej period.

The Thaw and the 1966 Campaign

Unsurprisingly, by blaming particular religious organizations and the passivity of the

local ranks, what the party elite conveniently did not explore was the nexus between religious

life and the thaw – in short, its own role in the revival of popular faith. The effects of the opening

of borders towards the "west" provided perhaps the most unmistakable signs. Indeed, the

Agitprop's observations about the "infiltration" of foreign missionaries and the growing

influence of religious organizations from abroad relied in part on earlier reports. In October

1965, for instance, the Minister of Internal Affairs Cornel Onescu had already warned the

Council of Ministers that, in order to stimulate "the mystical-religious fanaticism of clerics and

believers," various Catholic and (neo) Protestant associations from both sides of the iron curtain

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[346] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, "Informare cu privire la munca de răspândire a cunoștințelor științifice în rândul maselor," f. 17.

[347] ASSC, Fond Departamentul Cultelor, Secția Studii, inv. 35, File 86/1967, vol. 8, "Report," 5 January 1967, f. 1, 3-4, 6-8. (Case 2013)

flooded the country with thousands of bibles, letters, and other religious publications.[348] As

Onescu suggested, these could penetrate state frontiers more effortlessly by mail or with the help

of international tourists and Romanian citizens because traveling across borders had become

easier. Also, the General Directorate of Press and Printing (Direcția Generală a Presei și

Tipăriturilor), the main state body in charge of censorship, had ceased confiscating religious

literature in April 1965. Surely, the fact that Agitprop reports of the 1966 campaign did not

address these and similar effects of liberalization on religious life emanated in part from the

notion that the leadership "was always right." Nevertheless, this reluctance for self-reflexivity

was significant because it reflected the degree to which the political and cultural narrative were

entrenched.

Reliance on the established approaches meant that the 1966 atheist campaign proscribed

old administrative and didactic measures in its renewed effort to uproot religion from within

Romanian borders. "Restrictive measures," the head of the Department of Cults Dumitru Dogaru

explained, "were out of the question" because they would provoke international protest and

aggravate the regime's relationship with believers at home. Instead diminishing the strength of

religion necessitated a "long-term plan" that combined careful supervision of religious life with

legal pressure limiting the clergy's activity and the ideological enlightenment of socialist elites.

Necessary steps, Dogaru proposed, also had to be taken in the form of semi-legal administrative

measures that would curtail the number of priests and believers, by reducing enrollment numbers

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[348] ANIC, Fond Consiliul de Miniștri, Secția pentru Problemele M.A.I., File 152/1965, f. 52-59. Qtd. in Mihnea Berindei, Dorin Dobrincu, and Adrian Goșu, eds. *Istoria comunismului în România, vol. II: Documente Nicolae Ceaușescu, 1965-1971* (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 73. To safeguard the Marxist-Leninist education of Romanian citizens, the Juridical Department of the Central Committee instructed central organs to take advantage of standards in "socialist legality." Religious materials "in great quantities" could be seized on account of the state's monopoly in foreign commerce (art. 8 of the Constitution) and prohibitions against unauthorized commercial activity in the penal code. As the Juridical Department explained, otherwise the seizure of religious materials contravened art. 33 of the Constitution which guaranteed the secrecy of correspondence.

in seminaries, withdrawing state appointments from priests, and by banning the conversion

requirements in the Catholic marriage system. The same formula was to be applied to every

religious cult with the necessary modifications to accommodate for confessional specificities.[349]

All of these measures had to be pursued "with the appropriate tact" and attention to confessional

specificities – to wit, without initiating a campaign that would offend believer's sentiments and

reduce the effectiveness of the regime's anti-religious efforts.[350]

Above all, the party-state's approach to religion needed further clarification (*lămurire*).

The Council for the Dissemination of Cultural and Scientific Knowledge was the first to heed the

warning. By early July it revised plans for atheist work in its regional branches in the Mureş

Hungarian Autonomous Region, Crişana, Hunedoara and Oltenia. Its leading specialists likewise

initiated seminars on the party line towards religion and the methodology of scientific-atheist

education for atheist activists, cultural workers, religious inspectors, and party leaders.[351] Similar

actions were undertaken in Bucharest and the rest of the regions in the fall and winter months.

The call for increased attention to the religious question and the intensification of atheist

propaganda was similarly aimed at the State Committee for Culture and the Arts and the

Ministry of Education. The two institutions were instructed to develop better "cultured" leisure

activities in order to attract the population and to mobilize teachers for propaganda work with

parents and the youth. The Agitprop's directives naturally assigned pride of place to party organs

at the local level; they were not only called on to explain the ideological line on religion but were

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[349] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 14/1966, f. 40-42.

[350] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 25-32. Prepared in 1979 for the Central Committee, a report from the Department of Cults indicated that the number of clerics was reduced from 11,352 to 10,677 in 1968-1978. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 3129, File 54/1979, "Documentar asupra cultelor religioase, situaţia personalului clerical, pe culte şi a lăcaşurilor religioase, învăţământul teologic," f. 50-54v.

[351] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 1-2, 7-10.

also required to train better atheist cadres and become model communists for the rest of the population.[352] Alongside the tightening yet careful circumscription of administrative measures, this insistence on cadres' ideological militancy and accountability corresponded with the overall reinstatement of party control in all aspects of social and political life during the Ceaușescu era.

As before, the 1966 campaign allotted the print media a prominent place in the confrontation with religion and the dissemination of atheism. Agitprop chided publishing houses and journalists for neglecting the scientific-materialist education of the masses. Publishers were singled out for issuing books in small numbers and with an unsatisfactory visual quality. In fact, besides the brochures issued by the Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture and Editura Științifică, publishing houses had taken relevant titles completely off their lists. It was for these reasons that trade union and village libraries had poor collections; most had not received any new titles since 1963.[353] Newspapers and journals did little better. Alongside publishers then, *Scânteia Tineretului*, *Flacăra*, *Contemporanul* and *Știință și Tehnică* were prompted to increase publications and address problems with religion in a straightforward manner.[354] In the aftermath of the atheist campaign, the print media issued numerous articles that proclaimed the party line on religion. The Hungarian newspaper *Ifjúmunkás*, for instance, broached the relationship

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[352] Ibid, f. 27-30.

[353] Ibid, f. 21. An extensive report prepared by the Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture in February 1966 confirmed that publication numbers were reduced from 72 Romanian titles in 1963 (average number of copies 37,000) to 45 titles in 1965 (average number of copies 23,500). Among others, the report noted that ordinary citizens complained about the crisis, noting that they could not find such publications in villages or in bigger cities like Brăila. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Notă în legătură cu broșurile de popularizare a științei din colecția C.R.C.C.S.," f. 43-56. Interestingly, the report also observed that publishing brochures ceased to be profitable since publication numbers were reduced in the central plans. Whereas for Romanian language brochures publishers incurred a deficit only in 1965 in the amount of 178,000 lei, in the case of minorities it was 344,000 lei in 1963-1965. Ibid, "Situația financiară rezultată din editarea broșurilor de popularizare a științei în perioada 1963-1965," f. 55. In 1969, an atheist expert argued that this shortage of publications accounted for the curious fact that Hungarians from Romania turned to publications in Hungary (issued in an average 150,000 copies) to fulfill their curiosity about science. Ibid, f. 28.

[354] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 38/1966, f. 22.

between atheism and ethics or atheism and science, while *Lupta de clasă* evoked the "precursors of contemporary atheism" and reported on "current philosophical debates on religion and atheism."[355] *Revista Pedagogică*, the review of the Institute of Pedagogical Sciences, and Academy's *Revista de filosofie* (*The Philosophical Review*) followed suit with specialized articles on the evolution of the idea of man in pedagogical thought, current trends in the propagation of science and culture," and the history of human devotion to gods.[356] The Agitprop's call for more attention to ritual practice saw many predictable publications that presented the history of religious life-cycle ceremonies and popularized socialist alternatives for baptisms or weddings.[357]

The 1966 campaign in atheist education revealed the party leaders' perception on religion. However, the real significance of its story lies in the questions that the Party asked and the ones it did not ask. To recall the question posed by the Department of Agitation and

[355] Zoltán Farkas, "Erkölcs és ateizmus," *Ifjúmunkás: A K.I.SZ. Központi Bizottságának Hetilapja* 11, no. 30 (27 July 1967), 6. Zoltán Farkas, "Tudomány és vallásos hit," *Ifjúmunkás* 12, no. 30, (25 July 1968), 1 and 6. Petru Berar, "Precursori ai ateismului contemporan," *Lupta de clasă* 46, no. 11 (November 1966), 114-118. Petru Berar, "Religia si ateismul în dezbaterile filozofice contemporane," *Lupta de clasă* 47, no. 2 (February 1967), 120-122. Petru Berar, "Literatura de informare ştiinţifică şi ateismul," *Lupta de clasă* 48, no. 7 (July 1968), 51-59. Degan Vasile, *Consideraţii despre religie şi propaganda ateist-ştiinţifică* (Cluj, 1969), Pompiliu Caraion, *Geneza sacrului* (Bucharesti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1967). D.D. Roşca, *Existenţa tragică* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1968). Al. Posescu, "Tendinţe şi poziţii ateiste şi materialiste în filozofie în perioada interbelică," *Curente şi orientări în istoria filozofiei româneşti* (Bucharest: Editural Academiei R.S.R, 1967), 169-224.

[356] Ioan Cerghit, "Evoluţia ideii despre om în pedagogie, concepţia materialist-dialectică despre om, bază metodologică a pedagogiei socialiste," *Revista de pedagogie: Organ al Institutului de Ştiinţe Pedagogice* 15, no. 1 (January 1966), 14-31. Emil Iordăchescu, "Orientări actuale în activitatea de popularizare a ştiinţei şi culturii," *Revista de pedagogie* 17, no. 8 (August 1968), 119-125. P.Bălă, "Cultul divinităţilor care mor şi înviază," *Revista de filosofie* no. 9 (1967). Tache Aurelian and Anton Costescu, *Cultul sfinţilor* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1966).

[357] Gheorghe Bălteanu, *Botezul şi împărtăşania* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1969). C. Priescu, I. Teoharide and Lal Romulus, "Ceremonia va avea loc în saloanele," *Scînteia tineretului* 23, no. 5708, (26 September 1967), 1-2. "Moment Solemn al tinereţii – sărbătoarea majoratului: Anotimp al maturităţii," *Scînteia Tineretului* 23, no. 5766, (5 December 1967), 2 and 5.

Propaganda, what phenomenon was taking place at the ideological level? What were its political consequences of this phenomenon? And what needed to be done to withdraw the population from under the influence of religious propaganda?

Certainly for the ideological elite the answers were clear: the revival of popular faith they identified on the ground occurred because of the mobilization of particular religious organizations and the simultaneous lack of ideological militancy of the party's rank-and-file. Religion was incompatible with communism, indeed threatened socialist construction, according to top officials. But for many ordinary people this was not necessarily obvious. Even local party cadres found it quite acceptable to serve God and Party at the same time, making themselves ineffective as model communists for the wider masses. And in the leadership's mind all of this converged into a problem that required the party to put atheist education back on its agenda, not in the form of a series of campaigns but as a *permanent endeavor*.

The question that the ideological elites did not ask was to what extent the resurgence of popular religiosity they observed on the ground was not only their own making but also reflected some of their long-standing biases. The dissolution of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture in 1963, the opening of borders, and the party's increasingly "pragmatic approach" to churches reflected the liberalization of the social and political sphere that began already under Dej. Rather than constituting a surprise, in the context of the thaw, the abandonment of scientific-atheist enlightenment in "recent years," the influx of foreign missionaries, and the "confusion" of cadres about the party line on religion should have been expected then. The overwhelming number of reports on minority religions also reflected that the Central Committee did not look closely enough at Orthodox believers; instead, it focused its

attention on the religious organizations that it had traditionally viewed as the most threatening.[358]

Regardless, the fact that the connection between the thaw and religious life were not explored in

Central Committee reports or addressed in the measures is indicative for how party leaders

understood religion.

As the Ceaușescu regime made sense of the religious landscape and re-affirmed the

atheist mission, discussions about atheist education took a back stage for a couple of years in

party organs, both at the central and local level. This return to a relative calm on the atheist front

was encouraged by the political priorities of the new party leadership in 1966-1968: Ceaușescu's

focus on eliminating rivals in the Central Committee and on consolidating his power with the

rank-and-file, among others through the administrative re-organization of the country.[359] The

Prague Spring of 1968 likewise presented challenges on the domestic front and in relations with

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[358] In 1966, the last effort of Agitprop to mobilize for the intensification of atheist education was on November 14-16, 1966 when all party secretaries from the regions were called into a meeting to discuss "problems of ideological work." However, the fact that the 1966 campaign was not a general call for mobilization but was directed at particular regions was evident in Paul Niculescu-Mizil's speech at the meeting. As he stated, "Unfortunately, in particular places we see an intensification in the activity of certain religious sects, [and] religious cults, but our party organs are not only on the defensive; they do not even respond with rich programs in the propagation of scientific knowledge." ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 43/1966, "Stenograma întâlnirii din 14-16 noiembrie 1966 cu secretarii comitetelor regionale de partid care se preocupă cu problemele muncii ideologice," f. 206. An overview of Central Committee documents in 1966-1968 further confirms that the campaign concerned only certain religious organizations and regional party committees. In fact, Agitprop did not draw up an official "plan of measures" (*plan de măsuri*) until 1968 and this plan also echoed the particular bias of the 1966 campaign; the measures insisted on intensifying ideological activity in regions where the influence of cults and sects had grown. See File 5/1969, "Măsuri privind intensificarea activității de educație științifică a maselor," dated 31 May 1968, f. 150-160, esp. 151-152.

[359] The administrative-territorial reorganization of the country from 16 regions to 41 counties in 1968 reflected Ceaușescu's attempt to root out the autonomies of power in the regional party branches and to fashion a new base of provincial party support. See Zoltán Csaba Novák's introduction in his collection of archival documents on the party's Hungarian nationality policy, *Aranykorszak: A Ceaușescu- rendszer magyarságpolitikája* (Miercurea-Ciuc: Pro Print Könyvkiadó, 2011), 31-32.

the Soviet Union.[360] At the same time, the particular question of how to turn a practicing believer

into an atheist acquired unprecedented significance for two reasons: first, because in the post-

Stalinist climate of the time, party leaders denounced repression and terror as instruments of rule

with the removal of Alexandru Drăghici;[361] and second, because good relations with churches

and believers, indeed "the presence of religious life" in socialist Romania, remained central to

the tightening of economic and political relations with "the west." Thus, coercion was no longer

the best option for socialist construction. The Party-state's efforts turned to ideology as the

single-most effective means for mass mobilization. In part, this foreshadowed the qualitative

transformation of atheism over the next decade. What also helped propel atheism to the center of

party concerns was a concrete incident. On Christmas Day 1968, a student demonstration took

place in the heart of Bucharest that raised tensions in the Central Committee, already high

because of Ceaușescu's famous bravado against the crushing of the Prague Spring.

Of Hooligans, Christmas, and Atheist Experts

Ceaușescu's "Balcony Speech" on 21 August 1968 denounced the Soviet-led invasion of

Czechoslovakia and sought to demonstrate the unity of the Romanian people around the

leadership. While in hindsight "performing disapproval of the Soviets" was "the best card" the

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[360] I have not encountered any evidence in the Central Committee Files or in the local archives confirming that these measures were cleared by the Central Committee and sent to the regions. Because of the Prague Spring and the French May, 1968 was a particularly precarious year in which the regime wanted to avoid popular demonstrations. Therefore, it is very likely that these measures never left the Agitprop's desk.

[361] As Berindei, Dobrincu and Goșu note, by constituting a commission in 1965 to "reveal" the abuses and illegal acts of the Securitate in the 1950s and early 1960s, Ceaușescu sought to distance himself from the Dej regime and "fashion himself as a liberal in the public opinion." Berindei, Dobrincu, and Goșu, 7. The content of the commission's report was discussed initially in closed sessions of the Central Committee in 1967 but in 1968 local party committees were informed of its "findings." Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 79. The commission's report was presented to the party's local committee in Harghita county on 28 April 1968 during the presence of Mihai Gere, deputy member (*membru supleant*) of the Executive Committee. See, National Archives of Harghita County [Arhivele Naționale Direcția Judeteană Harghita, henceforth ANDJHR], Fond Comitetul Judetean P.C.R., inv. 851, File 2/1968, f. 23-87.

party leader played in his entire career both domestically and internationally, late 1968 was a precarious time for the RCP.[362] The Ceauşescu regime was at the height of its isolation in the socialist camp. This was, therefore, a time of maximum prudence. Indeed, the threat of Soviet invasion seemed real enough to mobilize the army, call able-bodied Romanians into the newly formed patriotic guards (*gărzile patriotice*), and to contact the Yugoslav leadership, the only other signatory of the Warsaw Pact that had not participated in the offensive against the Prague Spring.[363] In fact, according to the new leading party propagandist Dumitru Popescu, nicknamed "the Almighty," August 1968 marked the beginning of the ideological "frost" – commonly dated

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[362] Corina L. Petrescu, "Performing Disapproval Towards the Soviets: Nicolae Ceauşescu's Speech on 21 august 1968 in the Romanian Media," in *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960-1980* ed. Martin Klimke, Jacco Pekelder, and Joachim Scharloth, 2nd ed. (London: Berghahn, 2013), 199-210.

[363] Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Ceaşescu*, 129-135. Forseeing the possibility of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia already in July, the Central Committee asked the Chinese Communist Party to keep an eye on the Prague Spring and to prevent the Soviet Union from embarking on a "military adventure" that could threaten other socialist states. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Relații Externe, File 103/1968, f. 2- 15. The idea to contact the Yugoslav party, mobilize the military and form the patriotic guards were decided already on the day of Ceauşescu's speech. See ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 133/1968, "Stenograma şedinţei Comitetului Executiv al C.C. al P.C.R. din ziua de 21 august 1968," f. 6- 26. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Administrativ-Politică, inv. 3059, File 5/1968, "Planul de măsuri al Ministerului Forţelor Armate," f. 81- 82. On August 26 the Central Committee instructed county party committees to organize, train, and arm the patriotic guards in their jurisdiction. Ibid, f. 83- 84. A month later the Permanent Prezidium approved the army's proposal to extend the term of 55.000 soldiers on reserve by 1-3 months. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 164/1968, f. 2.

after the July Theses of 1971.[364] In this volatile political environment, it is unsurprizing that the

so-called "Christmas Demonstration" rattled the Central Committee without fail. Because it

revealed a dent in the party's legitimacy, there was fear that Christmas 1968 could serve as an

excuse for a Warsaw Pact invasion. Indeed, as historian Adam Burakowski argues, these were

the reasons why the party leadership acted energetically to an otherwise "banal incident" and

why the event became an ideological "turning point" for the Communist Youth Union and the

party, more generally.[365] But the Christmas Demonstration did not only convince the regime to

pink-slip its limited thaw. In marked distinction from the 1966 campaign, this incident also

propelled the party to involve "atheist experts" in Central Committee conversations. Without

precedent, this move subsequently prepared the way for quintessential changes in the regime's

atheist endeavors over the course of the 1970s.

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[364] In his memoir Popescu states that "there was no 'mini-cultural' revolution, the frost started in 1968" because of the acuteness of the Soviet-Romanian conflict. Dumitru Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se: Panorama răsturnată a mirajului politic* (Bucharest: Curtea de Argeş, 2006), 232.

After the marginalization of Leonte Răutu, Dumitru Popescu (born in 1928) became the chief ideologue of the Ceauşescu regime. At this time, he was a member of the Central Committee (1965-1989) but he later received appointments in the Secretariat (1969-1989) and the Executive Committee (1969-1989). In 1950-1956, he was editor of the cultural magazine *Contemporanul*. After completing a six month course on the press at the Higher *School* for Social Sciences A.A. Jdanov in 1956 in Moscow, he had a stellar career in the Romanian socialist media. He was chief-editor of the *Youth's Spark* (1956-1960), General Director of the Romanian press service AGERPRESS (1960-1962), chief editor of *The Spark* (1965-1968), president of the National Council of Romanian Radio and Television (1971, 1976-1978), and head of the Central Committee's Press Department until 1977. He was also the chief figure in the state administration of socialist culture in the Ceauşescu era, being the president of the Council for Socialist Education and Culture in 1971-1977. In the 1980s, he was named rector of the Pary Academy Ştefan Gheorghiu (1981-1989) and member of the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences. Florica Dobre et al, *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R., 1945-1989: Dicţionar* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 480-481. According to Vladimir Tismăneanu, the epithet "the Almighty" was attached to Popescu's name when his despotism and narcissism became evident during his time at *The Spark*. Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Cine a fost Dumitru Popescu-Dumnezeu? Marele pontif al religiei politice ceauşiste," 3 December 2011, at http://www.contributors.ro/cultura/cine-a-fost-popescu-dumnezeu-marele-pontif-al-religiei-politice-ceausiste/ (last accessed 29 January 2015).

[365] Burakowski, 134. Comisia Prezidenţială Pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste, *Raport Final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 153.

Possibly a reverberation of the global youth movements at the time, the "Christmas Demonstration" began on 25 December 1968 as a student caroling and it caught the authorities completely off guard. Virgil Trofin, the head of the Secretariat recounted the events the next day. "At 2:30 in the night a group of hundred students, initially gathered at the Medico-Pharmaceutical Institute, proceeded to the other dorms." In ever-greater numbers eventually reaching a thousand, the columns of students moved through the main arteries of central Bucharest, past the University of Bucharest, across the Magheru Boulevard and on to the Romana Square. Ululating and caroling with fir in their hands, they apparently caused such an "infernal noise" that "the phones could not be used" in the Central Committee.[366] According to Anca Șincai, a participant at the events, as they danced the nationalist Round Dance of Unification (*Hora Unirii*) on the main squares, the students managed to attract the attention and sympathy of the capital's inhabitants, some of whom joined after the Christmas mass.[367] To avoid escalation, party leaders ordered the Securitate and the police to stand down and they did not wake Ceaușescu up – as historian Burakowski suspects, for fear that first secretary would resort to force and undo the gains of August 1968. It was only at the behest of Cornel Pacoste and Marin Rădoi, leading party secretaries at the University Center and the city of Bucharest that the crowds finally dissipated from the North Railway Station.[368]

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[366] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 216/1968, "Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al C.C. al P.C.R. din 25 decembrie 1968," 7-12. Published in Adam Burakowski, "Un eveniment important aproape necunoscut: demonstrația studenților din București, 24 decembrie 1968," *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 14, no. 1-2 (2006): 243-247. Quotations are from p. 244.

[367] See Adrian Cioflâncă's interview with Anca Șincai, "Cum am devenit instigatoarea numărul unu," *Revista 22* (22 December 2006), at www.revista22.ro/cum-am-devenit-instigatoarea-numarul-unu-3330.html (last accessed 15 January 2015).

[368] Burakowski, "Un eveniment important," 239.

Although hardly a political protest, this rare manifestation - spontaneous rather than officially organized – drew the interest of the Soviet, Polish, and East German embassies and elicited a disproportionate response from the Romanian party elite.[369] On December 27 the Council of Ministers extended the winter holidays, as a result of which students left the capital in substantial numbers.[370] Along with two other colleagues, Anca Șincai was arrested for demanding "Freedom for students!" in front of the U.S. Embassy. Universities expelled numerous students or called upon them to publicly unmask themselves.[371] Disciplinary measures also reverberated through the highest party ranks. Ion Iliescu, head of the Ministry of Youth and first secretary of the Communist Youth Union (U.T.C.), along with other members of the UTC's Central Committee underwent the ritual of "self-criticism" and were called upon to tighten ideological control over youth.[372] For their negligence to stop such "hooliganism" with mass arrests, the secretary for the Securitate Vasile Patilineț and the mayor of Bucharest Dumitru Popa received harsh reprimands from Ceaușescu himself.[373]

Beyond the overall ideological tightening, Christmas 1968 gave a critical momentum to official preoccupations with atheism because it put the question of Orthodox religiosity squarely on the table. After all, the fact that the primary initiators of the manifestation were Romanian

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[369] Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Fond DIR-0-24/1/69, W-9, File 28/74, 1-4. Published in Burakowski, "Un eveniment important," 240-243. Polish political attaches gathered information primarily from the Soviet Embassy, which may have sought to exploit the event. To Moscow the embassy reported namely that besides "Liberty," the crowds also shouted "Down Ceaușescu!" At this point, Anca Șincai and Romanian archival documents do not confirm that such denunciations of the party leader were uttered at the manifestation.

[370] "Decretul Consiliului de Miniștrii privind zilele libere 3 și 4 ianuarie," *Buletinul Oficial* (27 December 1968).

[371] Comisia Prezidențială, ibid.

[372] ANIC, Fond C.C. al U.T.C., inv. 3, File 15/1968, "Stenograma ședinței Biroului C.C. al U.T.C. din ziua de 26 decembrie 1968," f. 130.

[373] Burakowski, "Un eveniment," 245.

students, without the involvement of priests or international religious organizations, meant that

the event could not be explained away with the political narrative so characteristic of the 1966

campaign. Indeed, at the emergency Executive Committee meeting on 25 December, Virgil

Trofin and Nicolae Ceaușescu agreed that the Christmas incident pointed to a deep problem.

Notwithstanding earlier efforts to revive atheism, "our conceptions about the world, life and

society" remained utterly absent from all levels of instruction. As a result, the closing of this

ideological void at the heart of communist education begged a more comprehensive re-

examination of atheist work, the Executive Committee concluded.[374] In line with such

instructions, Agitprop's deputy head Petre Constantin promptly drew up a new proposal for

measures and on 31 January 1969 convoked a meeting with "atheist experts" to consult on the

revival of religiosity and the problems with atheism. As Constantin emphatically stated, the

expected outcome of the forum was not an anti-religious campaign or militancy in atheist

education; experts were to provide suggestions on how to transform atheism into a permanent

and consistent activity.[375]

"How Do We Stand With Religious Mentality? We Have To Know Too"

The party cadres and academics who gathered at the Agitprop in January 1969 addressed

some of the more fundamental, theoretical and practical, challenges that confronted atheist work

under the new regime. Indeed, the most striking and revealing discussion at the meeting revolved

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[374] Burakowski, "Un eveniment important," 239-240. The fact that Christmas 1968 propelled central party organs to prioritize atheism is underscored by the declaration of Ilie Rădulescu, the head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda during a control visit to Harghita county. He informed the county committee of the recent student manifestation at Christmas in order to emphasize that "atheist-scientific education of the people was a permanent concern in party work." Direcția Județeană Harghita a Arhivelor Naționale, Fond C.J.P.C.R., inv. 851, dos. 3/1969, "Proces verbal al ședinței ordinare a biroului Comitetului Județean din 14 mai 1969," f. 119.

[375] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Stenograma ședinței din 31 ianuarie 1969 pe tema propagandei ateist-științifice," f. 15-16.

around the nexus between the thaw and religiosity, the historic interference between religious

and Romanian culture, the very typology of religion, and importantly, the institutional demotion

of atheist education after 1963. This forum revealed a significant departure from the rhetoric of

the 1966 campaign and marked the emergence of new directions in atheist propaganda.

As the regime's reach for "national authenticity" in the 1960s translated into a more

moderate church policy and promoted the selective embrace of pre-socialist cultural heritage,

numerous experts at the meeting worried that atheism was quickly losing ground to religion. The

liberalization of the socialist press and the penal code caused a series of difficulties with the

churches and intellectual circles, in particular. As the head of the Department of Cults Gheorghe

Nenciu[376] explained, depictions of the Pope as a "champion of [religious] reform, progress and

peace" in *Contemporanul* convinced church leaders that "we have abandoned atheist

propaganda" and that certain publications even promoted pro-religious positions. Moreover,

Pope Paul VI's photograph and an article in *Luceafărul*, the weekly of the Romanian Writer's

Union, "encouraged Catholic elements in Transylvania who think of the re-establishment of the

Greek-Catholic church, [and] of the intensification of religious life" arguing that new trends in

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[376] According to a biography prepared by the Securitate, Gheorghe Nenciu, born in 1922 in the village of Bălteni close to the capital, graduated from the Department of Philosophy and joined the P.C.R. in 1945. After working for the Securitate in 1945-1952, he was retired and excluded from the party on grounds that his father had been a kulak and a member of the National Peasant Party. In 1953 his exclusion was revoked and he joined the Ministry of Cults as a chief inspector. The Securitate characterized him as follows: " In his activity, Nenciu is appreciated as a reliable cadre with good professional training, aware of religious problems and politics, energetic, [and] principled in work. At his post, he proved to have sense and tact in relation with church representatives in the country, reason for which he won their respect and consideration; he militated for the application of our party's policy in this domain of activity. He represented the interests of our state in an appropriate manner during his contacts with church representatives from abroad." ACNSAS, FD/București, File nr. 11206, vol. 9, f. 198-198v. Qtd. in Adrian Niculae Petcu, "Activitatea Departamentului Cultelor în atenția Securității, 1970-1989," *Caietele CNSAS* 2, no. 4 (2009), 73-74.

socialist legality provided protection and public space for religious manifestations.[377] In fact,

academician and propagandist Constantin I. Gulian[378] emphasized that the recent "concessions

towards anti-Marxist and non-Marxist ideology" put atheist education on the defense on all

fronts. Suspending rigorous censorship, state publishers competed to re-print interwar

Orthodoxist philosophy and literature and in the process recent Marxist publications ended up at

best equaling rather than outweighing the massive number of such works.[379] As the socialist

press abandoned its role in providing ideological guidance on Marxist-Leninist concepts,

religious poetry appeared in *Contemporanul*, the organ of the State Committee for Culture and

the Arts. Because of such a retreat in the ideological battle against religion, Gulian observed, in

literary circles and among students at the institutes of art, the departments of philology and

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[377] Nenciu stated that he had "an entire file" on such problems. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Stenograma ședinței din 31 ianuarie 1969 pe tema propagandei ateist-științifice," f. 38.

Art.319 of the new penal code made the disruption or obstruction of the religious practices of a legally recognized cult punishable by imprisonment from one to six months. It sanctioned the same punishment in cases when a person was pressured to participate in religious rituals or to carry out a religious act pertaining to a cult. "Codul Penal," *Buletinul Oficial* no. 55-56 (23 April 1973). While still prohibiting religious proselytizing, this article allowed some degree of public presence for cults and thus qualified provisions in the 1948 Law of Cults, which had enclosed religious activity within church walls deeming all public religious manifestations contrary to public order and "good morals."

[378] Constantin I. Gulian (1914-2011) was a philosopher. In 147 he acquired a doctorate in philology from the School of Literature and Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. He later became the head of the Department of the Philosophy of History (1953-1975), the head of the Academy's Institute of Philosophy and History (1954-1971). Besides being a visiting professor in Bruxelles, Heidelberg, and Paris, he also taught in Warsaw, St. Petersburg and Moscow probably in the 1950s. According to Vladimir Tismăneanu, he was instrumental in condemning interwar Orthodoxist philosophers and in the drawing up a Zhdanovist canon of Romanian and universal philosopy during the early 1950s. Vladimir Tismăneanu, "C.I. Gulian, exterminatorul filosofiei românești," *România Literară* no. 2 (12 January 2012), at http://www.romlit.ro/c._i._gulian_exterminatorul_filosofiei_romneti (last accessed 6 September 2014).

[379] Explicitly, Gulian brought up the recent re-publication of Blaga's three volume work Trilogia culturii and Constantin Noica's books in which, among others, he reread Plato through Hegelian philosophy: *Douăzeci si sapte de trepte ale realului* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1969) and *Platon: Lysis (cu un eseu despre înțelesul grec al dragostei de oameni si lucruri)* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură Universală, *1969).*

philosophy, it suddenly became "bon ton to wear a cross and to swear by [Lucian] Blaga and other representatives of idealism."[380]

The party's attempt to present a future classless society through the cultivation of Romanian folklore also placed serious demands on atheist education, especially around religious holidays.[381] As Tache Aurelian,[382] professor of philosophy at the University of Bucharest suggested, the Christmas Demonstration was in some ways an outcome of the folklorization of cultural life. To illustrate this point, he recounted that when the Polytechnical University invited the choir of the University of Bucharest to sing "winter songs," certain university students and faculty endorsed caroling as part of folk customs and could not or appeared to be unwilling to differentiate between folklore and "mystical influence over popular customs." Worse yet, during Easter "illustrations with red eggs, [and] Jesus Christ" became increasingly frequent in socialist commerce; this phenomenon evolved to the point where shop windows "were studded with red eggs."[383] Such customs were not lay, Aurelian warned, and raised questions about how atheists should deal with holiday traditions that were so thoroughly anchored in Christianity.

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[380] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 21 and 28. The two poems Gulian mentioned were Eugen Jebeleanu's "Rugăciune" and Geo Bogza's "Psalm" published in 1968 and 1969, respectively.

[381] On the turn away from the proletarian folklore of the 1950s towards peasant culture see Vintilă Mihăilescu, "A New Festival for the New Man: The Socialist Market of Folk Experts during the 'Singing Romania' National Festival," in *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II: Socialist Era Anthropology* ed. Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev and Slobodan Naumović, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia vol. 17 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 59-60.

[382] Tache Aurelian (1930-1991) graduated from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest and obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Leningrad with a thesis entitled "Religious alienation and human emancipation." After his return to Romania in 1955, he taught at ancient, medieval, and renaissance philosophy as well as the philosophy of religion at his alma mater. Vladimir Tismăneanu recalls him as "the official atheist." See "Politologie și conformism în Epoca de Aur," last accessed 20 January 2015 at http://www.contributors.ro/cultura/politologie-si-conformism-in-%E2%80%9Eepoca-de-aur%E2%80%9D-cazul-ovidiu-trasnea/ (last accessed 6 September 2014).

[383] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 34.

In effect, atheists argued that by revisiting the national agenda, the Ceauşescu regime removed an important ideological barrier to religious influence in both elite and folk culture. Such developments placed new imperatives on atheist work. Atheists claimed, for instance, that the laicization of "national traditions" – in other words, the detachment of the "mystical," "idealist" dimensions of cultural heritage from its inherently historical and aesthetic values – was increasingly a priority. In order to reinstate ideological rigor in this sense, Constantin I. Gulian noted that atheists required assistance from philosophers of culture and folklore specialists as these experts could "clarify" difficult questions that were bound to emerge about "religious paintings" (icons) and customs.[384] But while imperative, atheists also agreed that the symbolic reevaluation of national heritage had to remain a fine instrument in the battle against belief; it could not dovetail into crude Soviet methods such as the museification of church monuments and the banning of religious practice. The head of the Department of Cults Gheorge Nenciu criticized Agitprop for proposing such measures in the first place. Religious service had to continue at these monuments and the guides had to remain priests who were instructed "to emphasize the historical and artistic value of the respective monument." In effect, he reminded party leaders not only that the very "brand" of Romanian socialism was at stake but that closing a handful of churches was tantamount to a proverbial drop in the sea. Foreign tourists "had to find religious life," Nenciu exclaimed "because otherwise they will say: the Romanians closed [their] churches, they made them into museums. That's what they say about the Russians. Now let us judge: in this country we have 12,000 churches total. If we close 10, do we solve the problem?"[385]

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[384] Ibid, f. 24.

[385] Ibid, f. 41.

As atheists pointed to the new ideological challenges that the thaw imposed on their work, what the transformation of atheism actually entailed in terms of *methods* led to even more probing questions. Alexandru Koppándi,[386] head of the press sector, criticized Agitprop for resorting to outdated forms of propaganda and for providing local organs with instructions that were essentially meaningless.

> On page 8 it is written that atheist work should be conducted in a differentiated way. Such a general instruction does not solve any problems. Because we are not giving such instructions for the first time […] And then, county committees will also pass on instructions for differentiated work. In my opinion we have to decide what we intend to do, with whom and where? Because we are battling mysticism in a completely general manner regardless of what cult people belong to, how accentuated their belief is, etc. […][387]

The problem, Koppándi implied, was that whereas the political narrative distinguished between confessions, its typology of religion did not inform atheist work in a substantial manner. In fact, being directed from Bucharest, atheist-scientific propaganda was attuned principally to the specificities of the majority cult but could not properly address a Calvinist, Roman-Catholic, or Lutheran audience.[388] In part, this state-of-affairs was the result of an "utter crisis in atheist lecturers from among the minorities," explained Paul Popescu-Neveanu, a long-time atheist cadre of the Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture.[389] Yet, considering that the party-state deemed certain religious organizations more dangerous than others, contradictions of this

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[386] Alexandru Koppándi (born in 1929) studied at the Higher School of Social Sciences A.A. Zhdanov (1952) and at the Higher Party School of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow (1953-1956). He became an instructor at Agitprop in 1963 and later led its department for propaganda and press. He rose within the ranks of the Central Committee, becoming first a deputy member (1974-1984) and later a full member (1984-1989). For his complete biography see Dobre, et al., *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R.*, 351-352.

[387] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 29 and 31.

[388] Ibid, f. 32.

[389] Ibid.

nature had serious repercussions for the battle against religion. To provide an illustration to this point, an expert recounted that, in the German village of Cisnădioara, the Lutheran pastor was ironically "the most devoted propagandist" against Baptists. Although not an adherent of atheism, the pastor not only prevented neo-Protestant proselytizing – a key concern for the regime – but instructed his fellow churchmen to be thankful for the party's contribution to nuclear peace and mobilized them to participate in socialist life, at political meetings and cultural events. "Throwing all believers in the same basket," the expert poignantly observed, prevented scientific-atheist brigades from recognizing opportunities for temporary, yet beneficial alliances with major cults.[390]

For many who took part at the Agitprop meeting then, the future of atheist work ultimately hinged on its ability to reach believers more effectively. It was admitted at this point, that notwithstanding the party's ritualistic focus on quantity, statistics about lectures, scientific brigades, and brochures were a poor indication of success against religion because they obscured a crucial qualitative element – namely, that propagandists were out of touch with the flesh-and-blood believer, especially in rural areas.[391] As a result, experts increasingly articulated two new objectives for atheist work. First and foremost, to become more persuasive, the ideological establishment needed to acquire an accurate understanding of individual believers on the ground and the micro-social environment of their local communities and family. This in turn imposed the need for a new kind of atheist worker - not the occasional lecturer - but someone who was embedded in local social relationships and could provide a continuous counterweight to the local priest in the community.

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[390] Ibid, f. 33. The person is not named in the document.

[391] Ibid, f. 18.

As an established propagandist with substantial training in sociology and psychology, Popescu-Neveanu[392] was uniquely aware of the latest trends in atheist education across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It is not surprising, therefore, that he articulated the new path forward the clearest. Popescu-Neveanu dreamed of a permanent "counter-priest" in every village. Teachers or medics, who had their heart set on atheist work, could elucidate local conditions by gathering crucial ethnographic and sociological data. They were also uniquely capable to offset the social embeddedness of priests. Unlike outsiders, Popescu-Neveanu implied, local intellectuals had a "social status" and like the priest could work "from man to man" without any mediation.[393] Ultimately, however, the development of applied and effective methods in cadres' work called for a centralized understanding of the psycho-social realities and traditions on the ground. Since both top and local organs had poor knowledge of actually-existing religion, Gulian concluded, "our sociology needs to undertake what the comrades in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia completed: sociological, scientific research. How do we stand with religious mentality in our country? […] We have to know the truth too! How do we stand?"[394]

The Agitprop's forum in January 1969 became an appraisal of atheist propaganda as it had pursued not only since the thaw but already during the early Dej period. Consensus emerged around two key arguments: first, that the pursuit of a distinctively Romanian socialism presented

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[392] Paul Popescu-Neveanu (1926-1994) was a student of Mihai Ralea, a social scientist and cultural figure with Marxist sympathies and affiliations to the interwar left-wing agrarian (poporanist movement), who had distinguished himself in social and national psychology, political sociology and the sociology of culture. Popescu-Neveanu also studied with Gheorghe Zappan, professor of experimental psychology. After graduating with a degree in psychology at the University of Bucharest, Popescu-Neveanu completed a doctorate at the University of Leningrad under the famous Soviet psychologist Vladimir Nikolaevich Myasishchev. Once he returned to Romania, Popescu-Neveanu joined the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture (after 1963 the Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture) and was named professor of psychology at the University of Bucharest in 1969.

[393] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 19-20.

[394] Ibid, f. 24.

new ideological challenges in the battle against religious belief; and second, that atheism could be transformed based on the empirical discovery of religiosity, not according to the dogmatic understanding that Marxist-Leninist ideology provided. Indeed, atheists' emphasis on the subjectivity of the individual believer, the micro-environment of relationship networks, and research on social reality echoed revisionist arguments and reflected the push to depart from the Stalinist perspectives regarding the socio-economic determinism of the macro-level and the concomitant embrace of hyper-rational bureaucratic mechanism.

Yet, while the atheist elite approved the party's aspiration for new directions, the question of how to give atheism a home in the institutional ecology of the party-state remained open. This predicament had become quite serious since 1963 when, under the banner of de-Sovietization, atheist work was scaled back, or as many at the meeting argued, disorganized. Indeed, Popescu-Neveanu noted that at the Committee for Culture and the Arts atheist activity had become "administratively hemmed in" to a department within the Committee's Council for the Dissemination of Science and Culture. The repercussions for atheist education and the professionalization of atheist work were almost prohibitive. Emil Iordăchescu, the head of the Committee for Culture and the Arts, for instance, called attention to the fact that "Bucharest was one of the few capitals in Europe without a planetarium." This was a significant gap considering that harnessing popular enthusiasm about space travel for the popularization of science had been a priority for atheists in the Soviet Union.[395] Additionally, there were few specially trained propagandists and no popular or scholarly atheist journal. Literature on issues of interest or

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[395] Ibid, f. 45. It is quite significant that atheist reliance on cosmic enthusiasm was at its height in the Soviet Union in the same period when the Dej regime embarked on de-Sovietization. By 1969, however, the popularization of space explorations as a form of atheist education entered into an age of bane. Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Contested Skies: The Battle of Science and Religion in the Soviet Planetarium," in *Soviet Space Culture: Cosmic Enthusiasm in Socialist Societies* ed. Eva Maurer et al. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 57-78.

textbooks on methodology had also become extremely scarce. In order to achieve the goal of

eradicating religion, Popescu-Neveanu concluded, there was a need for an organization "outside

the party" that had "full liberty of action" and could become the bedrock of atheist propaganda in

the country.[396]

Part of a transnational network of Marxist-Leninist atheists set up on Soviet initiative,

Romanian experts were aware that the currents of post-Stalinist revisionism brought on sea

changes in their work since the 1950s. Indeed, the official reliance on technocratic expertise, the

rise of semi-official groups, and proliferation of institutions relatively independent from party

control animated atheist propaganda across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. [397] It is not

surprising that, in an environment where atheist work was acquiring a better status and

significant institutional resources, Romanian atheists called attention with a notable envy to the

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[396] Ibid, f. 16-17.

[397] While the richness of scholarship on Soviet atheism and the almost utter lack of similar works on Eastern Europe enables me to compare the evolution of the Romanian case only to the Soviet one, I do not wish to adopt a center/periphery model here. Soviet sources demonstrate, for instance, that atheists in Moscow were influenced by post-Stalinist atheist work in the Baltics and Bulgaria. According to Smolkin, the people's universities were a "novel institution" in atheist work and were introduced by the Estonian "Knowledge" Society in 1959. Bulgarian atheist research and work also "provided an early model for the Institute of Scientific Atheism established in 1964. Smolkin, 112 and 190.

Programs for exchanging lecturers with various eastern European and Soviet atheist societies were established within the framework of national cultural treaties. These were used even in the early 1960s when Romanian atheist work was marginalized. Archive of the Ministry of Culture and National Patrimony [Arhivele Ministerului Culturii și Patrimoniului Național, henceforth AMCPN], Fond Comitetul de Stat Pentru Cultură și Artă, File 26297/1962-1964, File 26297/1962-1964, "Notă," 4 July 1964. f. [1]. Ibid, "Notă," 16 April 1964. In 1966 the Committee for Culture and the Arts sent several lecturers as part of the exchange program to the Soviet Union, Mongolia, China, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Ibid, File 19483/1966, "Planul de relații externe al CSCA pe anul 1966 ce privește Consiliul pentru Răspândirea Cunoștințelor Cultural-Științifice," f. 3-4. Ibid,"Situația schimbului de conferențiari cu străinătatea în anii 1960-1964," f. 6-18. Ibid, "Notă privind schimburile de conferențiari cu străinătatea în anii 1964-1966," f. 30-35. Romanian atheists and science popularizers were also invited to the conferences and congresses of sister-Knowledge societies where they took stock of atheist work in the broader socialist camp. A Romanian delegation participated in 1964 the international conference on adult education in socialist countries of Europe organized by the Czechoslovak Knowledge Society and in 1966 at the 4th Congress of the Urania Society in East Germany. AMCPN, Fond Comitetul de Stat Pentru Cultură și Artă, File 16398/1966, "Notă privind schimbul de lectori pe 1964 între R.P. Română și unele țări socialiste," 29 May 1964, f. [1-3]. Ibid, "Informare," undated, f.1-5.

advances other socialist countries had made on the atheist front. As Dan Marțian,[398] the first

secretary of the Communist Youth Union pointed out, "in problems of scientific-atheism, the

Soviets had several versions of textbooks, bibliographies, specialized institutions, [and] quite an

elaborate literature."[399] Tache Aurelian added that Moscow University had a complete

department of scientific-atheism with eight lecturers and two professors, a library, and

department for scientific research, which taken together occupied an entire wing at the Faculty of

Philosophy. The Hungarian Association for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge had

twelve journals for the popularization of science, out of which *Világosság (The Light)* dealt

solely with questions of scientific-atheism. Moreover, the Kossuth Club functioned as a

methodological office (*cabinet metodic*): it had a tidy library and propagandists did not have to

search for special bibliographies and publications "while freezing"; rather they were handed the

required materials and could commence work promptly.[400] Even in staunchly Catholic Poland,

the Society of Atheists and Freethinkers had a premier philosophical journal, its own press

department, group of lecturers and a research section. Their scholars "were connected to the

entire world and followed the religious developments in a perfect scientific manner." As

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[398] Dan Marțian (1935-2002) joined the Communist Youth Union in 1952 and studied at the Institute of Economic Sciences in Bucharest for a year (1954) before being sent to pursue his studies in the Department of History at Lomonsov University, Moscow (1955-1960). There he was politically recognized and by 1958 he was appointed as the secretary of the Romanian Communist Youth Union in the Soviet capital. After his return to Romania in 1960, he was immediately appointed as lecturer in the Department of Scientific Socialism at the School of Philosophy, University of Bucharest. His career within the party was at its height in the late 1960s up until 1974. See his full biography on the website of the Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism at http://mineriade.iiccr.ro/pdf/DAN%20Martian.pdf (last accessed 15 January 2015).

[399] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 36.

[400] Ibid, f. 25-26.

Aurelian noted, this was in stark contrast to Romanian atheists who found out about international conferences on scientific education from the pages of the foreign press, at best.[401]

What imposed a similar professionalization of atheist work in Romania was not only that it lagged behind propaganda in other socialist countries but that it also lagged behind religion. Departing from earlier dogmatic positions, Romanian ideologists observed namely that religion was modernizing and "backwardness" had become an attribute of atheism. One major change was that churches no longer rejected the scientific explanation of man and the universe but instead accomodated to science. To illustrate the process in the Catholic case, the head of the Department of Cults Gheorghe Nenciu recounted the recent declarations of Pope Paul VI. "Pope Paul was asked what he thought about the flight of the spaceship Apollo 8 [in 1968]. He declared: we are increasingly becoming Copernicans. But still you have to be proud that God chose Earth to send his Son; on this matter we are Ptolemaics."[402]

While this development prompted atheists to insist on the opposition between scientific materialism and religious cosmologies, it also raised questions about an important tenet of atheist belief. In these conditions was popularizing science still the most effective weapon against religion? According to the deputy head of Agitprop Petre Constantin, changes in church dogma were, in fact, the least dangerous aspect of Catholic modernization. From the perspective of socialist states, it was far more worrying that the Vatican accommodated to modernity by embarking on a social mission in the world. As Petre suggested, the fact that the church addressed this-worldly affairs – "social problems that worried people" such as poverty,

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[401] Ibid, f. 17-18.

[402] Ibid, f. 42.

development, and human rights – meant that the Vatican had transformed itself into a new kind of ideological opponent.[403]

The problem was, some atheists warned, that modernization was not particular to Catholicism. As Dan Marțian noted, the Soviets were preoccupied with this issue.[404] Indeed, the fact that "in our case these more contemporary, more modern problems of religion have not been studied with sufficient care" pointed to a potentially fatal oversight in atheist propaganda. After all, he explained: "our future work in this domain" hinged on understanding the penetration and adaptation of the modern aspects of religion.[405] Nenciu summed it up neatly: "we have to modernize too."[406]

But even as top level atheist cadres acknowledged that the institutionalization of their work was instrumental, many were uncomfortable with making atheism a visible aspect of propaganda, mainly because of the potential domestic and international repercussions. Returning to an earlier point, Gheorghe Nenciu observed, "We cannot forget that […] there is favorable talk about the existing liberties in Romania." While atheist education was required, he advised against publishing instructions in the press or giving schools directions on what to do with parents. What was at stake was not only ties with western countries but Romania's relationship with the diaspora. "We seek to draw the diaspora from abroad closer to the country and there are some nice, positive responses that are useful for us," Nenciu explained. "We do not have to

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[403] Ibid. Joel Krieger and Margaret E. Crahan, *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 737.

[404] Indeed, according to historian Victoria Smolkin, Soviet atheists perceived the modernization of religion primarily in the fact that the church ceased to reject science and defined its function primarily in the spiritual realm. In part, this was the reason why Soviet atheists lost trust in the powers of science to battle religion. Smolkin, 41-42.

[405] Ibid, f. 36.

[406] Ibid, f. 42.

create circumstances so that we are criticized in this respect."[407] The tension between the official

aspiration for legitimacy and the ideological commitment to banish belief lay at the heart of the

Romanian atheist endeavor, and, in this respect, the views of Nenciu were representative of the

sensitive position in which atheists found themselves.   Indeed, Constantin I. Gulian also worried

about adverse results and suggested that in order to prevent activists from being popularly

dismissed as "anti-Christs," the founding of an atheist society had to take place under "a more

discreet veneer."[408] What became clear then was that, in having to navigate between the party's

political instrumentalization of church policy and its pledge to battle religious mentalities,

atheists were entering a profoundly novel terrain.

Unprecedented, the Agitprop's forum with experts in January 1969 pointed to the

beginning of a dialogue between party leaders and the atheist ideological establishment – a

dialogue that would unfold until the 1980s, admittedly on very unequal terms. At the same time,

the involvement of experts also suggested that, despite the party's ritualistic insistence on

Romanian distinctiveness, conversations in the semi-official sphere from this moment onwards

became increasingly informed by the very questions that Soviet and eastern European atheists

had been struggling with since the 1950s as socialist regimes began grappling with questions of

post-Stalinist reform.[409]

The Party's interest in expanding and improving atheist education was evident in the

directive it published shortly after the meeting. Thus, in the brochure *With Regard to Atheist-*

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[407] Ibid, f. 38.

[408] Ibid, f. 24.

[409] Scientists, philosophers, and other members of the academia were on the board of the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Culture (1948-1963) but up to this point they had never been invited to Central Committee meetings to decide on ideological questions regarding atheism. See Chapter One. For the evolution of Soviet atheism, see Smolkin, op.cit.

Scientific Education, Agitprop underwent a ritual self-criticism for previous failures and called

on all institutions of the party-state to make the cultivation of atheist convictions a permanent

aspect of their ideological work. The brochure insisted that atheist education had to explicitly

address "the opposition between science and religion" and denounce "the modernization of

religion." In line with experts' recommendation, Agitprop reminded party cadres and cultural

activists to adopt a "differentiated" approach to believers based on their education, ethnic and

confessional belonging. It further concluded that in order to close the gap between atheist

education and social reality, "the particularities of scientific-atheist education among adults,

children and youth" required research in the domain of the sociology and history of religion, the

contemporary currents in idealist and religious philosophy, and in the methodology of atheist

education. At the same time, the 1969 directive forbade "administrative measures" or any

practices that "offended" believers on the grounds that constitutional provisions guaranteed the

"freedom of conscience" for believers and atheists alike. Indeed, Agitprop reminded activists that

atheist education had to remain "a work of persuasion" and had to avoid any semblance of a

"campaign."[410]

Atheist Education "with Tact"

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Party invested unparalleled amounts of resources to

make atheism a permanent component of propaganda work. Cadre training was becoming more

systematic both in higher and local party schools. The Academy Ștefan Gheorghiu introduced a

course "on the theoretical and practical questions of scientific education." At institutions of

higher-education, lectures addressed "the principal problems of atheism" in courses on Marxism-

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[410] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă , inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Cu privire la activitatea de educație ateist-științifică," 58-74.

Leninism, the social sciences, and teacher training. Similar themes were incorporated in ideological education at popular and workers' universities on the county level and in the new "atheist-scientific circles" formed within mass organizations and schools.[411] Aimed at the wider population, planetaria opened in 1969 in Constanța on the Black-Sea coast, and in Baia Mare, northern Transylvania.[412] As Romanian public television entered its golden age under socialism, programs such as "Teleuniversity," "At the Gates of Knowledge," "Pupils' studio" became a principal means to reach adults and especially the youth.[413] Notwithstanding its previous renunciation of "administrative measures," the Party also strenghtened the institutional supervision of churches in order to buttress the ideological battle against religious belief. Thus, the new Law of Cults adopted on 15 August 1970 formalized restrictions on donations and

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[411] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă , inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 71-72. Ibid, File 22/1970, f. 5-7.

[412] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă , inv. 2898, dos. 5/1969, f. 84. The Agitprop's brochure mentioned the construction of a planetarium in Bucharest as well. Curiously, however, this was never built. Rather, the city's popular astronomical observatory, which existed since 1910, was supposed to fulfill this purpose, although it was far less equipped to do so as a planetarium.

[413] Ibid, f. 23. Dana Mustata, "Television in the Age of (Post-)Communism: The Case of Romania" in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe during and since Socialism* ed. by Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens, and Kati Lustyik (New York: Routledge, 2013), 47-64. She notes that from the 1970s, children's and youth programming took up most of the broadcasting time on Romanian channels, p. 57.

enforced party control over the Department.[414]

Although atheist reform moved to the center of ideological concerns, the practical implications of party directives remained unclear for both local and central organs. Indeed, in 1969-1970 Agitprop reports noted time and again that local party cadres were still reluctant to address religious mentalities. This problem, the explanation went, was due to both "the belittlement of the religious influence exerted by the cults and sects" and to "confusions about the politics of our state towards the church."[415] But while Agitprop rehearsed dogmatic explanations to account for "failures," the clarifications local party cadres solicited suggests that their disorientation was to some extent genuine and went back to the tension that emerged between a more liberal church policy and the renewal of atheist propaganda after 1965.

Thus, when Central Committee inspectors went to the regions again in the summer of 1969, they were confronted with requests for practical instructions on a range of issues. As Ilie Rădulescu the head of the Agitprop reported, at local party meetings "questions were asked whether the presidents of people's councils, being also first party secretaries, could grant audience to servants of the church or if mayors had to accept invitations to participate in

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[414] Consiliul de Stat, "Legea nr. 42/1970 privind organizarea și funcționarea Departamentului Cultelor," *Buletinul Oficial* 103 (15 August 1970). The meaning of these changes was explained in detail in a RFE report. Whereas there was already an established practice to control donations and thereby restrict church income, such measures were not formally stated in the previous law of cults. See, Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-187-16, Situation Report Romania, 14 October 1970, "Department of Religious Cults Reorganized," 9-11.

Donations became a problem because of the opening of borders and the political instrumentalization of churches in relation with "the west." Thus, relying on the reports of the Department of Cults, Agitprop informed the Central Committee as follows: "The organization of the Hungarian Calvinist Federation of America sent priests donations in dollars by money-order […]. Roman-Catholic priests receive textiles for vestments for free in packages from Switzerland and Austria. Some Catholic priests received 13 Zündapp motorcycles from the Federal Republic of Germany for which they paid [a customs fee] of up to 1,000 lei based on petitions approved by the [Romanian] Ministry of Foreign Commerce." ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 7.

[415] Ibid, "Propuneri privind îmbunătățirea activității de educare ateist-științifică," 27 December 1969, f. 120.

festivities organized for the visit of a prelate." [416] Indeed, it seemed that for some members of the

rank-and-file the permissiveness of church policy signaled that religious practice and party

membership were compatible. During a session of the Executive Committee in February 1970,

the Minister of Youth Ion Iliescu shared a story from his own family to illustrate such cases:

> I actually had a discussion in my family, with more simple folk. [They are] honest and devoted party members but they hold baptisms, [and] weddings with the priest. And I asked them why do they do that? To which they said that now the issues are not the same anymore [*nu se mai pun problemele chiar aşa*] if comrade Ceauşescu meets with foreign prelates. So, people interpret these things in the wrong way. [417]

Confusion about what measures the party's position on religion actually entailed also

extended to top organs. In 1968, when Archbishop Áron Márton performed chrismation in

Harghita county for the first time in twenty years, the Department of Cults in Bucharest had

instructed that its inspector "did not have the right" to be in these areas lest "his presence

impeded this religious ceremony." For this reason, in 1969, when the next chrismation tour was

scheduled, the inspector asked central organs for clarification. He noted that approximately

40,000 believers were expected to gather just in four out of the forty-five localities where the

archbishop was scheduled to pass. [418] It was indicative that Ilie Rădulescu himself felt the need to

turn to Nicolae Ceauşescu before confirming to the county party secretary that "special cultural

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[416] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 93-94.

[417] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, "Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv privind activitatea de educație ateist-științifică a maselor," 10 February 1970, f. 53.

[418] Ibid, File 5/1969, "Notă," 15 January 1969, f. 14.

and educational events" could be undertaken.[419]

Unsurprisingly, Agitprop reports emphasized the adverse results of this confusion. For instance, party cadres in the southeastern counties of Gorj, Olt, Dolj and Vâlcea were criticized for concluding that there was no reason to intensify their struggle with religious mentalities because "they had no religious sects" in their districts, only Orthodox believers.[420] Local organs in Suceava and Iaşi county exhibited "a certain [measure] of insecurity" about what actions to undertake. As a result, during the celebrations of Saint John the New and Saint Paraschiva, both of which "attracted [Orthodox] believers from cities and villages in significant numbers," cadres ensured "the good provisioning of cities" but organized no ample cultural events to "captivate the interest" of citizens.[421] The fact that local organs remained neutral to, or worse yet, inadvertently aided religious life prompted the party elite to formulate repeated proposals and directives.[422] Indeed, the struggle to clarify the correct line and marshal grassroots energies for

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[419] Ibid, "Notă," 23 May 1969, f. 95. A previous handwritten note by Ilie Rădulescu from 15 January 1969 had instructed the Harghita county party secretary Sándor Szekeres via C. Petre to undertake measures "as intense as possible" but "with a lot of care," without creating an "unpleasant" situation. Szekeres was also directed "to inform us what they [the county party committee] think of doing [specifically]." ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Notă," 15 January 1969, f. 14. After Szekeres informed Agitprop, Rădulescu went to Ceauşescu because the first page of the Agitprop's May report on atheist education included the following handwritten note: "Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu has been informed. Special educational and cultural measures should be taken for the visit of bishop M.A. Signed Ilie Rădulescu, 26 May 1969."

[420] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 8/1969, "Notă," 5 April 1969, f. 7.

[421] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 22/1970, "Notă cu privire la aplicarea planului de măsuri aprobat de Comitetul Executiv al C.C. al P.C.R. pentru intensificarea activităţii de educaţie ştiinţifică," f. 47. For other reports see ibid, Files 1/1970, 11/1970, 14/1970.

[422] For a list of proposals to "improve atheist education" and the resulting directives, see ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Agitaţie şi Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, "Propuneri privind îmbunătăţirea activităţii de educare ateist-ştiinţifcă," 27 December 1969, f. 118-121. Ibid, File 22/1970, "Măsuri privind îmbunătăţirea activităţii de educare ştiinţitifică şi de combatere a misticismului şi obscurantismului din conştiinţa maselor," f. 5-14. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 136/1972, "Protocolul şi stenograma şedinţei Secretariatului C.C. al P.C.R. privind planul de măsuri pentru intensificarea activităţii de educaţie ateist-ştiinţifică." Ibid, File 1/1973, "Planul de măsuri," 22 December 1972, f. 34-42.

the ideological battle against religion partly explains why discussions on atheism and religion at the top party level achieved their peak in 1969-1973 in terms of both frequency and verve.

But while the top organs exhibited increasing impatience with local cadres for not falling in line, the Central Committees official language on religion remained contradictory. In fact, in the attempt to reconcile liberal priorities in church policy with ideological discipline in atheist education, top party organs resorted to the promotion of "atheism with tact." When Ilie Rădulescu, the head of Agitprop, presented an extensive "Proposal on Improvements in the Atheist-Scientific Education of the Masses" at the Executive Committee's meeting on October 2, 1970, several members cautioned against getting into a controversy with religious believers. After confessing that he was an atheist since he turned 19, Gheorghe Rădulescu, vice-president of the Council of Ministers, advised against touching upon "delicate religious feelings, which are not dangerous but are tied to traditions."[423] To avoid even the slightest semblance that the "Central Committee embarked on a campaign against religion," which in turn was bound to trigger a backlash in popular religiosity and clerical activity, Rădulescu also suggested that measures elude the "obsolete" term atheist, emphasizing instead the struggle against "obscurantism" rather than religious phenomena. The entire affair had to be conducted "with a lot of tact" and with qualified cadres. "We should not go to simple folks and give them I-don't-know-what lectures," Rădulescu concluded.

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[423] The economist Gheorghe Rădulescu, nicknamed "Gogu" by Ceauşescu, joined the Romanian communist underground in the 1930s. According to Vladimir Tismăneanu, in December 1989 he was "the last member of the RCP's old guard in the top of the party and state hierarchy." Vladimir Tismăneanu, Stalinism for All Seasons: the Political History of Romanian Communism (Berkeley, 2003), 267. In the 1970s and 1980s, his village house in Comana gave home to a literary circle, quite popular among aspiring and established writers, much like Leonte Răutu's. Lavinia Betea, "Cenacliştii de la Comana ajunseseră „sus", iar patronul lor – la Spitalul 9," *Jurnalul Naţional*, 10 May 2010, at m.jurnalul.ro/special-jurnalul/cenaclistii-de-la-comana-ajunsesera-sus-iar-patronul-lor-la-spitalul-9-544050.html (last accessed 30 October 2013).

Virgil Trofin, chairman of the National Union of Agricultural Production Co-operatives, János Fazekas, vice-president of the Council of Ministers, and Dumitru Popescu, secretary at the Central Committee, all nodded to these propositions in their own speeches. The person whose opinions most decisively shaped the measures in terms of ideological framing, institutional channels and audience was Nicolae Ceaușescu. The first secretary agreed with both Popescu and Gheorghe Rădulescu. The problem of "anti-religious education" could not be presented so ostentatiously "in today's conditions." "We have to keep in mind, in comrade Dumitru Popescu's words, that it is a long process of thousands of years and we cannot, however and anyway we want to, liquidate this thing in a couple of years." In this light, Ceaușescu concurred that "this formulation of atheist-scientific education" be taken out because it suggested the beginning of a campaign. Under the banner of "scientific education against mysticism and obscurantism," the Central Committee was to initiate instead "a profound and multilateral endeavor for people's education, in which people's degree of knowledge, their levels and philosophical problems" would be considered. Rather than dogmatic solutions, this question needed a complex approach that addressed "the entire education and attitude of man in society and towards spirituality." The reason for this was, as Ceaușescu admitted, that he ultimately prefered "the party member, who goes to church but who is disciplined in work, orderly and fulfils his obligation to the one which does not go to church but introduces disorder, indiscipline, [and] chaos in society."[424]

When a new direction on atheist education was under discussion at the Central Committee Secretariat in January 1973, concerns revolved again around visibility and potential accusations that the Party embarked on a campaign against believers. The initiative to establish a research department in the Institute of Philosophy at the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences

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[424] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, f. 46-54; Dobre, et al., *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R.*, 506-507.

that investigated the history, philosophy, and sociology of religion invited no objections. But top

party members chided Agitprop for proposing to publish a *Guide for the Young Atheist* and a

theoretical journal on the problems of atheism and religion.[425] For Ceaușescu, the directive's

ideological orientation was "outdated by twenty years" and did not reflect "the conceptions of a

governing party." "The way it posed problems, it could only cause difficulties for us," his

explanation went. "We will have the same results as the Soviets had."[426] For this reason, the

Secretariat rejected the document and resolved to discuss matters again at the Ideological

Commission.[427]

In fact, emphasis on "atheism with tact" remained in place for much of the 1970s.

Evident already during the 1966 campaign and 1969, this rhetorical turn indicated that the party

elite was holding back on ideological militancy. In part, the underlying desire was to avoid

domestic and international criticism. At the same time, the reformist inspiration of atheist

demands for professionalization, resources, and institutional autonomy threatened to supplant the

party's monopolistic claims to knowledge and power in the tradition of Stalinist political culture.

For these reasons, party leaders in the end vetoed the publication of specifically "atheist"

journals and magazines or the establishment of the kind of professional atheist institution that

experts had requested.[428] Indeed, the sole purpose of the Association for the Dissemination of

Science, formally founded in 1969 under the aegis of the Committee for Culture and the Arts,

was to mobilize intellectuals locally through the people's councils. The Association received no

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[425] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 1/1973, "Stenograma ședinței Secretariatului privind planul de măsuri pentru intensificarea activității de educare ateist-științifică," 15 January 1973, f. 13-14.

[426] Ibid, f. 16.

[427] Ibid, "Protocolul ședinței Secretariatului," f. 3.

[428] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, f. 47. Ibid, File 1/1973, f. 13-14.

administrative personnel of its own and since the president of the people's council was also the local party secretary, its entire activity remained strictly under party control.[429] In effect then, the party elite refused to extend Romanian atheists the same liberties and financial resources that their counterparts in other socialist countries seemed to enjoy. As the next chapter will show, it was only during the re-Stalinization drive of the late 1970s that the leadership began to feel more comfortable with ideological militancy. Indeed, a signal for "the hard line" came in 1979 at a meeting of the Secretariat. In contrast to his statement in 1970, on this occasion Ceauşescu pointedly declared that, having religious world views was no longer permissible for the communist rank-and-file.[430]

As party leaders and prominent atheists took stock of religious life over the course of the early Ceauşescu era, they recognized that atheism was on the defense. Certainly, the regime's liberal measures in the 1960s – among others, the pragmatic approach to religious organizations, the recovery of the great figures of interwar Orthodoxist cultural currents, and the opening of borders to "the west" – did not help. As this chapter demonstrated, the costs that the thaw involved for the atheist endeavor were not articulated at first; in line with customary narratives inherited from the Dej period, the ideological elite blamed the religious revival it discovered in 1966 exclusively on the cults and the lower ranks of the party-state. Believers themselves appeared to be mere victims of a battle that communism waged exclusively with the churches.

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[429] The initial 1969 directive *with Regard to Atheist-Scientific Education* that announced the foundation of the Association suggested that there were intentions to establish professional institutions. The directive stated namely that the Association would conduct research, train cadres, advise the Party on atheist educational policy, and conduct mass education with branches on the county level. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Propagandă şi Agitaţie, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 80. This decision was revoked at an Executive Committee meeting on 10 February 1970 when the new contours of the association were outlined.ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, f. 47-48.

[430] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inf. 3129, File 54/1979, "Stenograma şedinţei Secretariatului C.C. al P.C.R. cu privire la propaganda materialist-ştiinţifică," 4 July 1979, f. 15.

Such observations remained part of the explanation for the persistence of religion until the end of the communist era. By the early 1970s, however, a qualitatively new rhetoric emerged about atheism because of the reverberations of revisionist Marxism in Romania. Indeed, the records of the Central Committee reveal that party leaders and prominent atheists became increasingly reflexive about the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of their work. As they observed, atheist education was out of tune with the different types of believers, their individual convictions, and their micro-social environment. Rather than being made self-evident through ideology, religious life needed to be empirically discovered. And, atheism needed locally embedded counter-priests if it was to bring social reality in conformity with the party's ideological aspirations.

This chapter showed, that a crucial fallout of this shift in perspective was that church policy and atheism parted ways. Whereas the administrative oversight and restriction of religious organizations remained an important instrument for the state, because of the political instrumentalization of religion on the international and domestic scene, church policy ceased to be unabashedly anti-religious. In fact, this change was the reason why the Department of Cults found itself in an increasingly precarious position. The new law of cults adopted in 1970 strengthened the Department's oversight of church institutions and finances but it had to maintain good relations with religious organizations at the same time. Unsurprisingly, because of its double-role, the Department soon came under the surveillance of the Securitate for being too

lenient and politically unreliable.[431] Meanwhile, the burden of battling religion shifted from administrative measures overwhelmingly to the atheist project. Surely, the Central Committee pursued atheist education "with tact" and left contradictions between church policy and atheism in place. But although there was a certain break on ideological militancy, the regime's committment to overcoming religion was evident in the mobilization of previously marginalized experts. As the next chapter will reveal, even though they had to operate in a circumscribed and reduced institutional environment, professional atheists and researchers became instrumental to the transformation of atheism in the 1970s. Indeed, without their work, the turn of socialist culture to spirituality and the course of socialist humanism during the re-Stalinization of Romanian society cannot be fully understood.

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[431] The Securitate opened a file on the Department of Cults (then called the Ministry of Cults) already in 1955, Adrian Nicolae Petcu writes. This initial file appears to have been closed in 1973 at the recommendation of lt. col. Ion Baciu, the head of the Securitate's Bureau for Cults, who proposed this measure on the grounds that "in the period that passed since the opening of this file, subjects with antecedents or ones that posed a social threat was significantly reduced." However, in December 1974 the file was re-opened under nr. 1636. See, Adrian Nicolae Petcu, "Activitatea Departamentului Cultelor în atenția Securității," *Caietele CNSAS* 2, nr. 4 (Winter 2009): 69-120.

CHAPTER FOUR
ROMANIAN SPIRITUAL CULTURE:
FROM *HOMO RELIGIOSUS* TO THE PROMETHEAN MAN

By the early 1970s, party leaders and atheist experts concurred that anti-religious

measures, as they had been implemented during the previous decades, did not adequately address

the complexity of religion on the ground or the challenges religion posed to Romanian socialism.

Atheist work needed a radical overhaul, the conclusion was. But while the Central Committee

issued repeated directives and instructed cadres to be "tactful" when confronting believers, the

meaning of this new atheism, its relationship to orthodox forms of scientific education or to the

broader agenda of inculcating "culturedness" remained obscure.

Indeed, when the Executive Committee gathered in February 1970, party leaders raised

further questions about the substance of atheism and future forms of propaganda. Recent

directives continued to insist on the centrality of cultural and sports activities in atheist

education. Yet, the Minister of Youth Ion Iliescu doubted, for instance, that cultural uplift

provided the expected results. Recalling his experience with a policeman, Iliescu observed that

people entered the church "with piety" and kept these places "clean." To the house of culture,

however, they went "both with a cigarette in the mouth and with dirty shoes."[426]

Traditionally, Marxist-Leninist ideology linked respect of collective property to the cult

of work, morality, and socialist construction. In this sense, Iliescu suggested that mannered

conduct in cultic buildings revealed citizens' devotion to supernatural forces. Conversely, the

lack of similar behavior in houses of culture reflected citizens' tenuous emotional bond to

socialism and imposed the urgent need for citizenship education (*educaţie cetăţenească*). For the

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[426] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, "Stenograma şedinţei Comitetului
Executiv privind activitatea de educare ateist-ştiinţifică a maselor," f. 52-53.

leading ideologist Dumitru Popescu, "the Almighty," however, the key challenge was not how to stretch atheist education wider so as to better inculcate socialist norms of conduct. The issue was rather how to root atheism deeper in the philosophical questions of man's social existence and his relation to nature. Cultural and scientific enlightenment remained important directions in the activity against mysticism, Popescu argued. But ultimately they were insufficient.

> Lecturers come to the village, [and] talk about atoms. But by talking to people about these things they do not become atheists. Even if you talk to them about heavenly bodies launched [into space] they still do not turn into atheists for this [atheist conviction] is a question of philosophy and [a question] of man's effective relationship to nature. That's why I say that raising the cultural level is not decisive. Indeed, we are witnessing a certain recrudescence of mysticism among men of culture, writers and artists, who are informed about the evolution of modern culture. […]
>
> For this reason we need to preoccupy ourselves more with propagating *our* philosophy […]; we need to talk more about the fundamentals of this philosophy because this will help the person to orient himself towards [his fellow] man and nature.[427]

Both Iliescu and Popescu disputed a key assumption of the established cultural narrative of religion, namely that there was a direct correlation between "backwardness" and "faith," "culturedness" and atheism. At the same time, their comments pointed to two possible directions in atheist education. Work could focus on social manners, including the affective dispositions behind them, or on philosophical beliefs. But while Nicolae Ceauşescu promptly instructed that both directions should be incorporated in "the multilateral education of people," the fundamental questions of atheism remained unanswered. Indeed, despite the party's oft-repeated claim to ideological leadership, at the meeting of the Secretariat in January 1973 the party leader gave general instructions again: atheist education had to be conceived "as an activity for raising the

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[427] Ibid, f. 54-55. Emphasis added.

cultural and scientific level of the population."[428] In effect then, while the religious dynamic

during the thaw and the reverberations of post-Stalinist revisionism in Romanian Marxist theory

pushed atheism to the center of official preoccupations, top party echelons provided no further

direction for how either the meanings or methods of atheism needed to change with respect to the

Dej years.

The presence of a certain degree of circularity in Central Committee instructions meant

that the task of re-thinking foundational issues fell on the shoulders of a new category of

specialists: professional atheists and scholars of religion. What did this new atheism encompass

explicitly and how could it be enriched by fields of knowledge, such as sociology, folklore,

psychology, and religious studies overall? In essence, the fact that atheism had been exclusively

guided by definitions of its obverse, religion, presented a challenge. One could hardly revise one

without the other. Was religiosity then, as cruder Marxist-Leninist formulations had maintained,

still an aberration of human history to be promptly engineered away? Or did it perhaps reflect a

spiritual, in a certain sense even natural, response to the abiding problems of human existence?

Conversely, could Marxist-Leninist atheism remain centered in a scientific negation of

metaphysics or did it perhaps need to evolve into a kind of spirituality superior to religion? As

the Party was increasingly, though not unwillingly, forced to legitimize socialism in indigenous

national terms, experts likewise had to articulate how their ideas diverged not only from religious

worldviews but also from the atheism of their Soviet ideological rivals.

These issues required conclusive answers both in terms of theory and method. But for

most who joined this sphere of ideological work, the task was far from trivial. There were three

important obstacles along the path. Interwar sociology, ethnology, and psychology produced

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[428] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 1/1973, "Stenograma ședinței Secretariatului privind planul de măsuri pentru intensificarea activității de educare ateist-științifică," 15 January 1973, f. 16

some valuable works on popular religiosity based on state-of-the-art methods for the time:

surveys, participant observation, and systematic collection of literary and musical folklore.[429] In

1948, however, these fields were denounced as bourgeois pseudo-science, a turn of fortune that

precipitated a nearly thirty year hiatus in the scientific study of religion.[430] Second, to become

aware of recent trends in Marxist-Leninist atheism, experts also had to overcome the setbacks

that de-Sovietization in the 1960s imposed on their theoretical understandings and instruments in

propaganda work. For atheists in the 1970s, all of this meant that they needed to construct a field

for the scientific study of religion and atheism, train a new generation of specialists, revive

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[429] These works emerged primarily in the framework of the Cluj School of Experimental Psychology and the Bucharest School of Sociology. For the key works in psychology, see Lucian Bologa, *Psihologia vieţii religioase: contribuţii la studiul structurii şi evoluţiei vieţii religioase individuale* (Cluj: Editura Cartea Românească, 1930). Anatol Chircev, *Psihologia atitudinilor sociale: cu privire special la români* (Sibiu: Editura Institutului de Psihologie al Universităţii din Cluj, 1941), E. N. Mărgineanu, "Atitudinea faţă de biserică," *Revista de psihologie teoretică şi aplicată* 2, no. 1 (January-March 1939), 44-57. N. Rădulescu, "Raportul dintre superstiţii şi atitudini sociale," *Revista de psihologie teoretică şi aplicată* 4, no. 3 (July-September 1941), 302-310. These works were mentioned in Petre Datculescu, *Educaţia materialist-ştiinţifică a tineretului: cercetări psiho-sociale* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980), 65-72. For a short history of the school, see Traian Herseni, *Cultura psihologică românească* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1980), 244-248.

Hegemonic in the social sciences during the interwar period, the Bucharest School assigned special teams for the study of popular spirituality, religious/magical customs, as well as life-cycle and seasonal rituals. For a list of works, see Nicolea Dunăre, "Cultura populară în cadrul şcolii sociologice monografice," *Revista de etnografie şi folclor* 25, no. 2 (February 1980), 148. On methodology, see Constantin Eretescu, "De Gustibus non disputandum … Romanian Folk Studies in the Fifties" in *Studying Peoples in the Peoples Democracies II: Socialist Era Anthropology* eds. Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, and Slobodan Naumović (Berlin: LitVerlag, 2008), 41-46.

[430] The 1948 Law on Education removed these fields from university curricula and research institutions. Numerous experts in these fields were purged. The official denunciation of bourgeois social sciences came in the form of a brochure by Leonte Răutu entitled *Împotriva cosmopolitismului şi obiectivismului burghez în ştiinţele sociale* (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1949). For the fate of sociology, see Eretescu, op.cit.

The regime did not deal as harshly with folklore because experts in this field were useful for introducing Stalinist proletarian folk culture. Zoltán Rostás' interview with Mihai Pop, "the father of Romanian cultural anthropology" and former member of the Gusti School, in *Sala luminoasă: Primii monografişti ai Şcolii gustiene* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2003), 315-316. Nevertheless, the 1950s and early 1960s were a low point for research on religious folklore as well. While writing the introduction to the Bibliography of Romanian Folklore for 1951-1955, Ion Muşlea, the founder of the Folklore Archive in Cluj (1930) noted, "I took out the chapters "customs and beliefs" (one file for holidays and one file for juridical customs), "carols" (only one text), "mythology and religious folklore" (two to three files), "popular medicine and exorcism" (no file – the same as in the case of ethnobotanics, magic and superstitions). The absence of these chapters reflects the new trends in our folk studies." Ion Muşlea, *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române. Studii, memorii ale întemeierii, rapoarte de activitate, chestionare, 1930-1948* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundaţiei pentru Studii Europene, 2003), 248.

discussions on research methods, and conduct actual investigations to inform policy. As the

previous chapter demonstrated, the impulse for this was strong. The discovery of the "humanist"

Marx and the comparatively stronger embrace of post-Stalinist revisionism in some socialist

countries engendered new approaches to religion and secularization.[431] Leading Romanian

atheists were convinced therefore that they lagged behind their more "modern" Soviet and East

European colleagues.

Historical precedents and party priorities brought further pressure to "indigenize" atheism.

In Greater Romania, social scientific interest in religious mentalities was animated by the

political and cultural Orthodoxism of the era. As a result, most interwar social scientists ascribed

the Orthodox Church and the peasantry – which was, at this time, overwhelmingly portrayed as

mystical-religious – a significant role in the preservation of "Romanian spirituality" in the face

of a totalizing rational modernity.[432] Amidst the challenges of nation-building and the existential

malaise after the First World War, such intellectual positions also held widespread authority in

the public eye. As the RCP returned decidedly to the national idea in the mid-1960s, presenting

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[431] Patrick Hyder Patterson, "The Shepherd's Calling, the Engineers' Project, and the Scientists' Problem: Scientific Knowledge and the Care of Souls in Communist Eastern Europe" in *Religion, Science, and Communism in Cold War Europe* eds. Stephen A. Smith and Paul Betts (London: Palgrave, 2016), 55-76.

[432] Debates certainly existed but views about the modernizing mission of the Orthodox Church were prevalent particularly among the members of the Bucharest School of Sociology. Most notably, the "father" of the school Dimitrie Gusti attributed an important role to the church in the country's evolution. Influenced by Durkheim's views on religion as a social glue, Gusti regarded Orthodoxy as intrinsic to national community, order and development. While he recognized that religion's precise nature could change, he believed that it would ultimately fit with and perform important social functions in the modern cultural nation-state that his sociology would help bring forth. Hence came his view that churches and monasteries constituted moral institutions of popular enlightenment. This also explains why young theologians and local priests were incorporated into the monographic research teams. Such views of the Orthodox Church imply that Romanian social scientists did not necessarily embrace the teleology of secularization and modernity so widely shared elsewhere. Raluca Mușat, "Sociologists and the Transformation of the Peasantry in Romania, 1925-1940" (PhD Dissertation, University College London, 2011), 239-241. Antonio Momoc, "Sociology and Theology: Building the Romanian Cultural Nation," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 9, no. 4 (August 2013), 101-109. On debates see, George Enache, "Dezbateri privind rolul social, politic și național al BOR în prima jumătate a secolului XX," *Dosarele istoriei* 12, no. 1 (January 2007), 28-40. Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1995), esp. 87-132.

atheism in a Romanian garb became increasingly a priority. For atheists, at stake was not simply obtaining privileges in the institutional ecology of a party state's centralized structure – that is, political support, funds, new publishing outlets, and research facilities. Rather, what hung in the balance was gaining public recognition for the emancipatory potential of atheist spirituality from a public that was, historically speaking, profoundly alienated from Marxism, orthodox or otherwise. To recall the pessimistic remarks of Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, the founding father of Romanian Marxism, "not even the greatest optimist would dare entertain hopes that modern socialist ideas could take roots" in these plains.[433]

By investigating how new approaches to religiosity and atheism informed the articulation of a "Romanian spirituality" and drove ritual reform after 1976, this chapter examines the qualitative transformation of the socialist sacred during Ceaușescu's "golden epoch." To this end, I rely on party newspapers, scholarly journals, and restricted research reports. As I demonstrate, echoing revisionist ideas, experts' ideological discourse and their sociological research on popular faith re-shaped both the semantic content and methods of atheist work in instrumental ways. Indeed, empirical findings confirmed that besides its spiritual functions, popular religiosity persisted because it was embedded in "traditions" around life-cycle rituals and seasonal celebrations. As a result, the Central Committee embarked on the laicization of folk culture in an unprecedented manner, fashioning among others a centralized system of festivities under the umbrella of the biannual "Song for Romania" Festival.

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[433] P. Axelrod, 'Bericht über den Fortgang der sozialistischen Bewegung: Rumänien', *Jahrbuch für Sozialwissenschaft* 11 (1881), 320-6. Qtd. in Michael Shafir, "Political Stagnation and Marxist Critique: 1968 and Beyond in Comparative Eastern European Perspective," *British Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 4 (October 1984), 457.

"What Do We Put In Its Place?" The Meaning of Atheism

In the late 1960s, Ceauşescu's declarations concerning the open nature of Marxism

encouraged the intellectual diffusion of Hungarian and Czech revisionism in socialist Romania.

This ideological opening allowed the publication of Marx's early writings and the works of

alternative theorists like Georg Lukács. Young Marx's suggestion that religion fulfilled real

human needs, being a means for the pyschological mastery of existential problems, and the

spiritual dimension inherent in his emancipatory vision of society contradicted the vulgar

materialist approach that after the Second International characterized Marxism especially in the

Soviet Union. The strong philological relationship with Marx's Economic and Philosophical

Manuscripts (1844), in particular, also allowed theorists to return to problems of ethics,

consciousness, the spirit, transcendence, and the role of the individual in history – themes

previously expunged from orthodox Marxism.[434]

Thus, when in the early 1970s Romanian experts set out to discuss problems of atheism

in light of revisionist currents, fundamental questions about religion and humanism turned up on

the pages of various publications with ever greater frequency. These included "informational"

and "methodological" booklets restricted for the internal use of party schools and research

institutions.[435] Articles on the problems of atheism likewise appeared in "Socialist Era" (*Era

Socialistă*) which, as the party's premier theoretical journal, addressed a broader audience of

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[434] Shafir, 453. Vladimir Tismăneanu, "From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania" in *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Postcommunism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 144-145. Boris Majer, "Marxism, Transcendence, and Spirituality" in *Marxism and Spirituality: An International Anthology* ed. Benjamin Page (London: Bergin&Garvey, 1993), 125-137.

[435] E.g. in Bucharest, the Party Academy Ştefan Gheorghiu and Center for Research on Youth Problems both published such booklets entitled *Caiet documentar* and *Caiet metodic*, respectively.

ideologically savvy party members.[436] Meanwhile, journals in philosophy, psychology and

sociology of the Academy of Socio-Political Studies provided experts with a professional

medium for conversation and referenced scholarship on religion published abroad.[437] Finally,

atheists also addressed key questions in party newspapers – primarily, *The Spark* and the *Youth's*

Spark, in cultural-scientific magazines such as "Our Age" (*Contemporanul*), "The Cultural

Guide" (*Îndrumătorul Cultural*) and "Science and Technology" (*Știință și tehnică*), or in books

intended for the general public. Side-by-side, these publications reveal how, in the process of

revising their assumptions, atheists reached a new conclusion – namely, that the communist

future hinged less on the battle against religion than on the making of a socialist spiritual life,

distinctly atheist and Romanian. While they retained their materialist convictions, albeit in a

tempered version, these experts argued that atheist education could not focus only on the

cultivation of scientific rationality. In order to facilitate the spiritual development of the

individual and society as a whole, atheism needed to fulfill man's moral, emotional, and

aesthetic needs and thus allow for self-creation and the transcendence of existential limitations in

this world.

Before religiosity became a central party concern in the late 1960s, Romanian cadres had

operated with the understanding that atheism was predicated above all on the opposition between

science and religion. Proponents of this view inherited the crude positivist materialism of Georgi

Plekhanov, V.I. Lenin and Stalin. Formed in the scientific enlightenment programs of the Dej

era, these cadres dismissed religious belief as cognitive fallacy and tied it to mechanistic

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[436] The journal was named "Class Struggle" (*Lupta de clasă*) until 1972 when it changed its name to *Socialist Era*. For the purposes of clarity, in this chapter I only use the last name in the text and in the citations.

[437] Such theoretical discussions were featured primarily in the "Journal of Philosophy" (*Revista de filozofie*) and "Social Future" (*Viitorul Social*) as well as in "Forum: Social Sciences" (*Forum: Științe Sociale*), a journal of higher education.

processes of class exploitation at work in society. Conversely, they had exalted the natural

sciences for the ability to disprove religious cosmologies and regarded Marxism-Leninism, given

its stature as a social science, to be uniquely suited for revealing the twinned, cognitive and class,

roots of religion. It was historic man, the argument went, who invented gods in an effort to

explain his own powerlessness over the arcane forces of the universe and who, for centuries,

made afterlife an instrument of his this-worldly exploitation. According to this approach,

believers were victims of deception, both of their own and that of religious institutions. Atheists,

on the other hand, figured as relentless champions of science and reason who expelled the

darkness of faith from believers' minds to ensure class emancipation. When considering these

conventions, it is perhaps not surprising that in the early 1970s some atheists took the party's call

to improve their work as a ritualistic cue to reiterate previous ideological formulas. Indeed,

throughout the Ceaușescu era, textbook authors taught the military, in particular, that ending the

life-cycle of religion hinged ultimately on scientific enlightenment and class struggle.[438]

For the vast majority of professional atheists, however, the religious landscape of the

1960s and young Marx's insistence on the importance of individual subjectivity in history

proved that previous approaches were inherently problematic and downright untenable. Atheism

required insight from other fields of knowledge, primarily sociology, philosophy and

psychology, and an answer to the question of why religiosity continued to retain, even increase,

its appeal to individuals in the inhospitable conditions of socialism. Indeed, echoing earlier

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[438] Academia Militară, *Ateism științific* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1976), 6-8. Zoltán Farkas, *Prelegeri de ateism științific și critica doctrinelor religioase* (Cluj: Editura Universității Babeș-Bolyai, 1972), 105-106. Simion Asandei, *Ateism și religie* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1980). Simion Asandei, *Omul, știința și religia* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1985), 25-27. Petru Romănescu, ed. *Probleme de educație ateistă* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1971), 54-69. The view that atheism was based on the opposition between science and religion was also predominant in a particular sub-genre of atheist literature: science fiction novels. See, Alexandru Mironov and Mihai Bădescu, eds. *Nici un zeu în cosmos: culegere de texte de anticipație pe teme ateiste* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1985).

remarks in discussions with the Department of Agitation and Propaganda in January 1969, atheists and other experts added further arguments in the print media for why enlightenment workers continued to miss their intended audience and simultaneously provided suggestions for the future direction of atheist work.

In this broader atmosphere of criticism, certain publications went as far as to question the very need for atheism as a distinct sphere of socialist construction. Emblematically, for the front page of *The Youth's Spark*, the main organ of the Communist Youth Union, the prominent sociologist Henri H. Stahl[439] authored an incisive critique of scientific-atheist education: first, for arguing against religious ideology as if glaring distinctions between organized and popular religion did not exist; and second, for assuming that fighting "ideology with counter-ideology" or exposing "the absence of logic" in faith was sufficient to convert believers to atheism. "In our rural world," Stahl argued, believers "had no clue about the details of church dogma"; they embraced pre-Christian, pagan beliefs, which had degenerated into superstition, and practiced rituals "only in the magical sense." Furthermore, cadres were "turned a deaf ear" whenever they could not demonstrate at least as much familiarity with religious texts as believers had, even if this familiarity amounted to "ten quotations." In the face of such religious mentalities, Stahl poignantly concluded, "Enlightenment discussions were useless and inefficient." "You could not argue!" Instead of confronting the believer, atheists needed sociology to uncover the social roots of paganism and had to focus on eradicating "backwardness."[440] What Stahl proposed then was that the objectives of atheist work were *identical* to the broader tasks of societal modernization: urbanization, industrialization, general education and social welfare.

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[439] Henri H. Stahl (1901-1991) studied in Bucharest and became a key figure of the Bucharest School of Sociology, founded by Dimitrie Gusti.

[440] Henri H. Stahl, "Cursuri de ateism," *Scânteia Tineretului*, 26:6561 (23 June 1970), 1.

Such a radical position threatened to empty scientific atheist education completely of its

meaning. It harked namely of the Marxist-Leninist socio-economic narrative, according to which

modernizing processes would secure material well-being and therefore inevitably drive people to

abandon beliefs that were ultimately rooted in ignorance and penury.[441] Perhaps unsurprisingly

then, leading party cadres reacted immediately to defend atheism's autonomy and its very *raison*

d'être.[442] Within a fortnight Emil Iordãchescu, the secretary general of the Council for the

Dissemination of Science and Culture, answered Stahl on the pages of *Youth's Spark*. While

admitting that enlightenment work left much to be desired, Iordãchescu dismissed Stahl's

"skepticism" and argued that the objective of sociological research was not simply to promote

general modernization but to match atheist propaganda to the individual believer.[443] Petru

Berar,[444] the editor of the party's theoretical journal *Socialist Era*, recognized Stahl as an

established figure of the interwar Bucharest School of Sociology, and suspected his arguments to

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[441] According to Victoria Smolkin, because this socio-economic narrative, which incidentally Marxist-Leninist shared with western adherents of secularization theory, was inherently confident that modernization would lead to the demise of religion, its proponents saw confrontations with believers inherently futile. This was the reason for which many Soviet cadres were criticized for "passivity." Smolkin, 57.

[442] It is perhaps worth noting that Stahl's argument was perceived as particularly threatening because he spoke from several positions of authority: as a prominent interwar sociologist, as a committed (Austro-)Marxist, and as a key figure in the revival of sociology during the Ceaușescu era. During his research in the villages of interwar Romania, Stahl had acquired an extensive empirical understanding of popular religiosity, something that even prominent Romanian atheists lacked. Additionally, his attitude towards religion was not militantly Marxist-Leninist but it was informed by broadly Marxist understandings. Indeed, his article suggests that Stahl saw religion as a socially determined phenomena and seems to have assumed along with many sociologists of his time that religiosity would wither under the forces of modernization. Finally, with the revival of sociology, Stahl was also at the height of his institutional position, being the director of the Department of Sociology at the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences in the early 1970s. On Stahl as an Austro-Marxist, see Zoltán Rostás, *Monografia ca utopie: interviuri cu H.H. Stahl (1985-1987)* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2000), 14-15.

[443] Emil Iordãchescu, "Sociologie," *Scânteia Tineretului* 26:6570 (3 July 1970), 1 and 4.

[444] Petru Berar (1931-1983) graduated with a degree in journalism from the Department of Philosophy at the University in Bucharest in 1955, after which he served as the editor of "Class Struggle" (*Lupta de clasă*) until 1971. During the late 1960s and 1970s, he emerged as one of the key representatives of the new atheist experts. After 1977 until his death, he taught and directed research on the sociology of atheism and religion at the Party Academy Ștefan Gheorghiu, the premier party school in Bucharest. "Petru Berar: Necrolog," *Revista de filozofie* 31, no.1 (1984), 79.

be an attempt to separate research on religion from atheist objectives. As a result, Berar rejected

Stahl's position that a new discipline would render the institutional network and the vast efforts

in mass atheist education useless. Instead, he stressed that sociology was indeed necessary but on

Marxist-Leninist grounds; it had to study "the dynamics of atheism and religion" and had to

improve propaganda work.[445]

As atheists *publicly* circumscribed the Party line on religion and started to outline

"scientific atheism" as an academic discipline, many engaged theoretical and practical questions

in an increasingly systematic manner. For Florin Georgescu, a researcher in the Institute of

Philosophy at the Academy of Social and Political Sciences, anchoring atheism in the opposition

between science and religion circumscribed atheist methods in a double sense. Scientific

enlightenment, Georgescu argued, assigned equal importance to the "gnoseological" and social

roots of faith. But in classical Marxist terms, religion was primarily an answer to social

alienation not a product of human cognition – that is, man's thirst for explaining "nature, social

life, and his own inner world." Furthermore, Georgescu argued, over the course of history,

religion evolved into a "synthetic form" of false consciousness. As people's impotence over

dominating their social world grew in time, their beliefs increasingly overlapped with other

aspects of socio-cultural life such as politics, law, art, and morality. In view of faith's social

origins and historical evolution, Georgescu contended that, while "a consistent atheism could not

be built" without both the scientific rebuttal of religious worldviews and the Marxist study of

faith, exclusive reliance on these tools was insufficient. Atheism needed to move away from

negation and become a "synthetic" social and cultural alternative to religion - "progressive

politics, forward-looking art, materialist philosophy, democratic law, etc." This was not to say

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[445] Petru Berar, "Polemică în jurul educației științifice-ateiste," *Era Socialistă* (July 1970), 116-117.

that, instead of science, atheism was now the antipode of religion. Since religious and atheist consciousness mirrored historically distinct social developments, Georgescu concluded, they were not opposites but represented instead "two modes of human life." "Religion was the past life of humanity. Future was on the part of atheism."[446]

Akin to previous predictions about scientific thought and modernization, Georgescu's confidence in the advent of an atheist society was deeply embedded in much broader narratives about secularization, according to which modernity inadvertently rendered faith antiquated and irrelevant. Popular periodicals, scientific journals, and other forms of media reproduced such pronouncements with verve throughout the Ceaușescu era. And yet, while atheists never fundamentally questioned the fateful march towards a disenchanted world, their understanding of religion's ability to fulfill quintessential human needs became increasingly refined. This change of perspective, in turn, tempered their expectations about the straightforwardness of secularization.

In fact, as they revised atheist theory and their understanding of religion, Romanian atheists drew considerably on the broader philosophical revisions of Marxism that were underway in Eastern Europe since the mid-1950s. Historian Pavel Kolář observed that the events of 1956 shattered the idea of a quick and straightforward march towards the communist future was eroded.[447] As a result, history slowed down and became more indeterminate for Romanian atheists, much like to prominent Marxists and communist parties across Eastern Europe. In line with the broader post-Stalinist ideological shifts, Romanian Marxists also "discovered" that socialist societies generated their own contradictions and possibilities for alienation, reasons for

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[446] Florin Georgescu, "Însemnări despre ateism și religie," *Revista de filosofie* 4, no. 5 (May 1973).

[447] Pavel Kolář, "The Party as a New Utopia: Reshaping Communist Identity after Stalinism," *Social History* 37, no. 4 (November 2012), 404, 422-424.

which they increasingly came to argue that, contrary to previous pronouncements, religion was

not a form of estrangement particular to past societies. It had a place in socialism too.[448]

Religion was "in crisis," atheists agreed not only in socialism but also on a global

scale.[449] Science desacralized faith by disproving religious cosmologies and by making

religiosity itself an object of scientific inquiry; under the force of modernization, the hold of

churches over man's spirituality and socio-political life dwindled. Atheist cadres applauded

socialist states, in particular, for eradicating the bourgeois-capitalist order and thus conclusively

uprooting religion on the macro-social level. And yet, they warned that confident

pronouncements that religion would wane, if not spontaneously then easily, were rash.[450] As

philosopher Petru Lucaciu observed, the persistence of faith in the unpropitious environment of

socialism indicated that past societies were only "one principal source of mysticism."[451] Rather

than dying out, atheists likewise observed that religious organizations "modernized," having

transformed themselves into qualitatively new ideological adversaries of communism. All of this

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[448] On the theoretical discovery of the possibility of alienation in socialist societies see James H. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Postwar Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 183.

[449] Petru Berar, "Educația științifico-ateistă a maselor: cerință a umanismului socialist," *Era socialistă* 52, no. 5 (May 1972), 25. Haralamb Culea, *Religia sub semnul cercetării filozofice-sociologice: Dezbateri ideologice* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975). Petre Datculescu, "Dezvoltarea atitudinilor materialist-științifice ale tineretului," *Caiet Documentar* no. 5 (1976), Special Issue: Educația materialist-științifică, p. 4-31. Ana Bălașa, "Dimensiuni actuale ale procesului de secularizare," *Viitorul Social* 9, no. 1 (January 1980). N. I. Mariș, "Ateismul și dislocarea obiectivă a sacrului," *Contemporanul* no. 26 (27 June 1986), 4.

[450] Berar, "Educația științifico-ateistă," 25. Petru Lucaciu, "Libera cugetare și ateismul în spiritualitatea românească," *Revista de filozofie* 4, no. 10 (April 1972). Petru Berar, *Religia în lumea contemporană* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1983).

[451] Lucaciu, ibid.

demonstrated, according to Berar, that "religion was not always a survival" but had "profound

roots" in socialist modernity and that overcoming it would be a long endeavor.[452]

As part of this process of ideological revision, prominent atheists also pointed out that the

source of the remaining utopian confidence in secularization was that their colleagues failed to

appreciate the distinction between abstract understandings of religion and the actual religiosity of

believers on the ground. As the philosopher Ernő Gáll noted, Marxist-Leninist atheism

"neglected the humanist legacy of the classics: Marx and Engels never forgot that religious belief

was the mystified expression of man's real earthly needs and problems."[453] Haralamb Culea,[454] a

sociologist at the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences, formulated this problem the clearest.

Atheists expected watershed changes in believers' mentality because they understood religion

exclusively as an epiphenomenon of the macro-social sphere. Echoing the young Marx, Culea

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[452] Petru Berar, "Educația științifico-ateistă a maselor: cerință a umanismului socialist," *Era socialistă* 52, no. 5 (May 1972). For a similar view, see also Constantin Ioan, " Educația ateistă a maselor și cercetarea științifică," *Revista de filosofie* 5, no. 1 (January 1973).

[453] Ernő Gáll, *Idealul Prometeic* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1970), 271.

Ernő Gáll (1917-2000) was a prominent Transylvanian-Hungarian Marxist, who joined the illegal communist movement in the interwar period and who was a strong believer in Soviet communism during the 1950s, in part because as a Jew he was deported to Germany during the Second World War. In 1957-1984, he was the chief editor of the Hungarian *Korunk*, one of the most prestigious Marxist reviews in interwar Eastern Europe. After the 1950s, Gáll progressively became an opponent of Romanian communism and evolved into one of the key intellectual figures in late-socialist and post-socialist Hungarian minority-building while retaining his Marxist convictions throughout. Among others, it was under his protection and intellectual patronage that the Hungarian intelligentsia and university students in Cluj returned to interwar questions about "minority being" and that students from the Institute of Protestant Theology, most notably the circle of László Tőkés (the Calvinist minister commonly held to have helped trigger the revolution of 1989), joined "minority-building efforts." Author's interview with László Vetési, 8 April 2011. While I quote Ernő Gáll among the other Romanian atheist theoreticians here, I shall note that the intersection of atheism, humanism, and minority existence during 1965-1989 has its peculiar intellectual history in the Transylvanian-Hungarian case, warranting a separate investigation on its own.

[454] I was not able to identify Culea's biographical information or institutional affiliation. The philosopher Ion Ianoși mentions him as a colleague at the University of Bucharest and indicates that Haralmb(ie) Culea was the Romanianized version of the Jewish name Harry Culer. Ion Ianoși, *Internaționala mea: cronica unei vieți* (Iași: Polirom, 2012). Alexandru Tănase, "Socialismul și condiția umană," *Era Socialistă* 59, no. 22 (20 November 1979), 28-30.

observed, however, that faith was mediated by the entire, "concrete" human personality – not only his socially determined personality but also his subjective life. Religiosity persisted in socialist modernity precisely because its "last bastion" and deepest roots lay in a sphere "relatively autonomous" from the social – "man's internal life."[455] It was for this reason that Petru Berar clarified: religious belief and feeling were not "survivals" in the conventional social-historical sense. Instead, for certain sections of the population, faith constituted "a form of spiritual existence" with profound psychological roots in both the conscious and unconscious layers of the personality.[456] Indeed, in line with greater emphasis on the individual in revisionist Marxism, atheists increasingly began to contend was that what made religion resilient in socialist society had less to do with cosmological explanations, its synthetic embeddedness in socio-cultural life, or its social origins. The strength of "religiosity as religiosity" lay in functions that came to be described increasingly as *subjective* and *spiritual* – that is, religion's ability to give meaning to death and therefore human life through the promise of salvation.

The critique of previous conceptions of religion had two important implications: first, for how atheists reconsidered the trajectory of secularization and second, for how they reimagined atheism as an ideal. In a series of works intended for the local propagandist and the common citizen, Culea observed that religious life and modern society revealed a "bushy dialectics" (*dialectică stufoasă*): the involution of religion proceeded in stages along a "sinuous, jagged road" occasionally giving way to the recrudescence of faith.[457] The piece-meal character of this

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[455] Haralamb Culea, "Implicații ale analizei sociologice a fenomenului religiozității după o investigație concretă," *Viitorul Social* 2, no. 1 (5 January 1973).

[456] Petru Berar, "Educația științifico-ateistă a maselor: cerință a umanismului socialist," *Era socialistă* 52, no. 5 (May 1972). See also, Constantin Ioan, " Educația ateistă a maselor și cercetarea științifică," *Revista de filosofie* 5, no. 1 (January 1973).

[457] Haralamb Culea, *Religia sub semnul cercetării filozofice-sociologice: Dezbateri ideologice* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975), 7 and 60. See also, Berar, "Educația științifico-ateistă a maselor," 25.

process meant that distinctions had to be drawn between certain stages. The spread of

secularization, desacralization, irreligiosity, and even scientific rationalism in society constituted

only "preliminary phases," Culea argued, when the "demolition" of religion was the important

task at hand. But the move towards an atheist society raised the problem of "reconstruction." In

order to decisively uproot faith, atheists needed to offer a belief system that provided "integral"

existentially meaningful answers to the key questions of human life. Culea explained:

> The task was not only to answer the question "What do we put in its [religion's] place?"
> […] Instead of faith in heavenly immortality, there was the need for an optimistic belief
> in the earthly immortality of humanity - [a belief] infused with a profound, mature and
> lucid sense of reality, [and] located at the antipode of a naïve, fantastical, religious
> yearning for eternal life. Atheism was not the mortification, but the vivification of man;
> not a mere contemplation, but a praxis guided by the ideal of human happiness. Marxist
> humanism assured the spiritual premises of this model, and communism secured its
> material, social foundations. But these conditions are not sufficient. It is also imperative
> to erect on a mass scale a Promethean human type, who is capable of experiencing fully
> (in thought and feeling) the happiness of a life based on creative action in the service of
> humanity, the sole humanist answer to the problem of death. The only problem of life,
> certain philosophers argue, is death. Atheism, […] reformulates this as follows: the only
> dignified and real alternative to death, the only lucid answer possible is a demiurgic
> life.[458]

This was a spirituality of action that entailed commitment to individual self-creation and self-

transcendence next to involvement in collective efforts to ennoble human condition in a

particular time and place. The influence and continuity of one's actions in the life and work of

others is what meant immortality to humanist Marxists. By presenting this "earthly" model of

eternal life to cadres and the ordinary socialist citizen, Culea distinguished "integral atheism," as

he termed it, from lay mentality or the scientific-atheism of the Dej years.

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[458] Culea, *Religia sub semnul cercetării filozofice-sociologice*, 70 and Culea, "Disocieri necesare în tratarea esenţei
ateismului," in *În sprijinul educaţiei materialist-ştiinţifice a tineretului: Planuri tematice şi bibliografice*
(Bucharest, 1973), 23. For discussions of the "Promethean" man as an atheist ideal, see Lucia Codreanu-
Dumitrescu, *De la Sisif la Prometeu* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1977).

At the same time, he broached a perennial problem in atheist thought. Quoting the French idealist philosopher Léon Brunschvicg, he explained, "we often hear that on 'his death bed' even the most acrimonious atheist regresses into 'the first age of intelligence,' in other words returns to the infantile religious belief in survival" because of the "consolation" that the prospect of afterlife gave.[459] In effect then, Culea noted that atheism's success ultimately hinged on whether it could develop a spiritual-emotional environment in society to address the problems of human existence in a meaningful and "optimistic" way. In practical terms, this meant developing an atheist art and culture on a mass scale. Aesthetics provided individuals with feelings of ecstasy, crucial for making atheist belief fully livable because it reconstituted the wholeness of the personality by linking "the external world to the internal, affective, intellectual, and moral world of the human being."[460] A mass culture erected on these principles was truly humanist, Culea argued. It gave the masses the confidence that their needs and aspirations can be expressed culturally, that their troubles in everyday life do not constitute a divine punishment, and instilled hope regarding the expansion of democracy. Such a mass culture redirected their real feelings of impotence over the finitude of human existence towards a "utopian horizon," not unrealizable but realizable later on.[461]

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[459] Culea, *Religia sub semnul cercetării filozofice-sociologice*, 71-72.

[460] Ibid., 86.

[461] Haralamb Culea, "Religie, mentalitate laică și ateism," *Forum: Științe Sociale* 5 (1973), Special Issue: Probleme de ateism-științific, 161.

Romanian Spirituality

Arguments that held up atheism as an existential model indicate that Romanian ideologists in the 1970s made the transition from a scientific to a humanist atheism.[462] However, the question still remained: what made their ideas distinctly Romanian? Resolving this issue required atheists to reconstruct the genealogy of their thought in a twinned national and Marxist-Leninist frame. As the Party's growing monopoly over culture sharpened intellectual competition around national identity in the 1970s, arguments that gave atheism an indigenous root became prevalent.

On the surface, the task entailed obscuring the continued influence of Soviet atheism in keeping with the regime's claims to independence within the socialist camp. The issues raised by Romanian atheists in the 1970s overlapped extensively with the kinds of questions Eastern European and Soviet atheists began to ask in the post-Stalinist period, no doubt because of the broad impact of revisionist currents in socialist countries. Indeed, specialized bibliographies largely marked for the "internal use" of the party academy provided extensive lists on foreign scholarship and major thinkers in Marxist-Leninist atheism.[463] Soviet works, in particular, were rarely mentioned in Romanian publications much less translated. Indeed, the only exceptions to this rule throughout the late socialist period was Petru Berar's 1976 anthology on religious psychology, which included selections from the opus of Soviet scholars such as D. M.

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[462] Smolkin, 89-131.

[463] See *Problematica teoretică a fenomenului religios*, *Caiet Documentar* no. 2 (1979) issued by the Party Academy Ştefan Gheorghiu. Petru Berar, ed. *Fenomenul religios în istoria umanităţii: cercetare bibliografică* (Bucharest: Academia Ştefan Gheorghiu, 1981). Elena Belu, ed. *Cartea ateist-ştiinţifică: catalog tematic selectiv, 1963-1973* (Timişoara: Biblioteca municipală, 1973).

Ugrinovici, V.V. Pavliuk, V.N. Serdakov, and I.N. Iablokov, and a handful of translations from the works of key atheists, most notably E. M. Yaroslavski and I.P. Frantzev.[464]

To cast their endeavor into a national mold, some ideologists also set out to recover the ostensibly Romanian history of humanist, materialist and atheist thought, non-Marxist and Marxist alike. Efforts to construct such a genealogy from the "feudal age" onwards began already in the early 1960s and culminated in 1980s with the publication of anthologies such as *Revolutionary Thought on Religion in Romania* and the two-volume *Philosophy and Religion in the Evolution of Modern Romanian Culture*.[465] These narratives assigned early socialists, in particular the illegal communist party (1921-1944), pride of place in the battle against mysticism often claiming tendentiously that their work had a "strong echo" among the working class and that the interwar period therefore accelerated "the confrontation between materialism and idealism."[466]

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[464] Petru Berar, ed. *Psihologia religiei* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1976). See, Iuri Pavlovici Franţev, *La izvoarele religiei şi ale bunei cugetări* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1968). Emilian Mihailovici Iaroslavski, *Biblia pentru credincioşi şi necredincioşi* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1963) and *Cum se nasc, trăiesc şi mor zeii şi zeiţele* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1962).

[465] See, Institutul de Studii Istorice şi Social-Politice de pe lângă C.C. al P.C.R., *Gîndirea revoluţionară din România despre religie: Din tradiţiile concepţiei materialiste asupra lumii* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1983). Simion Ghiţă and Dumitru Ghişe, *Filozofie şi religie în evoluţia culturii române moderne: Studii şi antologie*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1984). Earlier works were intended primarily for specialists, see Octavian Cheţan, "Gândirea ateistă în paginile revistei *Contemporanul*," *Cercetări filozofice* 7, no. 5 (May 1960); Simion Ghiţă, Carol Göllner, and János Hajós, eds. *Antologia ateismului din România* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1962); Constantin I. Gulian, Simion Ghiţă, Constantin Joja et al. *Istoria gândirii sociale şi filozofice în România* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1964). Constantin I. Gulian, ed. *Antologia gândirii româneşti, sec. XV-XIX*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1967). Petru Vaida, *Dimitrie Cantemir şi umanismul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972). I. S. Firu and Corneliu Albu, *Umanistul Nicolahus Olahus* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1968). As the Ceauşescu regime's discourse became anti-Western and the obsession with Dacians in narratives of national origins intensified, historians shifted their attention away from Greco-Roman antiquity towards Geto-Dacian science and humanism. See Ion Horaţiu Crişan, "Valenţe ale spiritualităţii daco-getice," *Era Socialistă* 59, no. 24 (20 December 1979), 34-37. Radu Florian, "O controversă filozofică," *Era Socialistă* 59, no. 8 (20 aprilie 1979), 45-47.

[466] Ion Babici, "Din tradiţiile luptei P.C.R. împotriva misticismului şi obscurantismului religios," *Forum: Ştiinţe Sociale* 5, no. 3 (1973): 70-74.

On a more fundamental level, however, atheists also had to re-evaluate prominent

arguments from the interwar period which had identified religion as a cornerstone of Romanian

civilization and spirituality, whether past or future. As Herderian notions of the *Volksgeist* – "the

spirit of the people" understood as a set of mental, intellectual, moral, and cultural characteristics

– gained appeal in the Romanian national movement, the religiosity of the peasantry became a

matter of debate particularly in folklore, the dominant nation-building science of the nineteenth

century. Between the two world wars, however, the Romanian soul's penchant for the

metaphysical was no longer a question but a matter of consensus, especially among intellectuals

adhering to the cultural and political Orthodoxism hegemonic at the time.[467] As historian Sorin

Antohi argued the pre-socialist imaginary of "an autochtonous Geist," at peak in the interwar era,

involved a "vertical escape" from the stigmatizing realm of Euro-centric symbolic geographies in

that it placed national being "in a protective relationship with a divine or (in the secular versions

of this way of thinking) a transcendental principle."[468]

The essentializing links that interwar thinkers like Lucian Blaga, Mircea Eliade, and

Constantin Noica established between national essence and the peasant appealed to the Party,

which from the mid-1960s promoted the Romanian peasantry and its culture (folklore) as

"progressive" revolutionary forces in history. In part, this was the reason why such writers

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[467] George Enache, "Christianity, Modernity and Romanian Folklore," *The Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies* 4, no. 7 (July 2012): 109-116. For the various positions that, among others, the Gândirists, Trăirists, and the so-called 1927 Generation embraced within the broader current of Orthodoxism see Michael S. Jones, "Culture as Religion and Religion as Culture in the Philosophy of Lucian Blaga," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* no. 15 (Winter 2006): 66-87 and Roland Clark, *Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, 2009). Keith Hitchins, "*Gîndirea*: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise," in *Social Change in Romania, 1860-1940* ed. Kenneth Jowitt (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies), 140-173. Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, esp. 87-132.

[468] Sorin Antohi, "Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology," *Transit – Europäische Revue* no. 21/2002 (last accessed 24 March 2015 at http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/romania-and-the-balkans).

underwent partial rehabilitation and their works were published in the early Ceauşescu period.[469]

But from the perspective of the ideological establishment, these intellectuals had also denounced

materialism as alien to "the Romanian soul."[470] As a result, nationalizing atheism in the 1970s

spurred some to affirm the paganism, or better yet, the secularity of peasant mentality and

spiritual life. Cloaked under the citation of canonized Romanian writers, ideological

pronouncements to this effect took place, for instance, at the Party Plenum in November 1971

where member of the Permanent Presidium Ilie Verdeț debunked claims about linkage between

national being and religiosity.

> We have a people that does not know what mysticism is. In 1922 in the journal *Calende*, Tudor Arghezi said: the Romanian people are the least mystical people in the world. No other people has so many curses about crosses, gods, [and] gospels. Master Arghezi knew one thing or two – he had been a monk. Therefore, when I witness the propensity of my colleagues towards mysticism and the idea of death, I am amazed and do not understand why this happens when all of us belong to a people that has the same orientation towards life.[471]

To posit the essential laity of the nation in consonance with Marxist discourse,

intellectuals undertook more concerted efforts over the course of the decade, above all, around

those classics of folk literature that had provided the foundation for arguments about national

specificity and religiosity in the first place. Thus, commenting on the ballad of *Meşterul Manole*,

the literary historian Liviu Rusu dismissed interwar interpretations and identified instead peasant

"spiritual values" such as egalitarianism, love of humankind, and charity as part of a

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[469] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*. Florin Ţurcanu, *Mircea Eliade: Prizonierul istoriei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), 583-588.

[470] Al. Posescu, "Tendinte si pozitii ateiste si materialiste in filozofie in perioada interbelica," *Curente şi orientări în istoria filozofiei româneşti* eds. N. Gogoneață, Simion Ghiță, Radu Pantazi et al., (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1967): 169-224.

[471] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 3124, File 127/1971, "Stenograma şedinței plenare a C.C. al P.C.R. din 3-5.XI.1971," f. 39.

quintessentially lay ethical system.[472] In the epic poem *Miorița*, the philosopher Pavel Apostol discovered a "human ideal" for whom the problem of death strengthened "trust in the unlimited ability of man to overcome suffering and defeat."[473] This peasant morality and "profane attitude" towards meaning of life, the philosopher Alexandru Tănase concluded, was not sufficient to assure "the lay orientation" of Romanian society. Yet, the peasant spiritual perspective had an invaluable "ethical and aesthetic potential" for socialist humanism.[474] To return to the question of Romanian atheism then, what such arguments effectively proposed was that the Romanian peasant was the ancestor of a quintessentially national Promethean man.

By the late 1970s, ideological aspirations to articulate an existentially meaningful atheism and the discourse on national authenticity converged to instate "Romanian spirituality" into the political vocabulary of the Ceauşescu regime. A staple term of pre-socialist mystical and religious nationalism, in its recent iteration it constituted a new semantic constellation that subsumed the ideal of self-transcendent man alongside constitutive socialist values such as happiness, work, and collective spirit. As the regime's re-Stalinization advanced during the 1970s, "Romanian spirituality" increasingly diverged from the rhetoric of theorists that discussed atheist reform in the spirit of Marxist revisionism. Instead of their emphasis on "the inner dimension" of the human personality, the official usage reflected the submersion of the subject in the masses and the nation. In this national Stalinist discourse individuals only played the role of passive subjects in mechanistic processes of "national development."

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[472] Liviu Rusu, *Viziunea lumii în poezia noastră populară* (Bucharest: Editura Politică şi Literară, 1967).

[473] Pavel Apostol, *Trei meditaţii asupra culturii* (Bucharest: Dacia, 1970).

[474] Alexandru Tănase, "Tradiţii laice în cultura românească," in *Cultură şi religie* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1973).

Much like its predecessor, socialist Romanian spirituality also reflected a symbolic geography that inverted dominant imaginaries of center and periphery. As a term, it was inflected namely by the discourse of protochronism that gained currency especially after 1974. Protochronism, Katherine Verdery writes, was a "rescucitation of interwar indigenist arguments about national essence" that were formulated from a position of symbolic and politico-economic marginality. It stressed the sovereignty, creative independence, and temporal priority of Romanian cultural creations in relation to "imperial" western and Soviet forms while emphasizing indigeneous accumulation of value and Romanian contributions to the "world stock" of cultural capital and historical development. This position was best summed up in the words of the key protochronist Dan Zamfirescu. The Romanian people, he argued, were "thirsty for justice, universal in their capacity for sympathy and for centuries devoted to the supreme value of humanism." These characteristics made them ideally suited to work towards a "new universal mentality" and for the defeat of "demons that ruled […] the destiny of the human species in the twentieth century."[475] While mobilizing the ethical values of freedom, justice, and human solidarity, such notions of national humanism were naturally a far cry from the kind of revisionist Marxism that kept the existential questions of both societies and individuals in focus.

The last decade of the "golden epoch" saw many predictable articles that used "Romanian spirituality" by combining elements of atheist rhetoric, Stalinist tenets, and national ideology.[476] Certainly, numerous theorists who maintained an intellectual commitment to

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[475] Dan Zamfirescu, *Via Magna* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1979), 259.

[476] Constantin Răducu, "Permanențe ale spiritualității românești," *Contemporanul*, 27 March 1981. Vasile Vetișanu, "Spiritualitatea românească – O filozofie a originilor," *Contemporanul* no. 41 (7 October 1983), 4. Ion Pietraru, "Umanismul revoluționar și educația ateistă", *Contemporanul* no. 32 (5 August 1983), 4. Alexandru Tănase, "Formarea și înfăptuirea unei noi concepții revoluționare românești despre educația omului nou," *Cântarea României* 4, no. 12 (December 1983), 2-3.

Marxist humanism and were often but by no means exclusively of a Jewish background did not participate in such rhetoric. In Bucharest, one could recall the sociologist Haralamb Culea and Ion Ianoşi, a university professor in philosophy or in Cluj the Hungarian-Jewish Marxists Ernő Gáll, the editor of *Korunk*, or the philosophers Miklós Kallós and Endre Roth, both at the University of Babeş-Bolyai. Even Petru Berar, who had acquired a record for promoting the party line as the editor of *Socialist Era*, refrained from dressing atheism into a national garb. However, as the cultural authority of intellectuals became overwhelmingly dependent in the 1980s on one's willingness to cater to Romanian national discourse, these Marxist intellectuals became increasingly marginalized both in the party-state hierarchy and on the public scene.

Studying Religion and Atheism

Besides relying on experts for key ideological revisions, the regime's commitment to reform atheist work during the 1970s was also evident in that higher education and research on religion commenced at various institutions across the country.[477] For the future generation of intellectuals, courses on atheism opened at university departments of scientific socialism, philosophy and sociology. To train cadres while providing ideological control at the highest level, the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences set up its own laboratory of scientific-atheism.[478] Since the need to explain shortcomings and devise new methodologies for atheist education

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[477] The most informative and engaging controversies on atheism and religion probably took place at the numerous conferences, symposia, and closed meetings during which experts interpreted the ethnographic and sociological data gathered in the field or reflected on the psychological dimensions of belief. Such records were inaccessible to me in part because detailed research was not preserved in Central Committee archives. Furthermore, the files belonging to the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences, which often coordinated and evaluated such ventures, and the Department of Cults were inventoried and opened up for research only in 2014. In this part of the chapter I rely therefore on published research findings in chief socialist journals and more comprehensive reports marked for "internal use" that were preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy of Sciences.

[478] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 1/1973, f. 13. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, file 13/1986, f. 10v.

hinged on investigations of popular religiosity, research required systematic coordination. As a result, research groups were formed first under the aegis of the Council for Socialist Education and Culture under the supervision of the sociologist Haralamb Culea.[479] Alongside scholars, these groups comprised teachers, cultural activists and party cadres – categories that would remain key for conducting research projects throughout the era. Given the regime's heightened concern with youth religiosity, the Center for Research on Youth Problems also called on its own researchers in Bucharest as well as in its county centers in Cluj, Mureș, Maramureș and Neamț.[480] In 1976, however, the Central Committee assigned the task of coordinating research to the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences in the framework of "priority themes" set in the five-year plans.[481] Accordingly, the Academy mobilized scholars at the numerous university centers

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[479] Haralamb Culea, "Implicații ale analizei sociologice a fenomenului religiozității după o investigație concretă," *Viitorul Social* 2, no. 1 (5 January 1972). Initiated under the aegis of the Council of Socialist Culture and Education, the first large-scale sociological research surveyed 9,000 believers over the age of 18 selected randomly from sixteen counties and fifty-eight localities (44 rural and 14 urban) and a more intensive interdisciplinary investigation of two villages in the north-west Transylvanian county of Bihor. It mobilized approximately 600 teachers and cultural activists. See also, Haralamb Culea, "Religie, mentalitate laică, ateism," *Forum: Științe sociale* no. 5 (1973), 158-188.

[480] Fred Mahler, *Dezvoltarea conștiinței socialiste a tinerei generații* (Bucharest: Centrul de Cercetări pentru Problemele Tineretului, 1979), 11. Organized by the Center for Research on Youth Problems in the spring of 1976, this sociological and psycho-social research involved 1,200 pupils, students, and young workers in the capital and in the counties of Dolj, Galați and Mureș. Based on this model the deputy direction of the Neamț country branch of the Center Paul Șipurel coordinated research involving over 400 pupils and young students in 1979. See Paul Șipurel, "Aspecte ale formării convingerilor materialist-științifice în rândul tineretului școlar din județul Neamț," *Caiet metodic* no. 5 (1980), 78-109.

[481] The priority theme for 1976-1980 was *The Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors of Religious Phenomena and Problems of Atheist Education.* As part of this national research project coordinated by the Academy, the Center for Sociology at the University of Bucharest carried out investigations in fifteen counties. When counting only the use of questionnaires, over 12,000 subjects were investigated. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 3125, File 10/1976, "Programul de cercetare și de acțiuni principale în domeniul științelor sociale și politice, 1976-1980," f. 182. Ion Drăgan, Ion Mihail Popescu, and Ilie Bădescu, "Factori sociali ai fenomenului religios și cerințele educației materialist-științifice," *Era Socialistă* 11, no. 11 (5 June 1982), 8-10, 44.

for social studies in the capital and in cities such as Timişoara, Iaşi, Sibiu, and Cluj. It also made it a degree requirement for sociology students to participate in such research.[482]

To map the religious landscape in socialist Romania, the Council, the Center for Research on Youth Problems and the Academy posed several questions: 1) the size, distribution, and organizational structure of various confessions and the dynamics of religious life in the counties 2) the ways in which religiosity manifested itself through the practices, ideas, and affective experiences of different groups of people broken down by confession, age, gender, socio-economic categories, and geographic areas 3) how the social, emotional and psychological functions of religiosity allowed the resolution of personal difficulties and traumas 4) the role that the remaining contradictions of socialist life had in enabling the persistence of faith 5) the modernization of religious dogma and rituals, the evolution of popular religiosity in the twentieth century and the ways in which religious consciousness became intertwined with scientific knowledge or Marxist-Leninist ideology and lastly, 6) the practical problems with atheist work and proposals for improvement.

In exploring these numerous dimensions of religious life, early field researchers relied primarily on complex survey questionnaires that asked believers to describe their *religious practices* (participation in various religious rituals at church and religious practice at home, involvement in cultural-religious activities like choirs, orchestras or pilgrimages, financial support for churches), *beliefs* (about God, sin, divine punishment, and afterlife), and their

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[482] Ion Mihail Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali şi culturali ai fenomenului religios. Probleme ale educaţiei ateiste (Judeţul Tulcea): Raport prealabil de cercetare* (Bucharest: Centrul de Sociologie, Universitatea Bucureşti, 1978), 12. This research was carried out by students from the Faculty of History and Philosophy at the University of Bucharest between 15 June and 12 July 1978. It included 665 subjects between the ages of 15 and 34.

emotions (suffering, humiliation, salvation, and piety).[483] But the use of surveys and the

privileging of believers' perspectives were soon deemed to provide only a "limited"

understanding of religiosity.[484] As a result, by the late 1970s the Academy of Political and Social

Sciences provided a more sophisticated research model by integrating various methods: complex

survey questionnaires and unstructured interviews with believers; participant observation of

individual and group behavior in religious spaces; and comparative-historical analyses of local

religiosity based on church archives and historical publications. Rather than displacing, these

new methods complemented previous ways of evaluating the activity of religious organizations

and the atheist education programs of local organs – that is, the statistical and qualitative

methods characteristic of political and cultural narratives from the Dej era.[485]

The revival of the academic study of religion during the 1970s in Romania was part of

the party-state's growing reliance on social science expertise, sociology in particular. After

some timid steps under Dej in the early 1960s, the Ceaușescu regime rehabilitated, among others,

the name of Dimitrie Gusti's school in sociology, social psychology, and ethnology from the

interwar years. Beyond rooting the party in "progressive" national heritage, the Bucharest

School's international fame served an important role in the regime's efforts to reconstitute ties

with western social science.[486] In fact, most sociologists who rose to prominence in the late

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[483] One example is Culea, "Implicații ale analizei sociologice a fenomenului religiozității."

[484] For a critique of the over-reliance on surveys, see Fred Mahler et al., *Dezvoltarea conștiinței socialiste a tinerei generații* (Bucharest: CCPT, 1979), 12.

[485] See Chapter 3.

[486] Zoltán Rostás, "O istorie nefardată a reabilitării sociologiei românești," *Revista Transilvania* 25, no. 11-12 (November-December 2012), 89-90. Zoltán Rostás, "The Second Marginalisation of the Bucharest Sociological School," *Acum 2011*, vol. 5, nr. 1 (2011): 69-81, 75. Ștefan Bosomitu, "Notes and Remarks on the (Re-)Institutionalization of Sociology in Communist Romania in the 1960s," *History of Communism in Europe* no. 2 (2011): 169-196. Cotoi, "Sociology and Ethnology."

socialist period, including those studying religion, reaped the benefits of the party-state's

political interests, being encouraged to travel for conferences and extended research trips to the

United States, West Germany and France.[487] In addition to having access to Soviet and Eastern

European scholarship on religion, Romanian social scientists also became familiar with empirical

research and seminal theoretical works produced after 1953 behind the iron curtain.[488] All of this

suggests that, beyond the veneer of ideological discourse, the ideas and methods developed to

study religion and atheism in late socialist Romania were of broader transnational inspiration.

Indeed, as historian Călin Cotoi observed, in sociological field of the 1970s "the gambit of

scientificity was played between historical materialism, Western structural-functionalism,

empirical research, and fieldwork, but also interwar models of national science."[489]

Revisionist Marxism should be added to this list considering how it impacted both the

study of religion and atheism in empirical sociology. A former Gustian, Miron Constantinescu

contributed significantly to the re-establishment of sociology under Ceaușescu and to the relative

departure from Stalinist dogmatism in the field during the 1960s and 1970s. In his capacity as the

main patron of the discipline among the RCP elite, Constantinescu encouraged young

researchers to rethink the orthodox categories of dialectical-materialism. Crucially, his contacts

with the French-Romanian historian Georges Haupt and the Polish philosopher Adam Schaff led

him personally to reexamine both the antidogmatic message of Marxist anthropology and the

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[487] Shafir, "Political Stagnation and Marxist Critique," 446.

[488] For a critical overview of American, East European and Soviet scholarship after the Second World War, see e.g. Petre Datculescu, *Educația materialist-științifică a tineretului: cercetări psiho-sociale* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980). Sociologists were also familiar with the results of the global polls on religion carried out by the Gallup Institute (Princeton, New Jersey).

[489] Cătălin Cotoi, "Sociology and Ethnology in Romania: the Avatars of Social Sciences in Socialist Romania," in *Sociology and Ethnography in East-Central and South-East Europe: Scientific Self-Description in State Socialist Countries* ed. Ulf Brunnbauer, Claudia Kraft and Martin Schulze Wessel (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011).

metaphysical origins of Marxism.[490] As the president of the Academy of Socio-Political

Sciences, his influence was pivotal in turning Romanian sociologists towards investigations that

examined religion's spiritual functions in individual life and towards arguments regarding the

necessity of an atheist spiritual culture in socialism.

"The Perfume of Religion"

The unprecedented state support for the study of religiosity resulted from official views

that regarded sociology to be central to socialist modernization and that were in this sense open

to revisionist calls for ideology "to respect [social] reality."[491] The party-state's expectations

were that empirical analysis of "actually existing religiosity" could describe the gap between

Marxist-Leninist ideology and social reality and simultaneously provide policy prescriptions on

how to achieve convergence between the two. The tension between their deconstructive and

constructive roles put sociologists of religion in a precarious position. First, their ability to

identify incongruities between lived realities and the ideological vision of the party meant that

they possessed "critical knowledge" that was inherently problematic and that the Romanian party

state wished to keep away from the public especially as it returned towards Stalinism.[492] Second,

because of the ideological imperative to demonstrate progress towards the brighter communist

future, these experts also had to fulfill the role of "myth-makers" and resort to triumphalist

narratives about the success of atheist education and the decline of religiosity. Although both

kinds of rhetoric were present in research reports, unsurprisingly those preserved for "internal

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[490] Vladimir Tismăneanu, "From Arrogance to Irrelevance," 144-145.

[491] Georg Lukács, *Utam Marxhoz: Válogatott filozófiai tanulmányok* (Budapest: Magvető, 1971), 598.

[492] "Introduction" to *Sociology and Ethnography in East-Central and South-East Europe*, 1-28.

use" were less confident about successes than those published in various journals or theoretical and methodological books.

Ideological parameters certainly imposed limitations on scholarship. Yet, the amount of material sociologists and their research groups gathered around the country in the 1970s and 1980s produced the most extensive map of religiosity in Romania thus far. Despite being patchy in geographical coverage and inconsistent in terms of methodology, this map brought the Romanian atheist establishment unparalleled information on popular faith and atheist convictions. Some of the findings confirmed previous suspicions about the nature of religion in socialism but also prompted atheists to re-assess understandings of the typology of believers and the direction of atheist propaganda. Although hardly exhaustive, a brief account of key findings provides insight into how Romanian atheists envisioned a future for their work and how they shaped mass culture in late socialism as a result.

Quite unsurprisingly, most reports contained confident statements about the forward march of secularization. The religiosity of Romanians, when compared to the interwar period or to the state of popular faith in other countries, was insubstantial in terms of both spread and intensity.[493] Whether understood as a representative of "divine authority" over human life or a "community of faith," the church ceased to be "sole column of truth." What shattered the social and spiritual authority of religious organizations was the party's educational work and the triumph of the socialist economy, above all.[494]

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[493] Culea, "Implicații ale analizei sociologice," 207.

[494] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 44. Ion Mihail Popescu and Alexandru Bărbăcioru, eds. *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios și probleme ale educației ateiste a tineretului de pe teritoriul județului Caraș-Severin* (Bucharest: Centrul de Sociologie, Universitatea București, 1981), 58-59.

Yet, besides rhetorical bows to the "achievements of socialism," sociological findings

described a contradictory but dynamic religious landscape that sparked calls for reform in atheist

work in the first place. Despite the measures undertaken to curb church income, the fees for

religious ceremonies and believers' donations appeared to keep parish finances at a good level.

But the economic health of a local parish was sometimes hard to determine as priests kept

income off the record in order to pay for community events or restorations.[495] As a result, reports

made observations that were quite familiar to party leaders noting that, in many villages

regardless of creed, the local church surpassed the house of culture in both material situation and

audio-visual equipment.[496] Priests likewise made religious cultural life vibrant by simplifying

rituals or by organizing orchestra, choir, and theatric performances; excursions, soccer teams,

and "Who knows, wins" games - adaptations from socialist methods of science popularization.[497]

All of this prompted sociologists to conclude that, like elsewhere in the world, Romanian

churches modernized successfully, adapting their rituals and forms of organization to the

scientific-technological revolution of the present age.[498] The Church, thus, continued to preserve

considerable authority in the family and the micro-sphere of local communities, spaces that

socialist ideology held to be traditionally conservative. One manifestation of this, findings noted,

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[495] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Tulcea)*, 25. Popescu and Bădescu, 48. Several reports noted that the Law no. 177 adopted on August 4, 1948 regulating donations was too lax because it allowed donations based on the size of the parish and because it did not impose strict supervision of parish accounting. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 81 and 141-144.

[496] Popescu, 23, 28-29, 33.

[497] Popescu and Bădescu, 62-65. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 135-140, 154-155.

[498] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 153. Ion Drăgan, Ion Mihail Popescu, Ilie Bădescu, "Factori sociali ai fenomenului religios şi cerinţele educaţiei materialist-ştiinţifice," *Era Socialistă* 11, no. 11 (5 June 1982), 8-10, 44.

was that families dressed children in new clothing for religious holidays or various rituals but prevented them from wearing the same attire at school.[499]

Particularly worrisome were new religious phenomena. "Sects" were growing in a particularly rapid manner. In Caraș-Severin, for instance, between 1974 and 1980 neo-Protestant and banned religious organizations registered a 13 percent and an exorbitant 858 percent increase, respectively. The drift away from "traditional creeds," Orthodoxy in particular, resulted from believers' critical attitude towards how majority churches compromised with the state, the explanation went.[500] Occasionally, however, sociologists attributed such conversions to the "lack of talent and apostleship" among local Orthodox priests.[501] But findings also pointed to youth's growing beliefs in the occult – magic, astrology, and divination; the paranormal; or ufology. Atheist education, the conclusion was, had to address such faith in "supposedly transcendental forces."[502]

Since dogmatic assumptions about the power of scientific knowledge over religious belief had recently come into question, atheists naturally turned the bulk of their efforts towards assessing the actual impact of scientific-atheist education. Not surprisingly, their findings substantiated much of their suspicions about the ineffectiveness of enlightenment efforts. Indeed,

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[499] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 61-62, 66. Popescu and Bădescu, 26. Aurel Olaru and Gheorghe Dumitru, "Cercetarea sociologică a formelor și mijloacelor educației materialist-științifice," *Era Socialistă* 11, no. 4 (20 February 1982), 26-27

[500] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 132.

[501] Popescu and Bădescu, 51-52, 88.

[502] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 114. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 186. Datculescu, "Probleme actuale," 215-216. For calls that atheist education address these "para-religious" phenomena, see Petre Datculescu, "Subcultura ocultismului," *Contemporanul* 25 (1973). Octavian Chețan, "Tineretul și educația ateist-științifică," *Univers într-o carte vol. 5* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976), 115, 122-123. Laurențiu Pop and Bogdan Stugren, "Educația materialist-științifică și formarea personalității," *Era Socialistă* 5, no. 7 (July 1976), 35-37.

most reports noted the ease with which the lower clergy reconciled the contradiction between religion and atheism or religion and science. From findings in Caraş-Severin county, Ion Mihail Popescu[503] repeated a conversation he had with a Baptist minister who, when asked whether he had proof of the existence of God, answered: "The Bible and atheism were the incontestable proofs." "The Bible teaches us who God is and how He reveals Himself to people. If God did not exist, atheism would not have any sense. But atheism exists."[504]

Such arguments were made not only at the philosophical level but also in terms of moral values and the separate, yet ultimately complementary jurisdictions of communism and religion in human life. At a roundtable with local religious and party functionaries in the city of Reşiţa, for instance, a Roman-Catholic priest found "no essential distinction" between Christian and the party's ideology about life and the world "as long as both pursued the same goals: eternal peace, universal brotherhood, love of humanity, happiness, [and] justice."[505] In fact, he argued that a kind of labor distribution existed between the communist state and the Church, since comrades were in charge of administering this-worldly "horizontal" affairs while priests were responsible for "vertical" questions. As the two types of jurisdiction made the sign of "the Christian cross,"

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[503] Ion Mihail Popescu (1935-1997) was a sociologist, who was a student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest beginning 1954. In 1958, he became a victim of the wave of repression following the Hungarian Revolution. According to Vladimir Tismăneanu, he was expelled and imprisoned until 1964 because he quoted the major works of the interwar philosopher Lucian Blaga and Tudor Vianu in a philosophy seminar. In the early 1970s, he completed his PhD thesis on Blaga's philosophy of culture with Blaga's son in law, Tudor Bugnariu. During the 1970s and 1980s, Popescu worked in the Center for Sociology at the University of Bucharest, where he coordinated national research on religion and atheism as part of the 1976-1980 plan assigned to the Academy of Social and Political Sciences. Vladimir Tismăneanu, "O viperă stalinistă: cine a fost Tamara Dobrin?" 27 March 2011, at https://tismaneanu.wordpress.com/2011/03/25/o-vipera-stalinista-sau-cine-a-fost-tamara-dobrin/, last accessed 22 January 2015. Ştefan Costea, *Sociologi români: mica enciclopedie* (Bucharest: Editura Expert, 2001), 365.

[504] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios*, 150. Report marked for "internal use." This research was conducted by students from the Faculty of History and Philosophy at the University of Bucharest between 15 June-12 July 1980 in 4 cities and 12 villages on 650 subjects.

[505] Ibid, 82-83.

the Catholic priest poignantly concluded: "the harmony between Church and State was both possible and necessary."[506]

Sociological research on the cosmologies of young people conducted by the Center for Research of Youth Problems across the country further revealed that an overwhelming number of youth saw no opposition between scientific and religious explanations of existence.[507] As the head of the research project Petre Datculescu noted, young believers were fascinated with the enigmas of the universe – "the perfection of the macro-cosmos and of celestial mechanics; […] the bio-psychological complexity of the human being; [and] the genesis and evolution of living matter." But this knowledge rarely solidified into convictions about the irreconcilability of science and religion. Instead, believers declared that there was a contradiction at the heart of scientific explanations; in their mind, evidence of the perfection and complexity of the universe was incompatible with claims about its "hazardous" origin. To illustrate the effects of this cognitive process, Datculescu relayed the answer of an anonymous interviewee. Amazed that "the stars rotated on perfectly established orbits without colliding," one young believer was convinced that "this could not be the work of chance." To demonstrate how science strengthened belief instead of weakening it, Datculescu cited another believer who declared: "We believe in eternal life. Science also demonstrates that old age is an illness. I read *The Magazine*, I read

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[506] Ibid, 122 and 127. A young woman who was a Baptist and a member of the Communist Youth Union formulated the same argument in a conversation with a party member. Ibid, 91-92.

[507] The survey was carried out in 11 counties (Timiş, Arad, Bihor, Cluj, Mureş, Braşov, Sibiu, Maramureş, Suceava, Dolj, and Prahova) and the capital on 300 young people between the ages of 14-30. According to the report, for 57 percent of subjects there was "no opposition between science and religion, science had a relative character"; for 19 percent "a contradiction existed sometimes, but religion was true"; 21 percent "could not formulate an opinion" and only 3 percent declared that science and religion were mutually exclusive. Petre Datculescu, *Educaţia materialist-ştiinţifică a tineretului: cercetări psiho-sociale* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980), 83-83, and 126. In addition to the research project coordinated by the Center for the Study of Youth Problems in spring 1976 (see f. 46.), in this book Datculescu also relied on information gathered in 1977-1979, which covered 10 counties and involved 3,888 subjects (youth workers, pupils, and students between the ages of 14-30). See p. 159.

Humanity at Crossroads, [and] *The Beacon of Future*. All convinced me to believe." In an interesting twist then, even when familiar with scientific literature and receptive to the achievements of scientific explorations, young people managed to sublimate science in their religious worldviews. For Datculescu, such transformations in the youth's mind pointed to "the deliberate undermining of reason" or, the outright "impermeability" of believers' logic, part of which he attributed to the work of the lower clergy.[508] As he noted, in explicit terms, these findings raised the stakes for adapting scientific education to such "levels of understanding." But implicitly, Datculescu also raised the question whether convinced believers were the best targets for atheist work.

A lot more worrisome, from the point of view of atheists, was when local party members reconciled communism with religion by professing their belief or by participating in various religious ceremonies. In Caraș-Severin county, for instance, "63 percent of party members did not doubt the existence of God" and 40 percent believed that religion would persist in the future.[509] Conventional explanations attributed this phenomena to cadres' old age, low levels of education, or inability to distinguish between state policy towards the church and the party's ideological position towards religion.[510] But such explanations proved insufficient if party members went as far as to join "sects." When asked about the motivations behind their conversion, some cadres simply affirmed their belief that "the needs of the mind and spirit" or values such as "humanism, rectitude, [and] virtue" could be cultivated in "religious and party

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[508] Petre Datculescu, "Argumentul științific – argumentul cel mai convingător," *Scânteia* 51:12355 (May 14, 1982), 2.

[509] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, footnotes on p. 215 and 218.

[510] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 43. Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 113. Carried out in 15 June-10 July 1979, this investigation included 480 subjects between the ages of 16 and 37. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios*, 64, 68, 164, and 213-215.

organizations alike."[511] But Ion Mihail Popescu also cited cases of party members who justified

their conversion not with belief but with pragmatic arguments that amounted to "Pascal's

wager." As one party member reasoned,

> In youth I have served the Romanian Communist Party with unbounded devotion. Now, at old age, when I have realized that I do not quite know whether God exists or not, I thought it wouldn't be bad to follow the teachings of the Church. If He doesn't exist, I did not lose anything because I have done good deeds when I didn't believe in Him and I was a party activist. If He exists, I have all the chances for eternal life because, sincerely repenting my bad deeds from before, I have reformed myself. I have served you until now, let me serve the Baptists from now on![512]

Such findings suggested that Romanian socialist atheism failed even devoted communists on two

planes: in party education, as cadres continued to dissolve the ethical-philosophical boundaries

between socialist and Christian humanism and in a much more substantial way, when

communists faced old age and the prospect of death. Considering the Promethean aspirations of

the Romanian atheist enterprise, Popescu's formulation of the problem in terms of "Pascal's

wager" was profoundly suggestive: if, as Blaise Pascal argued, scientific reason could not prove

or disprove the existence of God, then when the long-term party cadre rejected socialist

teachings in favor of a religious institution's, his act seemed rational and did not need to be based

on religious belief. Along with Popescu's, such research findings reminded atheists that the key

problem in their endeavor was a spiritual-emotional one that did not necessarily have solutions.

Even if atheism provided answers for how to fulfill the human desire for meaningful life in this

world, the *possibility* of afterlife and divine judgment was still cause for existential worry even in

the case of the unbeliever.

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[511] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 90-91. For a similar argument see also, 115-116.

[512] Ibid, 89-90.

Although this particular problem was not explored any further, sociological

investigations did devote a lot of attention to the emotional elements of religious experience

arguing that the strength of modern faith was rooted in its affective and spiritual dimensions.[513]

Researchers most often emphasized the "therapeutic," "compensatory" function of religious

organizations - their capability to respond to "real" needs in an individual's life by providing

moral guidance and emotional relief from suffering during times of challenge.[514] The thrust of

such arguments was naturally that atheist education and party-state institutions overall failed to

do the same. As Petre Datculescu suggested, this omission carried particularly high stakes in the

case of the young and the ill who converted to sectarian belief because of traumatic life-events

such as lengthy diseases, suffering from family or romantic relationships, from the death of a

loved one, and even in the case of personal failures at school or in the work environment.[515]

Indeed, confirming atheist fears, interview subjects inadvertently reported positive feelings after

conversion, which ranged from the sense of being guided and protected to "spiritual

contentment," "moral stability," and even "indescribable happiness."[516] Importantly, Datculescu

noted, religion's compensatory function appeared to work as young atheists exhibited

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[513] Drăgan, Popescu, Bădescu, "Factori sociali ai fenomenului religios," 44.

[514] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 47. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 116-117, 173, 180-185. Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Tulcea)*, 41, 44-45. Petre Datculescu, "Dezvoltarea atitudinilor materialist-ştiinţifice ale tineretului," *Caiet documentar* no. 5 (1976), Special Issue: Educaţia materialist-ştiinţifică, 11. This is an article on the national research carried out by the Center for the Study of Youth Problems mentioned in f. 46. Aurel Olaru and Gheorghe Dumitru, "Cercetarea sociologică a formelor şi mijloacelor educaţiei materialist-ştiinţifice," *Era Socialistă* 11, no. 4 (20 February 1982) , 26-27. This research was conducted in Bacău county in July 1981 and involved 253 young subjects, among which workers, pupils, students, and intellectuals. Paul Şipurel, "Aspecte ale formării convingerilor materialist-ştiinţifice."

[515] Datculescu, *Educaţia materialist-ştiinţifică*, 114. Petre Datculescu, "Probleme actuale ale formării tineretului în spiritul concepţiei materialist-dialectice," *Dezvoltarea conştiinţei socialiste a tinerei generaţii* (Bucharest, 1979).

[516] Ibid, 115, 125.

"significantly" higher levels of tension, anxiety, and depression than believers.[517] Atheist experts also posited that it was in order to take advantage of moments of anguish in people's personal lives that many sectarians turned to the helping professions, becoming medics, pharmacists, lawyers, and hospital directors.[518] Atheists likewise observed that all churches embraced the socially marginal elements – the Romas, unmarried women, alcoholics, the unemployed, poor workers and peasants - providing economic aid, moral guidance, and community support to those who benefited less from the blessings of socialism.[519] Far from being expressions of mere cynicism of religious charity and social welfare, these observations showed the abiding concern that religious organizations were turning the weaknesses of socialism to their own advantage. By extension, they also underscored that atheism needed to fulfill the "pastoral" functions in an individual's everyday life - functions that traditionally belonged to religion.

The urgency for this grew even more as atheists revealed that religion persisted not only because materialism left a spiritual void behind but also because socialist modernization helped "reproduce" religiosity. Indeed, several reports emphasized that, as collectivization and industrialization unleashed unprecedented labor mobility across the country, the religious landscape of Romania became more intermixed. In Tulcea county, for instance, a great portion of neo-Protestant believers migrated from villages to the cities or the neighboring counties of Brăila, Constanța, and Galați.[520] Similarly, Hungarian Calvinists from the Banat and

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[517] Ibid, 136-137.

[518] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 41-42, and 82.

[519] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios*, 111-112, 121, and 150. Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 24. Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 29, 64, 81 and 88-89.

[520] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 18.

Transylvania moved to urban areas in southern counties such as Gorj.[521] The problem was that, as clergymen often followed believers, new communities sprang up in confessionally more homogeneous areas. As a result of such demographic intermixing, sociological findings reported that religious life became better organized and more animated in cities, the very places that the party-state generally regarded to be embodiments of socialism.[522]

More importantly, however, atheists pointed out that socialism provided a hospitable terrain for religion to thrive. Modernization disrupted individual life at a deeper psychological level, the argument went, by creating new circumstances and "negative" emotions on which faith could thrive. Based on their research in Bacău county, Aurel Olaru and Gheorghe Dumitru observed that the exodus of youth from rural to urban areas "often generated psychological conditions" favorable for religiosity because integration into the work environment and new living conditions in the city could be a harsh process.[523] Calling on the nation-wide findings of the Center for the Study of Youth Problems, Petre Datculescu added that adapting to the rhythm of labor specific to a modern industrial society and the rapid socio-economic development of the country often caused tension in the professional and daily life of youth. This was aggravated further by the bureaucratism and unseemliness (*neprincipialitate*) of communist institutions that

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[521] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 68-69, 87. 470 families in the main cities of the county.

[522] Given their missionary bent, neo-Protestant sects were particularly held responsible for the overall intensification of religious life. In fact, because the Orthodox Church was losing believers primarily to neo-Protestantism, in 1975 Patriarch Justinian instructed all bishops to set up special programs of religious education for the youth in localities where neo-Protestant organizations were present. See Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 51. But report noted, in general, that interfaith rivalry in religiously intermixed areas made local priests more active and believers more committed. Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Tulcea)*, 10-11. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 13.

[523] Aurel Olaru and Gheorghe Dumitru, "Cercetarea sociologică," 26.

did not provide adequate solutions for the "real life and work problems" of the young.[524] For this

reason, while summarizing the Academy's research in 1970-1980, Ion Mihail Popescu and others

noted that socialist transformation generated "secondary" processes favorable for the "neo-

sacralization" of society. Belief had *social* roots in the new society and would take a "long time"

to wither away, the explanation went. After all, although to a much lesser extent than other

civilizations, socialism also created its own social contradictions, as a result of which alienation

remained a fact of everyday life.[525] Paraphrasing Hegel, Ion Mihail Popescu summed this up as

follows: "although the world is not upside down in the conditions of socialism, its heart still

senses the perfume of religion."[526]

As findings confirmed that the battle against religion was going to be a protracted affair,

atheists increasingly concluded that the new task in their endeavor was to spiritually and

emotionally strengthen atheism, humanizing socialist life in this manner. Given the

compensatory functions of "religious myths, representations, and practices," Datculescu argued,

"atheist education based exclusively on the demystification of myths and the widening of

scientific culture risk[ed] to remain without echo." Instead, atheist work required above all the

cultivation of "inter-human relations characterized by solidarity, mutual respect, friendliness, and

mutual aid in difficult situations or moments in personal life."[527] Indeed, Aurel Olaru and

Gheorghe Dimitriu added, to address suffering and negative emotions, atheist policy needed to

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[524] Datculescu, "Dezvoltarea atitudinilor materialist-științifice," 13-14.

[525] Popescu, Bădescu, Drăgan, "Factori economico-sociali, " In fact, Popescu and Bădescu initially quoted research findings in Czechoslovakia to interpret their findings: Erika Kadlecova, "Czechoslovakia," *Western Religion: A Country by Country Sociological Inquiry* ed. Hans Mol, Margaret Hetherton, and Margaret Henty (Paris: Mounton, 1972), 119-134. Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 108-109.

[526] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 191.

[527] Datculescu, "Probleme actuale." Culea, "Religie, mentalitate laică, ateism."

perfect "psiho-social relations" among citizens in all areas of socialist life, whether in public institutions, mass organizations, the work environment, schools, places of leisure and living, or the more private domain of the family.[528] In practical terms, this task of humanizing social relations was far from straightforward. First, sociological research motivated atheists to revise the categories by which a person was classified as a believer or, conversely, an atheist. Second, experts also had to return to old questions about the place of atheism in mass culture, especially in connection to socialist rituals. Inextricably linked, these two issues set the course for the ways in which the Ceaușescu regime would envision socialist spiritual culture in its late years.

Rituals and the Believer

The objective of providing alternatives to religious holidays and life-cycle rites had re-emerged in 1966, during the first atheist campaign of the Ceaușescu regime. As before, red-letter days like May 1 and December 30 (Republic Day) were meant to displace canonical holidays, Easter and Christmas in particular, and became increasingly elaborate as Ceaușescu's personality cult intensified. But in the late 1960s, as Agitprop reports noted believers' attraction to the pompous style of religious ceremonies, the Central Committee also directed the party's rank-and-file to popularize rites of passage for coming of age, communist weddings, etc. Local organs were likewise instructed to organize various cultural and sports events with the purpose of drawing believers away from Sunday mass, local religious festivals or pilgrimages.

Importantly however, beyond instructions to intensify such efforts on the local level, the ritual question had a relatively low priority for atheist experts and top party organs alike. Indeed, when the Agitprop convened a forum with atheist propagandists in January 1969, one of the

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[528] Olaru and Dumitru, "Cercetare sociologică," 27.

participants complained that the church still retained monopoly over "the crucial moments in a person's life" in part because communist weddings and funerals, implemented before in a rather "improvised" and sporadic manner, were not promoted at the central level. These issues required attention in the future, the conclusion was.[529] During Executive Committee discussions on atheist education in February 1970, the head of the Secretariat Virgil Trofin similarly suggested that discouraging religious customs imposed the need to organize lay folk celebrations.[530] Notwithstanding such propositions, however, the question of rituals at this time remained quite ancillary in Central Committee discussions. It was what sociological findings revealed about the relationship between religious belief and the practice of rites that propelled the problem of socialist ritual reform to the center of party concerns.

Throughout the 1970s, the material gathered on the ground indicated that levels of observance for both life-cycle and seasonal rituals were "strikingly high" even in areas that researchers classified as being of "low religious intensity." Thus, according the statistics provided by the Center of Sociology at the University of Bucharest, in Gorj county 66.8 percent of subjects turned to the church for baptisms, weddings, and funerals.[531] In Tulcea, a county of "medium religious intensity," most citizens practiced life-cycle rituals "which they considered either to be traditions that needed to be preserved or necessary religious acts." This was true of all believers, regardless of nationality, levels of education, political loyalty or social category.[532] Figures for Caraș-Severin were even greater; in this county 84.7 percent of the rural population

[529] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Agitație și Propagandă, inv. 2898, File 5/1969, f. 34.

[530] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 2574, File 16/1970, f. 51.

[531] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 103.

[532] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 43.

and 46.8 percent of urban dwellers admitted going to church more or less regularly.[533] But the fact that ritual practice was twice as high in rural areas than in cities was consistent with other nationwide findings.[534] Restricted to "internal use," these reports also agreed that observance of canonical holidays ran consistently high. Therefore, researchers devoted considerable care to assess the popularity of various ceremonies, parish feast days, and pilgrimages in comparison to the socialist festivals that local organs set up for such occasions. Popescu and Bărbăcioru noted for instance that, gathering from five counties, tens of thousands of believers celebrated the Dormition of the Mother of God at the six-hundred year old monastery of Tismana. Meanwhile, taking place 3 kilometers away, the socialist feast experienced difficult moments, "being a common fair where itinerant merchants praised their wares loudly." "In such conditions," Popescu and Bădescu observed, "the Festival of Gorj song, dance and folk costumes, held in the same location as the feast […] was applauded by only a small number of citizens."[535] To sum up, sociological findings revealed, first and foremost, that religious rituals continued to pose a challenge to the atheist project – a challenge that its various enlightenment measures, "cultured leisure" programs, red-letter days and rites of passage had not yet adequately addressed.

What compounded the question of ritual reform was that experts identified profound contradictions between ritual observance and, conversely, people's actual beliefs and motivations to practice. As it turned out, popular religiosity emerged as a profoundly contradictory landscape that defied previous, primarily political typologies of the believer. For instance, how did the

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[533] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios*, 166 and 168. It should be noted that the percentage for the urban population is misleadingly low here because 46.8 percent of subjects did not actually respond to the question. Researchers attributed this low rate of response to the urban population's unwillingness to admit participation in religious ceremonies.

[534] Culea, "Implicații ale analizei sociologice."

[535] Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Gorj)*, 49-50.

unbeliever who joined the Baptists on the grounds of something like Pascal's wager fit definitions of the sectarian as the paradigmatic religious fanatic? And was empirical sociology even capable of scientifically grasping "what in social reality corresponded to concepts like "atheist" and "intensely religious"? For, as Petru Berar pointed out, "atheist" was a philosophical category that empirical sociology only borrowed.[536] In effect then, the argument went, developing a typology of belief that reflected the entire spectrum from religious belief to atheism in a manner corresponding to social reality constituted a decisive factor for the future success of atheist endeavors.

In the early 1970s, national data gathered under the aegis of the Council for Socialist Education and Culture and the Center for the Study of Youth Problems already presented inconsistencies between ritual practice and the affirmation of religious belief. Haralamb Culea remarked, for instance, that whereas 76.9 percent of subjects practiced rituals, only 5.7 percent actually held religious convictions. As a result, he concluded the observance of rites was not an accurate indicator of faith; sociologists needed to see whether people associated such ceremonies with religious cosmologies and emotions.[537] Petre Datculescu added to Culea's observations, pointing out that only a small group of the youth "who participated in ceremonies, [and] religious holidays [actually] manifested beliefs of a religious nature; and some of those who almost never went to church did accept the possibility of a divine power."[538] At the end of the decade, researchers from the Center for Sociology at the University of Bucharest similarly observed that numerous young people participated at the consecration of churches not because of any religious

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[536] Petru Berar, "Semnificațiile secularizării. Teze și antiteze," *Revista de filosofie* 20, no. 11 (November 1973), 1305.

[537] Culea, "Religie, mentalitate laică, ateism," 167.

[538] Datculescu, "Dezvoltarea atitudinilor," 22.

motivation but out of curiosity to see the bishop's apparel, hear a sermon, and see how a ritual was conducted.[539] On other occasions, high levels of religious practice were attributed to the social pressure of the family or the local community.[540] Even when believers denounced their own priests, which sociologists immediately interpreted to be a sign of a "decline in the social prestige of the church," they warned that popular anticlericalism should not be mistaken for the loss of belief.[541]

By the late 1970s such contradictions between ritual practice, attitude towards religious organizations, and belief warranted separate sections in the Center's reports and demonstrated that discussions about the typology of belief had undergone a radical shift.[542] Experts agreed that confessional belonging was a poor indicator of religiosity, an approach that had been characteristic of the political narrative of religion. Instead, they embraced new criteria to assess degrees of conviction on a spectrum that went from active religiosity to atheism, the middle being occupied by a type that researchers varyingly described as "transitional," "indifferent," or "non-atheist." A crucial trait of persons who belonged to this category was the disconnect between belief and religious practice: while they may have identified themselves as believers and practiced rituals, their commitment to religious worldviews, church dogmas was either not strong or not present at all.[543]

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[539] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 50. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte ale fenomenului religios (judeţul Caraş-Severin)*, 65.

[540] Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 51. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 62.

[541] Ibid, 59 and 72. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 64.

[542] See Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Tulcea)*, 72-75. Popescu and Bădescu, *Factori economico-sociali (judeţul Gorj)*, 107-109. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 187-191.

[543] Ibid, 187. Popescu and Bădescu, 110.

Since findings indicated this demographic category to be the mainstream, far outweighing either the convinced believer or the atheist, sociologists presented two main arguments to explain why "indifferent" believers were attracted to religious rituals. According to researchers at the Center for Sociology in Bucharest, one of the answers was that as religious organizations modernized, they increasingly focused the center of their activity on the existential and spiritual domains of human life. Instead of insisting on supernatural cosmologies foreign to the essence of the believer and the essence of nature, religious organizations acquired new functions in response to modern socio-economic and spiritual developments, the argument went. Churches transformed themselves into "meeting places" for youth or into places of "retreat and meditation, without purely religious meaning" for citizens facing difficult situations, economic setbacks, or moral troubles.[544] More importantly, however, the Center's national findings revealed that "tradition" was the most widespread motive for religious behavior. Citizens declared that religious ceremonies were necessary in human life. But such views, Popescu warned were not rooted in faith. "Indifferent believers" reinterpreted religious rituals as part of "cultural tradition" and customs.[545]

The discovery of "indifference" as an important category on the Romanian religious landscape was particularly troubling. On the surface, the socialist press was quick to claim the declining numbers of convinced believers was proof of atheist efforts and that secularization understood as the weakening of religious worldviews and the institutional power of churches was well underway. But in reports presented to the restricted audience of party leaders, researchers were far less confident. The Center of Sociology warned top organs that the population

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[544] Ibid, 44-45. Popescu and Bărbăcioru, 59, 71 and 153.

[545] Ibid, 181-183.

exhibiting such "religiosity of transition" was just as likely to embrace religious conviction as a lay mentality.[546] The process of secularization was not linear, these sociologists reminded, and as a result, atheist work had to focus primarily on this category of believer.

If spiritual needs and the attachment to cultural traditions explained the religious behavior of the indifferent followers, atheists had to provide attractive lay ceremonies. For Datculescu, these needed to be infused with socialist humanism and had to be "well-grounded from a historical, ethnographic, folkloric, psychological and sociological perspective."[547] Popescu also imagined "sumptuous lay ceremonies" rooted in folklore. In practical terms, he added, this meant that atheists had "to uncover the lay pip of certain religious celebrations." After all, "Christian holidays (Easter, Annunciation, Whitsunday, Dormition of the Mother of God, Christmas, and Epiphany, as well as religious celebrations tied to church patrons) constituted either lay celebrations tied to memorable events in people's real lives - primarily harvest cycles – or pagan festivities," which church fathers and theologians subsequently endowed with new meanings. Atheists were to imitate such efforts, Popescu suggested, while naturally emphasizing the lay sense of such holidays.

One implication of such arguments was that in order to return to the "original meanings" of such celebrations, research in folklore was imperative and had to encompass not only festival culture but customs around life-cycle rituals. [548] But in order for atheist propaganda to be successful with "the indifferent" believer in particular, the new folkloristic ceremonies also

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[546] Ibid, 187.

[547] Petre Datculescu, "Probleme actuale ale formării tineretului," 216.

[548] Ibid, 205-207. For other arguments on the necessity to promote "lay traditions" see Petre Bartoş and Mihai Merfea, " O cercetare sociologică privind educația materialist-științifică," *Era Socialistă* 11, no. 17 (5 September 1982), 43. Ion Drăgan, Ion Mihail Popescu, Ilie Bădescu, "Factori sociali ai fenomenului religios," 44.

necessitated "sumptuous" spaces. Every locality needed houses of baptism and marriage, funeral homes and lay cemeteries that not only rivaled but surpassed those of local churches. The urgency for a suitable material culture was particularly high in the case of funereal rites. According to the findings of the Center for Sociology at the University of Bucharest, most cemeteries in the country had not been nationalized and, as a result, were church-owned. The dearth of funeral homes similarly meant that catafalques could be set up only in family homes or at the local parish. Without a proper sepulchral culture that provided rituals and a material environment, Popescu implied, a socialist country could not give meaning to individual life because it could not "love its dead and respect their memory." Ultimately then, "it was like a sanctuary without an altar, or a heroic army without a flag."[549]

Over the course of the 1970s, sociological research around the country, most of which was carried out under the aegis of the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences, provided unprecedented information about popular religiosity in Romania. Sociologists also presented party leaders with a new category, "indifference," from which to understand the individual believer and described diffuse forms of religiosity that encompassed, alongside the widespread practice of major creeds, quasi-scientific religious cosmologies and some fascination with "para-religiosity." This religious map bore ambivalent results for propaganda work.

In line with the revisionist insistence on the role of expert knowledge in reforming socialism, the reports of the Center of Sociology in Bucharest repeated requests for institutional privileges for atheist propaganda and research. The Center proposed first, the creation of the National Commission for the Problems of Religion and Atheism and, second, the establishment of a National Institute for Research on Religion and Atheism at the Academy. Among others,

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[549] Ibid, *Aspecte*, 208.

sociologists also suggested a national census of the religious population, the first since 1930.[550]

But top party organs refrained from improving the status or resources of atheist experts. Indeed,

the only new institution established at the turn of the decade was a small interdisciplinary

laboratory at the Party Academy "Ștefan Gheorghiu." Alongside the Center for the Study of

Youth Problems and a similar laboratory at the Academy of Socio-Political Sciences, such

institutions provided the framework for continued research during the 1980s.[551] Nationwide

investigations became uncommon, however, as the Party increasingly marginalized sociology

and psychology as policy-relevant fields for socialist construction. Ceaușescu's rapid

industrialization program gradually led the way for the full-scale economic collapse of the late

1980s, state funding increasingly unavailable and investigative research on "social reality"

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[550] Ibid, 193-194 and 200. Popescu, *Factori economico-sociali (județul Tulcea)*, 76-77, 81.

[551] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, File 33/1987, "Raport cu privire la modul în care acționează organele și organizațiile de partid," f. 43-47.

politically undesirable.[552] But the limiting and eventual supplanting of semi-official expertise by the late 1970s reflected, most of all, the regime's unapologetic return to the Stalinist ethos and its subsequent intolerance of any centers of scientific knowledge that could detract from the party's power and its leading role in society. Certainly, in a space where the party-state's willingness to dispense political and financial support to those who mobilized national ideas, sociologists' embrace of a professional standpoint and technical language did not help the cause of atheist expertise.

The re-Stalinization drive built on sociological findings, nevertheless, ushering in two significant changes in atheist propaganda. On the one hand, the religiosity among the avant-garde of socialist construction – party members and the youth – motivated leaders to instate an ideological hard line against believers as well. Thus, the Agitprop's report for the Central

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[552] Burakowski, 212-325. Otilia Hedeșan, "Doing Fieldwork in Communist Romania," in *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II: Socialist Era Anthropology* eds. Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev, and Slobodan Naumović (Berlin: LitVerlag, 2008), 35. Regional academic centers of research, journals and all university courses in sociology ceased to exist by 1977. Rostás, "The Second Marginalization of the Bucharest School of Sociology," *Acum* no. 6 (2011): 69-81. Cotoi, "Sociology and Ethnology in Romania." Regarding the small-scale investigations of the Center for the Study of Youth Problems see, *Tineret, Cercetare, Acțiune Socială* 3 (Bucharest: CCPT, 1986) and *Tineret, Cercetare, Acțiune Socială* 2 (Bucharest: CCPT, 1988). The Academy's Interdisciplinary Laboratory in Scientific-Materialist Education also conducted research in 1986-1987 in four counties. Ana Bălașa, "Particularități ale procesului de secularizare în societatea socialistă," *Viitorul Social* 80, no. 3 (May-June 1987): 221-240.

The demise of psychology in 1982 became linked with the so-called "Transcendentalist Meditation Affair." In 1979 the Institute of Pedagogical and Psychological Research was directed by the National Council for Science and Technology, an institution under the control of Elena Ceaușescu, to investigate transcendental meditation technique associated with guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008). In a report to the Council, Vlad Gheorghiu and Ion Ciofu, the Institute's two experts in relaxation therapy, suggestology and psychophysiology, dismissed the mystico-religious aspects of the technique. However, they proposed an experiment with human subjects in order to determine if the meditation technique could be harnessed to treat the "New Man" and thus aid socialist construction. The technique became part of an experiment at the Institute only in 1981, at the insistence of the Ministry of Education. But in 1982, the regime used it as an attack against the Bucharest intelligentsia as well as academic psychology and pedagogy. As a result, the Institute was shut down. 300 psychologists, sociologists, pedagogues and writers were purged and sent to "production" under the accusation that they participated in the occult rituals of a religious sect. There are many unsubstantiated theories regarding the party's volte face but the argument that, like sociology, psychology had become an inconvenient field seem reasonable. It is unclear from the published sources what Elena Ceaușescu's involvement was. Adrian Neculau, "Afacerea 'Meditația Transcendentală' – o răfuială cu psihologia și psihologii," in *Viața cotidiană în comunism* ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 264-288. Doina Jela, Cătălin Strat, and Mihai Albu, eds. *Afacerea "Meditația Transcendentală"* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004).

Committee's July conference in 1979 noted that in the previous four years (1974-1978) the party

excluded over 2,200 citizens for converting to "sects."[553] At the meeting, Ceauşescu himself

demanded the removal of pedagogues from the education system unless they had clear

"materialist convictions" while he also declared that the religiosity of party members and of the

communist youth was unacceptable.[554]

More importantly, however, the question of ritual reform – that is, the task of providing

socialist folkloristic ceremonies for holidays and milestone moments in individual life – moved

to the center of the regime's concerns. Informed by empirical investigations over the course of

the decade, the Agitprop's report for the Central Committee's conference in July 1979 posited

the problem of rituals as an urgent matter:

> Sociological investigations from several counties revealed that most citizens resorted to the services of the church, to cult practices during the holidays of Christmas, Easter, parish celebrations, and weddings, baptisms, funerals, and in some cases for the consecration of the home. The reason for this is that, even though winter celebrations for New Year, [and] spring celebrations for May 1 have been successfully organized, there was little done to promote a lay frame [to mark] the other moments in man's life. Weddings are most often officiated in the customary rooms of people's councils, without a full ceremony to substitute the religious one; there is no name-giving ceremony for the newly born to replace religious baptism, and when it comes to funerals, it has not become a custom everywhere for the organs of the party and state to organize lay ceremonies for the deceased party members.

Agitprop rebuked the Council for Culture and Socialist Education, in particular, for not

exploiting the "lay significance" of local folk traditions and ensuring the "spread and installation

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[553] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Cancelarie, inv. 3129, File 54/1979, "Stenograma şedinţei Secretariatului C.C. al P.C.R. din 4 iulie 1979," f. 8-11.

[554] Ibid, "Raport privind înfăptuirea măsurilor de educaţie ateist-ştiinţifică," f. 37.

of new traditions."[555] But in light of the fact that in previous measures on atheist education

(1970-1973) party directives on rituals barely extended over a sentence, Agitprop's increased

criticism was hardly routine but constituted rather a cue for change.

Happiness Romanian Style: Socialist Spirituality and the "Song for Romania" Festival

The Ceaușescu regime's most significant attempt for socialist ritual reform was the

biannual Song for Romania National Festival (*Cântarea României*) created in 1976 in the

immediate aftermath of the first Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture.[556] The

Festival was a mass competition "of work and free creation" that, among others, staged local

folklore traditions. Its purpose was to produce a revolutionary national culture and thus provide a

realm for the becoming of a "multi-laterally developed" socialist man, distinctly Romanian and

atheist. The festival's national-Stalinist dimension was unmistakable in its militantly

mobilizational character and in its celebration of collective – socialist and national – identity

under a demiurgic leader over and above the private, subjective domain of the individual citizen.

Programmatic articles hailed Ceaușescu and the Party for developing the "past spirituality" of the

masses in line with the "needs of the future."[557] The Bucharest cultural magazine *The Week*

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[555] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secția Cancelarie, inv. 3129, File 54/1979, "Raport privind înfăptuirea măsurilor de educație materialist-științifică," f. 36v-37.

[556] The program of measures that was adopted after the congress stipulated under point 8 the creation of the Festival. "Programul de măsuri," *Scânteia* (19 September 1976). The Congress not only proposed the establishment of such a festival but also insisted on the need for lay ceremonies. Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-204-1, Situation Report: Romania, 29 January 1980, "Party Journal Calls for Intensified Anti-Religious Struggle," 12.

[557] Suzana Gâdea, "Partidul - promotor al spiritualității românești," *Contemporanul*, 8 Mai 1981, 2. Gheorghe Tănase (Prim-secretar al Comitetului județean Ialomița al P.C.R.), "Spicele de aur simbol al unei noi spiritualității," *Contemporanul* no. 5 (26 January 1984), 10-11. Alexandru Tănase, "Doctrina Ceaușescu – gândire și acțiune revoluționară în domeniul educației permanente," *Cântarea României* 4, no. 1 (January 1983), 9. Vasile Morar, "Conexiunea dintre educația ateist-științifică și educația estetică," *Cântarea României* 4, no. 7 (July 1983), 37. Vasile Zvanciuc, "Aspecte laice ale concepției despre lume în cultura tradițională," *Cântarea României* 4, no. 8 (August 1983), 43.

(*Săptămâna*) praised the festival as "an impressive revolutionary agora," "a previously unknown form of connecting the entire Romanian people to an enormous spiritual network."[558]Song for Romania had an "all-embracing scale and lasting social impact," anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu writes. "Folk culture (and its experts) never recovered after this vast social experiment." This partly explains why, after twenty-five years, there are no real testimonies and barely any research on this phenomenon, "apart for some private nostalgia and a rather common public revulsion."[559]

Without a doubt, the concept for the festival was not entirely new. Showcasing peasant culture with the instrumental aid of folklorists or ethnologists has been an established strategy for imagining national identity in the modern era. Song for Romania had its own immediate historical antecedents in the festivities organized under King Carol II during the interwar years. On the other side of the political spectrum, the underground communist movement had also appropriated carols as key form of propaganda, being in dire pursuit of legitimacy.[560] From the mid-1930s, Soviet mass culture provided its own twist on pre-existing morphologies, above all by infusing traditions with the (new) Stalinist symbols of socialist modernity - work, creativity,

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[558] *Săptămâna* no. 313, 3 December 1976, quoted in Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-199-5, Situation Report: Romania, 11 February 1977, "Hymn to Romania: Festival of Working Singers or Singing Workers," 2.

[559] Vintilă Mihăilescu, "A New Festival for the New Man: The Socialist Market of Folk Experts during the Singing Romania National Festival," in *Studying Peoples in the Peoples Democracies II,* 56-80. What stands in the way of such research is also that the records of the Council for Socialist Education and Culture, the main institution administering the festival, are not inventoried. Access is also restricted as ministerial approval is required to access these archives which are currently in the custody of the Ministry for Culture and National Patrimony.

[560] Sabina Pauta-Pieslak, "A Political History of Romanian Colinde" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2007), 102-131.

progress, happiness and the image of a classless society. The laicization of folk culture as a form of atheist work had its origins in this very framework.[561]

In Romania, national ideology brought strict proletcultism to heels by the 1960s.[562] As peasant culture returned to the official stage through the rapidly expanding amateur artistic movement, folklore festivals and rituals on the Stalinist model burgeoned across the country.[563] Mihai Pop, the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology, noted in 1976 the revival of previous communal feasts. The Sheep Owners Gathering (*Sâmbra Oilor*) and the Ploughman (*Tânjaua*) in Maramureș county had apparently become "insignia of local pride." There were examples for new communal gatherings as well. Thus, at the Round-Dance Festival in Prislop, amateur folk dancers and singers met from three counties in order to celebrate the foundation of

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[561] Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 171-173. On folkloric feasts and atheist education see Luerhmann, *Secularism Soviet Style*, 43-49.

[562] According to some historians the Soviet festival culture implanted in Eastern Europe was the late Stalinist version, which had peasant folklore as a core element. Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991* trans. Cynthia Klohr (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 183-188. Odeta Mikštaitė, "Der 'Singende Stalinismus'": Zur Entstehung der Massenkultur auf dem Gebiet der Folklore in der Litauischen SSR," *Forschungen zur Baltischen Geschichte* 8 (2013): 192-213. This does not seem to be entirely true in the Romanian case because proletarian folklore was predominant in the official culture of the 1950s – understandably, given the traditional connection between class war, collectivization, and the proletkult. Rostás, *Sala luminoasă*, 315-316. Eretescu, "De Gustibus non Disputandum," 46-51.

[563] Cristian Vasile, *Viața intelectuală și artistică în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), 62-85.

the first Moldovan state in line with the state's cult of national genealogy.[564] But perhaps one of

the earliest and most visible examples of the official commitment to weld a national culture from

a mixture of local folklore and Stalinist values was the appropriation of a fertility ritual

traditionally tied to Christmas and New Year celebrations. Thus, "The Little Plow" (*Pluguşorul*)

became by the mid-1970s a widely publicized event at the Central Committee on December 31

every year.[565] Therefore, Song for Romania's novelty was not so much morphological. Rather,

its distinctiveness in the late socialist camp lay, first, in its scale and, second, in its intersection

with party-state endeavors to reform atheist propaganda.[566]

Indeed, if by the late 1970s breakneck urbanization was a priority for achieving socio-

economic modernization and homogeneity, then the festival was to fulfill the same goals in

culture.[567] As a vast educational, political-ideological and cultural-artistic event, Song for

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[564] Mihai Pop, *Obiceiuri tradiţionale româneşti* (Bucharest: Institutul de Cercetări Etnologice şi Dialectologice, 1976), 199. The revival of folklore animated the organization of festivals as well as of dance and song groups among the minorities. Like most of their Romanian counterparts, these still last and are iconic to this day. Zoltán Csaba Novák, András Tóth-Bartos, Lóránt Kálmán Kelemen, *Újjászületés, Háromszékből Kovászna: Kovászna megye megszervezése és intézményesülése, 1968-197*2 (Miercurea Ciuc: Pro Print, 2013), 162-169. Author's interview with András Gergely, 19 November 2010.

Mihai Pop (1907-2000) was an ethnologist and former collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti. Over the course of the Ceauşescu years, he undertook several research trips to the United States and was a visiting professor at major universities in Chicago, Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Los Angeles, Marburg, and Paris. Having familiarized himself with cultural anthropology, he introduced the field to Romania after 1965 while he directed the Institute of Folklore, later re-named as the Institute of Dialectology and Folklore, in 1965-1974. See Rostás, *Sala luminoasã*, 327-328. Iordan Datcu, *Contribuţii la etnologia românească* (Bucharest: Editura Universal Dalsi, 2004), 179-187.

[565] The suggestion to adapt this winter ritual as part of atheist propaganda came from Gheorghe Rădulescu at the Executive Committee meeting on 10 February 1970, ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., inv. 2574, File 16/1970, f. 51.

[566] The fragmentation of socialist mass culture during the increased regime differentiation in the post-Stalin period meant that mass folklore festivals appeared in other socialist countries as well, e.g. the Flying Peacock (*Röpülj Páva*) in Hungary or the festivals that coalesced in the Baltic Singing Revolution. Unlike Song for Romania, however, these festivals detached from official culture and turned into powerful youth movements that fueled regime change. László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001). Guntis Smidchens, *The Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Portland: University of Washington Press, 2014).

[567] Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity*, 34-35.

Romania included competitions in fields ranging from literature, the performing and plastic arts to music. Its mass phase took place in October-March followed by the county (March-April), the inter-county (April-May), and the republican phase and a final mass gala (end of May) in Bucharest. In particular, with the exception of toddlers and those incapacitated by old age or illness, the festival mobilized all citizens regardless of class background or occupation during its mass stage. Since it had to embrace the entire country, no county, city, village, educational and cultural institution, factory or cooperative was to be without an artistic ensemble or creation circle. Thus, as the Ceaușescu era came to a close, official statistics for the festivals final editions claimed that participation numbers, when counting *only* the performers and creators of various ages and professions, grew from the initial two million to five million – more than one-fifth of the country's population at the time. These figures excluded audience numbers as well as the army of cultural managers, who planed and coordinated the festival under the strict supervision of Agitprop and the Council for Culture and Socialist Education.[568]

Closely tied to the industrialization efforts of the Ceaușescu regime, urbanization and the systematization of villages promised modern, improved living standards to the average Romanian citizen. Yet, these processes also subjected the population to massive dislocation in the 1970s and 1980s. The population density of most cities increased radically while urban social and economic structures underwent rapid change. The herding of the peasantry from their familiar settings into state-designed uniform spaces of living brought about a break with traditional forms of life, setting off changes in the everyday mentality and existence of most

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[568] Mihăilescu warns that these numbers were often inflated as local party cells also competed against each other, "A New Festival for the New Man," 64. See also, Dragoș Petrescu*,* "400.000 de spirite creatoare: Cântarea României sau stalinismul național în festival," in *Miturile comunismului românesc* vol. II ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Nemira, 1997), 115-126. ANDJHR, Fond CC of the CCES, inv. 663, File 70/1980-1985. *Festivalul Național al Educației și Culturii Socialiste "Cântarea Romăniei, 1979-1981": Regulament-cadru* (Bucharest, 1979), f. 85-87.

Romanians.[569] At the same time, the rapid nature of the transformations meant that folkways predominanted the cultural life of most city-dwellers. Sociologists who studied popular religiosity in the 1970s had already signaled that the vast existential dislocation and the contradictions that urban environments entailed had to be addressed. Quoting Robert Bellah, anthropologist Gail Kligman echoed their argument, noting that there was a spiritual need for continuity, stability of orientation, and identity among the population if potential revolt was to be averted.[570] This therapeutic and political imperative to embed radical change in familiar forms explains, broadly speaking, why the state turned to folklore more systematically than a decade earlier. Indeed, by the 1980s, the staging of peasant culture had come to outweigh any other field of artistic creation and interpretation in the Song for Romania Festival, its value being continuously buttressed by references to national authenticity, historicity, and specifity specific to national discourse of the era.

Besides its scale, the distinctiveness of Song for Romania lay in the centrality of atheist education – a morphological innovation on the model of the Stalinist mass festival. The propagation of scientific and technological knowledge constituted one aspect of this atheist dimension. For the 1979-1981 mass phase, for instance, the local council of the Democratic Front for Socialist Unity reported extensively on measures undertaken to banish backward religious mentalities in Harghita county: the work of scientific-enlightenment brigades; the series of exhibits, film screenings, and public debates; special courses at people's universities; or seasonal events such as "The Month of Scientific-Documentary Films," "The Week of Science

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[569] Zoltán Novák, "Területrendezés a hetvenes-nyolcvanas évek Romániájában," in *Urbs: Magyar várostörténeti évkönyv* 5 (Budapest, 2010), 153.

[570] Gail Kligman, *Căluș,* 149.

and Culture," "Who Knows, Wins" competitions, etc. Similar actions were undertaken nationwide.[571]

As the laicization of folk culture became a party-state objective in atheist work, the need for appropriate repertoires of seasonal and life-cycle rituals placed pressure on academic institutions and ethnological research. In the late 1960s, amidst growing emphasis on national specificity and unity in official rhetoric, the regime had commissioned the Institute of Ethnology and Dialectology in Bucharest to develop the first Ethnographic Atlas of Romania, the idea of which went back to the 1920s – the prominent folklorist Ovidiu Densuşianu, in particular.[572] As a result, by the early 1970s the Institute drew up extensive questionnaires on all aspects of village life and material culture, including seasonal celebrations and life-cycle rituals. Between 1972 and 1982, with the help of curators at the major ethnographic museums in the country, the Institute's ethnologists completed field research in approximately 600 villages and interviewed over 18,000 subjects.[573] The regime's support for the publication of the Atlas waned by that time. But the ethnographic material gathered during that decade came to inform the repertoires that the Institute was obliged to compile for over a hundred thousand song and dance ensembles in the Song for Romania Festival. The Institute's experts also had to provide special assistance for

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[571] ANDJHR, Fond County Council for the Democratic Front of Socialist Unity, inv. 65, File 2/1980, "Raport," f. 46-47. Mihãilescu, "A New Festival for the New Man," 64-65. ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Propagandă şi Agitaţie, inv. 3291, File 11/1981, "Propunere privind organizarea unitară a acţiunii de stimulare a participării maselor la creaţia ştiinţifică şi tehnică, cu concursul din cadrul Festivalului Cântarea României," f. 21.

[572] Quote article in *Revista de Etnografie şi Folclor* vol. 43-44 (1998), 6.

[573] Interview with Dr. Ion Cuceu (ethnographer, Director of the Romanian Academy's Institute "Archive of Folklore,") Cluj-Napoca, 7 April 2011. For the questionnaires, see *Atlasul Etnografic al României* no. 6 (Bucharest: Institutul de Cercetări Etnologice şi Dialectologice, 1979). I have also seen no. 7 and 8 published in 1980. These were issues as "bulletin's for internal use." The first volume of the Atlas on habitat was published in 2004.

artistic instructors, direct the county committees of CCES, schools of folk art, theaters, houses of

culture and mass organizations, the trade and youth unions, in particular.[574]

By the 1980s the intertwining of ritual reform and atheist Romanian spirituality in Song

for Romania was unmistakable. The 1979 edition of the festival staged a rich array of seasonal

folk customs as well as rites of passage connected the important moments of individual life -

birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Ion Meițoiu, a researcher at the Institute of

Ethnological and Dialectological Research, singled out a couple of examples presented at the

republican stage. The houses of culture from the villages of Dărmănești (Bacău county) and

Tudora (Botoșani county) carnivalesque rituals around New Year's celebrations specific to

Northern Moldova. By comparison, the wedding of the dead performed by villagers from Vișeul

de Sus evoked "traditional worldviews" specific to the Maramureș ethnographic region.[575]

Under the banner of enhancing "past spirituality" according to the "needs of the future,"

peasant ritual culture underwent major symbolic transformations in the festival. Because

spectacular dances and dramatic skits lent themselves better to existence in mass culture, a

process of pre-selection preceded the staging of rituals. Within their natural ritual milieu, folk

customs – whether seasonal or life-cycle rituals – provided existential meaning and

communicated both cosmological and social order for a community of kin, village or broader

region. Subjected to a great deal of reinvention, these customs lost their original ritual functions

and turned, among others, into forms of mass entertainment and consumption. Their time became

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[574] AMCPN, Corespondență, File 27823/1979, f. 72. ANDJHR, Fond County Committee of the Council for Socialist Education and Culture, inv. 663, File 83/1981-1987. CCES, "Recomandări de repertoriu pentru formațiile artistice de amatori," f. 302-315.

[575] Ion Meițoiu, "Exigențe și opțiuni în valorificarea folclorului în manifestările spectaculoase din festivalul național Cântarea României," *Anuarul Institutului de Cerceări Etnologice și Dialectologice* (Bucharest: Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste, 1979), 91-92.

defined by the pre-planned duration of amateur performances. By conjuring up the continuity of the nation from past to future, they reorganized local community and space. As Mihai Pop noted, "inspired by old traditions that were revived or organized into new forms, or created anew from elements of old traditions, these traditions are not only of the locality – the village or valley in which they take place – like before; now they belong to the nation, the entire country."[576] After being stripped from their magical-religious meaning, these rituals lastly became suitable for the didactic purposes of the regime. In a national aesthetic frame, they preached Stalinist values: vitality, progress, beauty, and work, hailing the pursuit of collective values as a fulfillment of individual life. By making these values something that could be experienced in an emotional and aesthetic manner, these rituals were to allow individuals to constitute "spiritual" beliefs in accordance with regime objectives in secularization, nation-building, and socialist modernization.

Party efforts to bring such ritual-spectacles off stage and turn them into new rituals for socialist citizens reached their peak after the mid-1980s. When the Central Committee gathered once more to evaluate atheist education in February 1986, Ceaușescu himself militated that the festival become a framework not only for the staging of laicized life-cycle rituals taken from folklore but a medium for their large-scale creation and implementation. On the margins of new research findings, Ceaușescu repeated the long-standing truism. There had been "little preoccupation to mark the important moments of people's lives in a lay manner […] with new manifestations specific to our country." He stated the stakes for atheism clearly:

> As long as pioneers continue to go to church when they get to a certain age means that we are not taking proper educational measures. […] We cannot give an order that they [the

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[576] Mihai Pop, *Obiceiuri tradiționale românești* (Bucharest: Institutul de Cercetări Etnologice și Dialectologice, 1979), 174-191. Quoted from p. 177.

children] should not go to church but let's organize activities, particularly when they join the pioneers, whey […] they reach maturity, [and] enter into the Communist Youth Union, and on these occasions let us take measures, so that it's not the church that declares the maturity of a young person. Let us sit down to consider foundational questions and [decide] how to act in this direction! Especially in the case of the youth, the children, it is not admissible that we should see them get married at the church with a priest after they have come of age and some even have their UTC or party membership card in their pockets!

This meant, Ceaușescu concluded, "literature, art, television, radio, *Song for Romania*."[577] The new measures called, among others, on the Writer's Union, the Union of Visual Artists (Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici), and ethographers to "stimulate the creation of literary and artistic works, [and] dramatic pieces" within the amateur artistic movement. The stated goal was to provide the ordinary Romanian citizen lay folkloric rites of passage, thus "aiding the formation of atheist convictions" and of the "multilaterally developed socialist man."[578] All party-state organizations in culture and education were to support this process. Despite the already evident economic collapse, for instance, both the CCES and the Institute for Research in Ethnology and Dialectology were assigned new research projects to investigate and appropriate folklore for the new rituals.[579]

The popular success of Song for Romania was unquestionable, historian Dragoș Petrescu writes. "Fascinated by the almost sacred space of the stage which until then they had not owned, numerous amateur artists participated sincerely in the spectacles."[580] Travelling abroad as

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[577] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, File 13/1986, "Stenograma ședinței Secretariatului Comitetului Central al P.C.R. din ziua de 21 februarie 1986," f. 6-9. Emphasis added.

[578] ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Cancelarie, File 13/1986, "Propuneri de măsuri privind îmbunătățirea activității de educație materialist-științifică a oamenilor muncii," f. 13-14v.

[579] AMCPN, File 39615/1987, Proces verbal D.P.C.N., f. 1-7. File 39619/1989, I.C.E.D.: Contracte de cercetare, f. [1-18].

[580] Dragoș Petrescu, "400.000 de spirite creatoare," 115-126.

ambassadors of Romanian song and dance provided further incentive to those that acquired fame. Idolized by audiences nationwide, many became "living legends" and had successful careers in the post-communist period. Besides some material benefits, the festival likewise produced social position and political recognition for numerous folk experts.[581]

Despite the enthusiastic response of certain sections of the population, the socialist spiritual culture of Song for Romania was far more fragmented than it might have appeared. The centralized nature of the festival, the ubiquitous involvement of cultural institutions, and the endless performances enabled the extension of power to all actors, whether they participated willingly or under official pressure because of their status as experts. Indeed, elites, cultural managers, and citizens often challenged the rationale behind the festival or re-negotiated, even displaced, the ideological meanings it sought to instill. The "authenticity" of the new rituals and songs, for instance, turned into a point of contention between amateur folklorists who embraced the new folklore, ethnologists who tried to preserve "non-perverted forms", and the group of Romanian anthropologists who, gathering around Mihai Pop wished to deconstruct notions of "national specificity." [582] At the festival's inception, numerous cultural managers also suggested that the event was "an aberration." When asked why they did not manage to convince more workers to participate, the reporter Constantin Stănescu wrote in the party daily *The Spark,* activists often gave detracting answers: "Well, comrade, these people are doing their job, they are over their ears in work, when do they have the time to sing and dance?" As the economic crisis of the late 1970 deepened, livings standards declined, and the regime returned to a

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[581] Vintilă Mihăilescu, "The New Festival for the New Man," 68. Author's interview with Dr. Ion Cuceu (ethnographer, Director of the Romanian Academy's Institute "Archive of Folklore,") Cluj-Napoca, 1 and 7 April 2011.

[582] Ibid, 76-77. Vintilă Mihăilescu, "Le monde enchanté de la culture populaire: une lecture du discours ethnologique roumain à travers ses enjeux idéologiques," *Ethnologies* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 27-45.

heightened mobilizational ethos, Song for Romania expectedly met some unwillingness from a population already overwhelmed with increased production tasks and party meetings, not to mention the growing hardships of everyday life.[583]

Song for Romania also enabled the displacement of ideological meaning sometimes in an unanticipated manner. Certain villages, for instance, seem to have had the kind of popular amateur talent demanded by the festival in short supply, as a result of which on occasion religious choirs participated with appropriately socialist song repertoires and went on to win national prizes.[584] On other occasions, amateur performers emptied the festival of its atheist meaning. While presenting laicized "winter songs" on stage, performers sometimes sang the religious versions off-stage in front of judges and local party leaders at the sumptuous parties taking place following award ceremonies.[585] Studies argued that the Transylvanian Hungarian nationality, in particular, transformed the ethno-folklorism of the Romanian state into opportunities for minority-building efforts. What contributed to this was the relative protection that certain Marxist intellectuals and high-ranking Hungarian members of the RCP – Ernő Gáll, Károly Király, János Fazekas, and Géza Domokos – provided until the late 1980s.[586] Also,

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[583] Constantin Stănescu, *Scânteia*, 27 October 1976. Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-199-5, Situation Report: Romania, 11 February 1977, "Hymn to Romania: Festival of Working Singers or Singing Workers," 2.

[584] A former judge at the festival's county level mentioned Calvinist and Orthodox church choirs. Interview with Dr. Ion Cuceu (ethnographer, Director of the Romanian Academy's Institute "Archive of Folklore,") Cluj-Napoca, 1 and 7 April 2011.

[585] Interview with Ioan Toşa (born 1942, curator at the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania), Cluj-Napoca, 4 April 2011.

[586] Zoltán Novák, "Egy romániai magyar kommunista káder, Fazekas János életútja III.," at http://itthon.transindex.ro/?cikk=17727 (last accessed 15 March 2015); "Politica P.C.R. faţă de minorităţile naţionale, 1948-1975" (PhD Thesis. Nicolae Iorga Institute of History, Romanian Academy of Sciences, Bucharest, 2010), 247-251. Dr. László Vetési (born in 1953, Calvinist pastor, deputy editor of the Calvinist review *Református Szemle* in 1983-1989), Cluj-Napoca, 8 April 2011.

crucial processes in neighboring Hungary – literary populism, peasantism, and Transylvanism – coalesced to detach the dance-house movement from Hungarian official cultural policy, turning it into a youth movement that reverberated in a Transylvanian Hungarian public increasingly faced with the national assimilationist policies of the Ceauşescu regime. [587]

In effect, these examples indicated two interlinking processes at work. The arguments and practices of elites, activists, or performers involved in the festival suggested, on the one hand, that the actual meanings assigned to the official discourse of "Romanian spirituality" and the socialist rituals were unanchored and open. Staging new folkloric customs in front of cognizant audiences – mostly first generation urban-dwellers with close ties to the rural world and with experience of local customs – was an inherently fragile project because it allowed the re-affirmation of symbolic links between "traditions" and religious folklore. Contentions around "authenticity" within Romanian public space or across the ethnic divide ensured, on the other hand, reinforced the idea of the nation as the keystone of culture instead of Marxism-Leninism. By sanctioning the Stalinization and indigenization of atheism, the Ceauşescu regime put then processes in place that ultimately enabled different social sectors to empty "Romanian spirituality" and the new ritual culture of their socialist elements and contributed thus to the rupturing of official ideology.

The contributions of the Romanian semi-official establishment – propaganda cadres, philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists – to the reform of atheist education reveals the transformation of the socialist sacred during the later years of the Ceauşescu regime. Informed

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[587] László Fosztó, *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism: Community, Personhood, and Conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian Village*, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, vol. 21 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), 15. László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 137-141. See documents in Ádám Könczei and Csongor Könczei, *Táncház. Írások az erdélyi táncház vonzásköréből* (Cluj-Napoca: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, 2004).

by Marxist revisionist ideas, these experts departed from dogmatic understandings towards more nuanced approaches. Because religion constituted a spiritual response to the exigencies of the human condition, their argument went, Marxist-Leninist atheism needed to provide an alternative humanist spirituality if socialism was to ensure the ennoblement of the individual Romanian citizen. The theoretical insights and sociological evidence this elite provided had far reaching consequences. Cadre training and atheist education in the 1970s and 1980s became more systematic. Next to routine pronouncements about the inevitable forward march of secularization, research portrayed a dynamic religious landscape. Neo-Protestant sects grew at an alarming rate as believers turned away from traditional religious organizations in protest to the accommodation these churches reached with the party-state. Reports likewise noted the weakening social authority of churches and the decline of religious knowledge among the population. The demographic prevalence of indifferent believers and their attraction to religious rituals based on arguments of cultural tradition prompted experts to promote ritual reform in socialist culture.

Several points of clarification are in order here. Atheist experts sought to enchant socialist culture with spiritual meaning at a time when the Ceauşescu regime seemed open to creative, post-Stalinist currents in Marxist humanism. By the late 1970s, however, they and the revisions they produced about religion and atheism embarked on a specifically Romanian career. In contrast to reformed communist states, Romanian atheists never gained the political status or resources that their Soviet or Eastern European colleagues enjoyed no doubt because the reformist undertone of their discourse was deeply suspect to a historically Stalinist leadership. Also, their rhetoric of spirituality never reflected the regime's move away from collective principles in the interest of subjective individual fulfillment. This latter distinction is evident in

the manner in which the ritual reform atheists helped bring about became ultimately part of the drive for cultural homogenization under the banner of the Song for Romania Festival. As re-Stalinization helped nationalist discourse become monolithic in an unprecedented manner and thus pre-determined the delegitimization of Marxism, atheist ideals and the socialist sacred turned into empty shells.

CONCLUSION

Vying with Poland, contemporary Romania counts not only as one of the most religious

countries in the former socialist sphere but also a place where religion is inextricable from ethno-

national politics and identity.[504] It is worth noting that, despite charges of extreme collaboration

with the communist regime and the Securitate, after 1989 the Romanian Orthodox Church has

consistently been the most trusted public institution well above Parliament, the government, or

the justice system.[505] While in the past two decades, hundreds of churches in northwestern

Europe metamorphosed into museums, coffee shops, and skateboard parks, thousands of newly

constructed churches opened their gates in Romania.[506] Even as austerity measures were put in

place at the height of the global economic crisis, state and local government funds were plentiful

enough to commence works on the Orthodox Cathedral of National Salvation. When finished,

this new patriarchal cathedral in Bucharest will be the tallest Orthodox Christian Church in the

world. It will not only precede the recently reconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Savior in

Moscow but it will also tower over Ceausescu's notorious People's Palace which it faces.

This contemporary scene makes it tempting to draw some foregone conclusions. At

the outset, Romanian socialism appears to be yet another case where Marxist-Leninist

atheism "failed." The belated manner in which the Romanian party-state decided to put

atheism at the center of its ideological program and the extent to which it nevertheless

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[504] Irena Borowik, Branko Ančić, and Radosław Tyrała "Central and Eastern Europe" in Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 630.

[505] Lucian Leuştean, "The Romanian Orthodox Church," in *Eastern Orthodoxy and Politics in the 21st Century* ed. Lucian Leuştean (New York: Routledge, 2014), 103.

[506] Cãtãlina Constantin, "Biserici transformate în muzee, cafenele, săli de concert sau baruri," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 10 January 2015, at http://www.evz.ro/biserici-transformate-in-muzee-cafenele-sali-de-concert-saubaruri.html (last accessed 17 July 2015). Tessa Dunlop, "Romania's Costly Passion for Churches," *BBC Magazine*, 7 August 2013, at http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23420668 (last accessed 17 July 2015).

circumscribed the work of experts certainly suggests that, overall, Romanian party elites were circumspect with the atheist project not the least because their problematic national credentials forced them to rely on the Orthodox Church and prefer Stalinist centralization.

By underplaying the anti-religious commitments of the regime, however, the inherent risk is to miss the impact that enforced secularization had on churches' social authority and infrastructure not to mention its effect on popular religious education and belief. Professional atheists upheld their programmatic pronouncements about the inevitable withering away of religion. However, the religious landscape they observed in the late Ceaușescu era belied secularization, revealing processes of religious change rather than evidence for the loss of faith. The demographic prevalence of "indifferent" believers and their attraction to rituals as forms of "cultural tradition" pointed to trends observed elsewhere for the socialist period: declining religious knowledge and the formation of religious affiliations around ideas of cultural heritage. In turn, the increasing importance of the family in religious socialization, noted with alarm by atheist experts, indicated the privatization of faith. Meanwhile, the exponential growth of neo-Protestant organizations or the youth's attraction to the occult – astrology, paranormal, and ufology – showed a departure from traditional religiosity towards either "modern" and extra-institutional forms of piety.[507]

Missing processes of religious change reinforces the assumption that we are dealing simply with a process of "interrupted continuity" between pre-socialist and post-socialist religiosity. The unprecedented ritualization through the "Song for Romania" Festival similarly

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[507] Catherine Wanner, ed. *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and the Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7-12. Mark Steinberg and Catherine Wanner, *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 1-7. Mathijs Pelkmans, Introduction to *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union* ed. Mathijs Pelkmans (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1-16.

suggests that the heightened sacralization of socialist culture "paved the way for a resurgence of organized religion" notwithstanding the atheist drive of the party-state.[508] The old Church Slavonic terms incorporated during the 1980s into Ceaușescu's personality cult – glory (slava), founder (ctitor), and savior (izbăvitor) – warrant such arguments without doubt.[509] Yet such interpretations fail to adequately account for how the communist period rephrased religion in important ways.

This dissertation analyzed elite interactions with believers and the Central Committee from 1948, when transforming religiosity re-emerged as a party priority, to the end of the socialist era. I focused on natural scientists, sociologists, preservationists, folklorists and other experts in institutions of cultural administration and social research newly created to manage socialist sensibilities and conduct. Marginalized in different periods, these elites influenced the place of religion and atheism in Romanian society while competing for resources within the centralized structure of the Party-State. Their voices mattered because they interacted with believers for whom national and religious belonging coincided. Elites also provided specialized knowledge for party organs committed to achieve convergence between ideology and citizens' subjectivity.

Pursuing the history of the socialist sacred through expert knowledge required an interdisciplinary historiographical approach. Indeed, this dissertation bridged major

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[508] Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelicalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 8-9.

[509] Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department, HU OSA 300-8-47-212-2, Situation Report: Romania, 28 January 1988, "Religious Elements in the Glorification of Ceaușescu," 7-8.

historiographical fields: studies of state power and religious organizations[510]; investigations of

iconoclasm, church preservation, and the socialist production of space[511]; and works on

subjectivity and atheist education. In these literatures, however, the conception of the sacred that

undergirded official models of exemplary selfhood rarely received scrutiny.

Arguing that the sacred provides a key analytic rubric for understanding the lineaments of

socialist modernity, this dissertation reframed the mentioned historiographical perspectives and

disciplinary methods. I defined the socialist sacred as an overarching structure that emerged at

the intersection of normative patterns of discourse, morality, space, and ritual culture.[512] In

marshalling this category of the sacred, I drew on works that engraved atheist endeavors into the

global experiment to forge modern selves.[513] Based on such insights, I took seriously the

communist endeavor to provide citizens' with sacred values, spaces, and rituals while

emphasizing how this project evolved in dialogue with lived religion. Departing from these

studies, I insisted however that the late socialist sacred emerged primarily in response to global

debates about Marxism and humanism that peaked during the 1960s.[514] In so doing, this

dissertation dislodged the Soviet Union from its hegemonic position in histories of socialist

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[510] Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach about It* (New York, 2014); David Doellinger, *Turning Prayers into Protests: Religious-Based Activism and Its Challenge to State Power in Socialist Slovakia and East Germany* (New York, 2013); Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-1965* (London, 2009).

[511] Catriona Kelly, "Socialist Churches: Heritage Preservation and Cultic Buildings in Leningrad, 1924-1940," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2012); Igor Polianski, "The Antireligious Museum: Soviet Heterotopia between Transcending and Remembering Religious Heritage," forthcoming in *Religion, Science and Communism in Cold War Europe*, eds. Paul Betts and Stephen A. Smith (London, 2016).

[512] Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (New York, 2012).

[513] For theoretical explorations of modern subjectivity as shaped by a productive tension between rationalization and enchantment see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, 2007).

[514] Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York, 1987); Paul Mojzes, ed. *Varieties of Christian-Marxist Dialogue* (Philadelphia, 1978); Erich Fromm, ed. *Socialist Humanism* (Garden City, N.Y., 1965); Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010).

secularization and explained how the global revival of Marxist humanism provided party-states

the impetus for mobilizing new expertise to transform religiosity. Also, whereas previous works

focused on a narrow category of atheist cadres, my analysis focused on experts whose

ideological relationship to socialism was far more ambivalent: natural scientists, preservationists,

sociologists, ethnographers and other elites. Divided along traditions of thought about science,

national modernization, religion, and Marxism, these "bourgeois specialists" offer historians the

opportunity to explore how competing elites shaped the culture of the socialist sacred in

communist Romania.

This dissertation problematized histories that privilege the opposition between religion

and socialist secularism. I demonstrate that socialist civilizations belonged to a contradictory

modernity, inherently defined by a tense yet interdependent relationship between rationalization

and sacralization. By situating socialism in the broader history of modernity and

(dis)enchantment, this work also acquires a pronounced global and comparative relevance. It

permits us to think about the range of actors that shape normative regimes of emotion, spatiality,

and rituals in different political environments. My research also historicizes religious change by

illuminating people's responses to theistic and nonreligious canopies that competed to provide

overarching meaning to their lives. Lastly, since I combine approaches from cultural history,

anthropology and sociology to analyze elite struggles over the sphere of the sacred, this

dissertation provides a new interdisciplinary methodology for understanding how experts

leverage intellectual authority to transform norms of subjectivity in autocratic regimes.[515]

The evolution of atheist work during the "golden epoch" also qualifies the totalitarian

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[515] Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographical Overview," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (June 2006): 692-716; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2007); Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism* (Berkeley, 1991); Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers* (New York, 1981); Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity* (Boston, 2014).

aspects of the Romanian party-state. Adopted in 1966, Ceauşescu's pro-natalist policies are often cited to distinguish Romania in the socialist bloc by indicating the particularly invasive ways in which the late socialist regime "appropriated the private realm" of the family and the individual.[516] And yet, the fact that the Central Committee did not instruct for the implementation of new life cycle rituals until 1986 or undertake the creation of the necessary material culture for baptisms, weddings, and funerals in a centralized manner provide examples for how it did not subordinate the private sphere to collective principles. For much of the socialist period, marking the important moments of human life remained the domain of religious organizations. In this sense then, the sociologist Ion Mihail Popescu was right. For all the popular support that Ceauşescu's personality cult and virulent nationalism could muster, Romanian socialism did not attempt to provide meaning for individual life in crucial ways. In this sense, it remained "a sanctuary without an altar, or a heroic army without a flag."[517]

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[516] Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 34.

[517] Popescu and Bărbăcioru, *Aspecte*, 208.

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