Ideological Attempts to Build a Sustainable Program of Ecodomical Decommunistization in Post-1989 Romania by Promoting the Notion of National Identity

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Abstract

In December 1989, Communism died in Romania—if not as mentality, it surely met its demise as a political system which had dominated almost every aspect of life in the country for over four decades. Thus, at least in theory, an ideological vacuum was created and concrete steps towards filling it with different values and convictions were supposed to be taken as early as possible. The Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church seized the opportunity and initiated a series of measures which eventually created a distinct perception about what culture, ethnicity, and religion were supposed to mean for whoever identified himself as Romanian. This paper investigates these ideological attempts to decontaminate Romania of its former Communist mentalities by resorting to the concept of ecodomy seen as 'constructive process' and the way it can be applied to how the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church dealt with culture, ethnicity, and religion. In the end, it will be demonstrated that while decommunistization was supposed to be constructive and positive, it proved to be so only for the Romanians whose national identity was defined by their adherence to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and its perspective on culture, ethnicity, and religion. For all other Romanian citizens, however, decommunistization was a process of 'negative ecodomy' because either their cultural ideas, ethnic origin, or religious convictions were perceived as non-Romanian and non-Orthodox. In attempting to reach decommunistization therefore, the Romanian majority still tends to be xenophobic and even anti-Muslim, as plainly demonstrated by the Bucharest mosque scandal which rocked the country in the summer of 2015.

Keywords

communism, decommunistization, ecodomy, culture, ethnicity, religion

Introduction: Making Sense of Terms and Methods

In December 1989, Romania witnessed a series of public events which, as Peter Siani-Davies

notices, were labelled in various ways ranging from revolution and coup d'état to revolt and popular uprising.[1] Since identifying the exact nature of what happened during those fateful days of December 1989 lies beyond the scope of this paper, the term which I am going to use throughout this paper to point to that rather complex web of events is 'revolution', not only because it has became a public automatism to describe the actual history of December 1989 for the past two decades but also because it probably best describes, as John Ely indicates, what Romanians did during the famous 'ten days' which left such a visible imprint on the country's recent history.[2]

Even though what happened during Romania's December 1989 revolution is not so clear and defining the very nature of those events is even less so, what is nevertheless quite clear has to do with the fact that, one way or another, Romanians succeeded in putting an end to the political Communist regime led by Nicolae Ceauşescu not only in his capacity as president of the country but also as general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, the country's leading political body, and the only one for that matter. This tangible and visible result was no small matter as Ceauşescu had been the president of Romania since 1974, head of the state since 1967, and party leader since 1965.[3] Leaving aside the fact that, as highlighted by Steven D. Roper, Ceauşescu political rule was impregnated with nepotism, corruption, and dealings with high military officers which caused not only suspicion but also worries among the political elite, Romania's economic, social, and cultural life was degraded almost beyond repair.[4]

On top of it, Ceauşescu's continuous attempts to eliminate Romania's external debt were successful in April 1989 with disastrous consequences for the country's population. Alan Smith, for instance, correctly identifies some of the hardships which afflicted Romanians in the 1980s and were direct results of Ceauşescu's economic policies, such as 'draconian restrictions on household energy consumption', 'severe food shortages', and 'food queues'. All these resulted in the 'major damage' of 'industry and infrastructure' which were no longer modernized; the very same fate was suffered by the country's transport and telecommunications. While Romanian was almost literally sucked dry of its natural and financial resources, Ceauşescu decided to heavily invest in extremely expensive projects such as the Danube-Black Sea Canal and the People's House,[5] which became the headquarters of the Romanian Parliament in 1997.

Coupled with other factors highlighted by Steven D. Roper—such as Ceauşescu's personality cult as well as his inability and unwillingness to accept or even deal with Gorbachev's political reforms of *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness) which he snobbishly considered a 'right-wing deviation' as far as the Communist block was concerned[6]—the Romanian revolution ended not only Ceauşescu's political regime but also the country's Communist rule started, as shown by Dennis Deletant, in 1945 and carried out until 1989 by the party's secret police through numerous acts of terror, intimidation, arrests, and murder.[7]

While it is rather obvious that the December 1989 revolution terminated Communism as state policy in Romanian, whether or not Romanians

[1] Peter Siani-Davies, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 268.

[2] John Ely, "Re-Membering Romania: A Ghost Story", in C. Doboş, C. and M. Stan (eds), *Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Europe* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010), 60.

[3] *** *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Encyclopaedia* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2000), 305.

[4] Steven D. Roper, *Romania. The Unfinished Revolution* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 57.

[5] Adrian Smith, "Economy (Romania)", in I. Bell (ed.), *Central and South Eastern Europe 2003*, 3rd edn (London: Europa Publications/Taylor and Francis, 2002), 485.

[6] Steven D. Roper, *Romania. The Unfinished Revolution* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 57–58.

[7] Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania. Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948–1965* (London: Hurst and Company, 1999), 127ff.

managed to rid themselves of Communist mentalities is a totally different issue which, again, does not lie within the scope of this paper. It is, however, safe to say that since Communist rule and state policies were associated with Ceauşescu's regime and the existence of the Communist Party, their demise in December 1989 can be considered, more or less appropriately, the end of Communism in Romania. If this is the case, what was Communism replaced with? Was December 1989 the actual death of Communism in Romania or was it only the beginning of a series of attempts not only to replace Communist ideology with different patterns of thought but also to help Romanians concentrate on a different set of values?

By using the term 'decommunistization', this paper will focus on demonstrating that after 1989, Romanians engaged in a process which was aimed not only at leaving Communist thinking behind but also at promoting different, specifically Western values. As a concept, decommunistization was used in the early 1990s as referring to 'a shift to political pluralism'[8] or, in the words of Evgeny Abramyan, to dealing with 'security clearance investigations' of former Communist Party members meant to ban such persons 'from holding positions of responsibility in the government and governmental structure'.[9] In this paper, decommunistization will be used rather loosely as pointing to any attempt to leave Communism behind while embracing new and different values. In other words, while utterly deconstructive in nature as it seeks to debunk Communist ideologies, decommunistization is nonetheless constructive for as long as it aims at replacing such ideologies with another set of values which are seen as fundamentally non-Communist.

In being constructive, however, decommunistization is essentially positive and it is at this point that the notion of ecodomy becomes

relevant. Based on the definition provided in the mid-1990s by Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz who sees it as including 'any constructive process',[10] ecodomy is the means whereby decommunistization works as totality of attempts to replace Communist thinking with different ideological values. Romanians did try three very practical ways to rid themselves of Communism: first, the December 1989 revolution itself which, as reported by Philip Ther, took the lives of over one thousand persons during December 16 and December 25;[11] second, the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu on December 25, hailed as proof of the actual death of Communism in Romania or, as Florin Abraham vividly put it, 'a symbolic, violent end to the communist regime';[12] and third, the dissolution of the Communist Party on December 29, coupled—as Lavinia Stan indicates—with the Timişoara Declaration which, in Article 8, aimed at the banning of Communist Party leaders from filling government and political positions.[13]

Nonetheless, this paper will focus on a methodology which seeks to identify different and specifically ideological attempts to achieve decommunistization in a positive, ecodomical way based on the use of national identity as fundamental philosophy aimed at proving not only that Communism was not part of the Romanian's core constitutive nature but also that Romanians are capable of moving on beyond as well as despite their disastrous Communist experience. This is why decommunistization can be described not only negatively as deconstruction of Communist ideologies

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[8] *** *Daily Report. East Asia*. Volumes 92–95 (Reston, VA: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 1992), 58.

[9] Evgeny Abramyan, *Civilization in the Twenty First Century*, fourth edition (Moscow: n.p., 2009), 138, n. 24.

[10] Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *God's Spirit. Transforming a World in Crisis* (London: Continuum, 1995), 109.

[11] Philip Ther, *Europe since 1989. A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 71.

[12] Florin Abraham, *Romania since the Second World War. A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 115.

[13] Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania. The Politics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 91.

but also positively—and I am using here a list provided by Vittorio Olgiatti—as 'westernization, liberalization, modernization, democratization' and even 're-christianization'.[14] These ecodomic attempts to enforce decommunistization in Romanian life through the use of national identity as core philosophical concept are explored in three distinct areas of interest, such as culture, ethnicity, and religion—with this very last aspect, however, having recently turned into into a rather wide range of fervent and colorful anti-Muslim attitudes. All these developments though have taken shape and even blossomed into self-sustaining ideologies under the protective umbrella of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church which in post-1989 Romania emerged as a genuine national force that remained almost unchallenged until recent years.

Culture as Ecodomic Decommunistization

In the early 1990, the flagship of national decommunistization attempts was taken over by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church under the leadership of its Patriarch, Teoctist Arăpaşu. This is extremely significant because Teoctist supervised the publication of an immense volume celebrating the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church as well as the formal establishment of its Patriarchal Office. The volume was published in 1995 but it is very likely that the actual work to select the authors and put together such a huge amount of papers began in fact much earlier, which is indicative of Teoctist's intention to affirm the presence if not also the influence of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church in post-1989 Romania. In order to highlight the importance of culture for post-Communist Romanian life, Teoctist come up with a magisterial idea which proved to be

not only extremely cunning but also highly effective in influencing generations of young people after 1989. Thus, the connected the notion of culture to politics and the church. Specifically, he made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, Romanian culture goes hand in hand with Romanian politics and the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church because contemporary Romania, he claimed, was the result of a distinct cultural spirituality which developed throughout Romanian lands over hundreds of years,[15] which supposedly conferred Romanians a specific national identity.

In so doing, Teoctist created as well as consolidated the idea that not only Romanian culture is ancient, but also the Romanian Church—evidently, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church—shares in the very same quality. Needless to say that the obvious conclusion, for Teoctist as well as many Romanians, Eastern Orthodox or not, was that the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church was in fact the one which created Romanian culture. In other words, Romanian culture is not only the product of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church but it should also remain under its spiritual protection and supervision because this is what constitutes the Romanians' national identity. This made sense to quite a significant number of Romanians in the early years of post-Communist times because it somehow compensated for decades of ecclesiastical neglect, religious interdiction, and political persecution of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church by the former Communist authorities. Teoctist appears to have been a rather subtle psychologist as we must have been aware of these popular beliefs since he pressed on with his clever juxtaposition of culture and church. Thus, for him, in its capacity as mother of the Romanian culture, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church is the

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[14] Vittorio Olgiatti, "Multiple Transitions to the EU Constitutional Project. The Case of Eastern European Legal Professions", in A. Febbrajo and W. Sadurski (eds), *Central and Eastern Europe after Transition. Towards a New Socio-Legal Semantics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 281.

[15] Teoctist, "Cuvânt înainte. Patriarhatul român: dreaptă întocmire a bisericii naționale românești autocefale", in *Autocefalie, patriarhie, slujire sfântă. Momente aniversare în Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (Bucureşti: Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995), 9.

Romanians' 'national church'[16] as foundational for their national identity.

This is nothing less than implying, and Teoctist actually wrote it in black and white, that the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church is not only the mother of the Romanian culture, but also the mother of the Romanian nation[17] This fiendishly intelligent move establishes not only the primacy of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church as source and support of Romanian culture but also the exclusivity of the very same church as the only acceptable form of spirituality for Romanians, thus negating the validity of other Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, for Romanian culture because, according to this logic, they do are not elements specific to the Romanians' national identity. Cristian Vasile, for instance, goes as far as to reveal that this exclusion of non-Orthodox churches is nothing else but a form of persecution because—to take only one example—the Romanian Greek Catholic Church was persecuted in Communist times not only by the Communist political authorities but also by some Eastern Orthodox leaders who supported the state in enforcing such persecuting measures against non-Orthodox churches[18] because, since they were not constitutive of the country's national identity, such measures were deemed legitimate.

Whether Teoctist had in mind only the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church or the whole Romanian people when he insisted on the connection between church and culture is difficult to say with precision, although it is far less difficult to make assumptions of all sorts. Be it as it may, what he did in the early 1990s by juxtaposing church and culture and, in so doing, establishing the superiority of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church over Romanian culture can be seen as an attempt to deal with decommunistization in post-1989 Romania which, almost undoubtedly, he perceived as positive and ecodomic in nature as conferring spiritual strength to the country's national identity. Unfortunately, what appeared positive and ecodomic to Teoctist in the early 1990s was in fact a return to the older ideology of 'Thinkism' (*Gândirism* in Romanian) which had rooted Romanian culture in an extremely dangerous ideological cocktail. To quote Keith Hitchins, this cultural movement combined spirituality, religion, politics, and nationalism into an extremist ideology which was later promoted by the fascist Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement.[19] Although associated mostly with Nichifor Crainic, a trained Romanian Eastern Orthodox theologian turned philologist and philosopher, Thinkism harbored a wide range of intellectuals whose main concern was the identification, isolation, and praise of Romanian culture through actively promoting the idea of Romanian values under the parental protection of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and the governing idea of national identity.

One such example is provided by Simion Mehedinți who—at the dawn of the Second World War when national socialism and fascism was running wild throughout Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe—made the eulogy of a distinctive set of so-called 'Romanian values' which reportedly laid at the very foundation of Romanian culture and national identity. Thus, Mehedinți painted an awkwardly romantic and even hopelessly utopian image of the Romanian culture which was depicted not only as the result of the close cohabitation between the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and the Romanian State but also as being nothing less than simply otherworldly. As such, according to Mehedinți, the Romanian culture is characterized by a long list of idillic features including the lack of religious wars, neutrality towards disputed doctrines, the lack of heresies and heretics, the image of Jesus in folk tales, the total absence of

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[16] Teoctist, "Cuvânt înainte", 5.

[17] Teoctist, "Cuvânt înainte", 5.

[18] Cristian Vasile, 'The Suppression of the Romanian Greek Catholic Uniate Church', *East European Quarterly* 36.3 (2002): 317.

[19] Keith Hitchins, *A Concise History of Romania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 163.

vengeful desires, the priority of moral beauty over established justice, passive acceptance of suffering for moral sanctification, confidence in the final victory of good over evil, and the ancient character of Romanian Christianity[20]—all these, however, were seen as deeply rooted in the Romanians' national identity.

These utopian nationalistic ideas were taken over by Teoctist and incorporated in his presentation of Romanian culture as byproduct of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church in an effort to present post-1989 Romania with an ecodomic ideology meant to replace Communist philosophy with a specific cultural ideology under the supervision of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church. In doing so, however, he not only pushed Romanian culture towards the vestiges of its former nationalist-socialist philosophy promoted by the fascist Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement but also opened a specifically Romanian 'Pandora's box' by pushing the whole issue of culture into the highly dangerous concept of ethnicity—dangerous not only because it was meant to be an instrument of ecodomic decommunistization in post-1989 Romania, but also because it preceded the Communist era and survived it successfully to this day by its association to the concept of national identity.

Ethnicity as Ecodomic Decommunistization

According to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox formula, ethnicity goes and in hand with culture. If culture is envisioned as the product of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church which is depicted as mother not only of Romanian culture but also of the Romanian nation, then it is logical to infer that ethnicity—the very concept which is supposed to coagulate a nation—cannot be detached from either culture or nation because these two make up the essence of Romania's national identity. In the same volume

supervised by former patriarch Teoctist one comes across an article written by Constantin Pârvu who used to fill in the position of administrative patriarchal vicar. It is in this capacity that Pârvu insists on ethnicity as proof in favor of the inextricable connection not only between the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and the Romanian state, but also between the very same church and specific privileges which the state is supposed to grant the church. Thus, Pârvu begins his presentation of the role of ethnicity by putting forward the theory that contemporary Romanians are the offsprings of the ancient Dacians who were colonized by Romans. As such, Pârvu continues, the population of Dacians and Romans can be described as 'străromâni' or 'ancientromanians', a clever philological device which is supposed to juxtapose the ideas of ethnicity and nation. The resulting concept, Pârvu argues, is some sort of 'incontestable proof' that the Romanian Orthodox Church has been on contemporary Romanian lands since ancient times. This is why, he argues, the 'ancientromanians' confirm without any doubt whatsoever the very 'presence, permanence, and continuity of Orthodox Romanians in these lands'[21], an aspect which is believed to confirm the Romanians' national identity.

It is quite evident that Pârvu attempts do construct an ecodomic perspective on the origins of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church as closely associated with the romanized—and consequently latinized—geographic regions formerly inhabited by the Dacians. While his primary intention in putting together Eastern Orthodoxy—a branch of the Oriental churches associated with Greek and Slavonic influences—and the romanized Dacian population is to present Romanians as some sort of a special ethnic breed which ineffably combines

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[20] Simion Mehedinți, *Creştinismul românesc* (Bucureşti: Editura Anastasia, 1995).

[21] Constantin Pârvu, "Organizarea şi dezvoltarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în spiritul autonomiei şi autocefaliei", in *Autocefalie, patriarhie, slujire sfântă. Momente aniversare în Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (Bucureşti: Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995), 17–18.

Western and Eastern influences in a unique way, supposedly unrivaled as well as unparalleled in the whole of Europe, Pârvu's intention is to secure state granted privileges of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church as warrant of the country's national identity This is why, at least in Pârvu's mind, in post-1989 Romania, a country which had just shaken off Communism, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church has not only the right but also the duty to demand that its 'priority necessities for the clergy and ecclesiastical life' be granted by the Romanian State. These privileges refer to a rather wide range of issues such as 'the integral remuneration of the clergy', 'the recovery of the status of public officers for the clergy', and also 'the exclusive right of the [Romanian Eastern Orthodox] church to sell cultic objects'—all these must not only be granted by the Romanian state, but in matters pertaining to the remuneration of the clergy for their ecclesiastical service the necessary financial resources must be provided 'from the budget of the state government'.[22]

Thus, if Teoctist attempted to replace Communist ideology with the idea of Romanian culture as nurtured by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and in doing so he promoted culture as ecodomic decommunistization, Pârvu sought to replace Communist philosophy with the notion of Romanian ethnicity as sustained by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church with the clear intention to parade ethnicity as ecodomic decommunistization. In both cases, even if the main concern of both prelates was to secure the power and influence of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church, the spiritual beneficiaries of this paradigm change were supposed to be Romanians in general because they will eventually emerge with their national identity intact. The problem of the ethnic model of ecodomic decommunistization is not its preoccupation for Romanians and their welfare but rather its tendency to focus too much and even exclusively on Romanians to the detriment of other ethnic

groups which constitute minorities in contemporary Romania. Recent history has demonstrated that combining ethnicity with church ideology, especially with the concerns of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church resulted in tragic events before and during the Second World War, when the Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement were at the height of their national socialist activities. Paul A. Shapiro argues rather convincingly that combining ethnicity, nationalism, religion, and—quite unavoidably—politics for the sake of the ethnic majority population not only results in an exclusivistic rhetoric but also ends up in detrimental action taken against ethnic minority populations. In the specific case of Romania in the 1920s to the 1940s, Shapiro underlines that right-wing politics was culturally and ecclesiastically supported by famous Romanian personalities such as Nicolae Iorga, the noted historian, and Miron Cristea, the first patriarch of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church,[23] who were constantly resorting to the idea of national identity in order to explain their convictions.

According to Shapiro, Iorga and Cristea not only described Romanians as a nation characterized by Western Latinity, Eastern Christianity, and ancient Dacian-Roman ethnicity, but also actively engaged in presenting the Romanian nation as somehow unfairly and fatalistically singled out by history's vicissitudes. Thus, Romanians appear to be a unique European nation which, unlike any other European nation, combines Western and Eastern values which not only result in a unique ethnicity but also ignite hatred from other ethnic groups, notably from Hungarians, Jews, and Gypsies. This is why, as Shapiro explains, what Romanians must do—according to Iorga and Cristea—is protect their nation and their ethnicity, their very national identity, by 'returning ... to [Romanian Eastern] Orthodox values', which is nothing but

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[22] Pârvu, "Organizarea şi dezvoltarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în spiritul autonomiei şi autocefaliei", 56–7.

[23] Paul A. Shapiro, "Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church", in K. P. Spicer (ed.), *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 147.

the fascist ideology promoted by the national socialistic philosophy of the Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement.[24]

The combination of ethnicity and religion as ecodomic attempt to provide post-1989 Romania with proper decommunistization has the potential, as consistently demonstrated by the country's recent history, to move in the direction of fascism and national socialism even if, as Pârvu indicated, the juxtaposition of ethnicity and religion is primarily aimed at securing the privileges of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and its special relationship with the Romanian State. Nevertheless, the actual possibility of identifying the Romanian State itself with the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church or the other way around is only one step away and, even worse, it did happen with the fascist and national socialist politics of the Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement which promoted murder as means to fight against those threatening the Romanians' national identity. This is why Stanley G. Payne is correct in pointing to the potentially dangerous results of such deviant ideologies which literally believed in the consubstantiality between the theology of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and the ethnicity of the Romanian nation.[25]

Religion as Ecodomic Decommunistization

Even if the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church's perspective on Romanian culture and Romanian ethnicity is imbued with religious ideas, it is not difficult to identify religion *per se* as a concrete ecodomic effort to achieve decommunistization in post-1989 Romania. By religion, I do not necessarily mean the theology and practice of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church, but mainly a symbolic element which developed alongside but also as a result of the way the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church

understood the relationship between Romanian culture and Romanian ethnicity. In post-1989 Romania, now relieved of its Communist political regime and the brutal enforcement of the Communist credo in all the sectors of society and human life, the ecodomic affirmation of Romanian culture and Romanian ethnicity by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church needed a concrete and visible religious symbol which would and could support such an active ideological propaganda. This was found in the idea of building a Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] Nation which, according to Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, was supposed to promote first and foremost the 'interests' of the Romanian nation[26] and thus confirm their religious and national identity.

A huge architectural project, not yet completed in 2017, and commonly known as the National Salvation Cathedral within Anglo-Saxon academic quarters, the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] Nation not only conspicuously promotes religion as economic decommunistization in post-1989 Romania but it also openly professes the conviction that Romanian ethnicity and Romanian culture are forever bound together in Romanian religion—specifically, the theology and practice of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church. Leaving aside the fact that the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] nation provides more than sufficient evidence—as Victor Roudometof points out—that the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church is strongly, even ontologically connected to Romanian nationalism (which includes Romanian culture and Romanian ethnicity), the idea behind the building itself reflects the conviction that being Romanian is nothing less than being a member of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church.[27] In other words, the very foundation of

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[24] Shapiro, "Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church", 142.

[25] Stanely G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 136.

[26] Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 56.

[27] Victor Roudometof, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity. The Transformation of a Religious Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 94.

the Romanians' national identity resides in they capacity as Eastern Orthodox believers. Gavril Flora and Georgina Szilagyi are right not only in noticing this mandatory liaison between one's ethnicity and one's religion but also in stressing that necessity that each Romanian should be an active promoter of his or her country's interests[28] as well as a keen supporter of their national identity as Eastern Orthodox christians.

To a certain extent, such claims are understandable in post-1989 Romania. If until December 1989, each Romanian citizen, ethnically Romanian or not, was required and expected to support the Communist policy of the Romanian State in any possible way, the paradigm shift did not come to be without similar expectations, although this time they were paraded as religious and spiritual in nature. It is very clear though that the said religious and spiritual expectations of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church that every Romanian should be an active promoter of the country's interests are also as political as they can be. When ethnicity and culture are coupled with nationalism and religion—and even more so, when this ideological cocktail is concocted in Romania with its not-so-remote a past dominated by fascism and national socialism—one can rightfully expect the unfolding of a historical drama which leads to a distinctly religious symbol, such as the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] Nation, meant to fill the ideological hole left by the late Communist politics with the new religious ideology of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church. This particular idea, however, is not new. Stan and Turcescu provide a correct explanation of this fact by pointing out that, despite popular belief, the idea of building the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] Nation did not belong to Teoctist and his patriarchal ecclesiastical activity in the early 1990s. Quite contrarily, it can be traced back in time to Miron Cristea in the 1920s and even before that to the 1877–1878 Russian-Turish war, when the former Kingdom of Romania—which significantly did not include Transylvania—became independent from the Ottoman Empire[29] and had the historical chance to affirm its national identity in the modern era.

Back in the late nineteenth century, the idea of building a cathedral in the wake of the Russian-Turkish war, which for Romanians was nothing less that becoming independent as a nation, appeared as benign as postwar popular celebrations. Very soon after the war, however, the idea of the cathedral acquired more militant and triumphalist connotations because it was no longer seen as a symbol of political liberation— in the sense that having been under Turkish rule for such a long time, Romanians now had the opportunity not only to celebrate their faith in total freedom but also to proclaim their national identity as Eastern Orthodox christians. The cathedral, albeit only a project, became a symbol of national victory meant to praise Romanians for being religiously faithful to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church, a fact which reportedly assisted the Eastern Orthodox Romanians in winning the war against the Islamic armies of the Ottoman Turks. If so, it was rather evident that this specific combination of nationalism and religious was supposed to be beneficial for Romanians as a nation, so the idea of building a cathedral to celebrate it was only logical. This idea survived for over one and a half century due to people like Cristea and Teoctist, both patriarchs with vested interested in promoting the interests of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church as ecodomic and constructive realities for all populations who shared in the Romanian ethnicity and Romanian culture. This is most likely why Sorin Şipoş competently notices that, for the majority of Romanians, being associated with the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church is not so much an issue of theology or

[28] Gavril Flora, Georgina Szilagyi, "Church, Identity, Politics in Post-1989 Romania", in V. Roudometof, A. Agadjanian, and J. Pankhurst (eds.), *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press/Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 114.

[29] Stan, Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, 56–7.

religion as it is a matter of 'tradition, ethnicity, and heritage'[30]—and it was this latter aspect which defined their national identity.

In other words, Romanians do not need religion as much as they need symbolism and the Cathedral for the Salvation of the [Romanian] Nation provided them with the necessary religious ideology to ecodomically and constructively move beyond Communist philosophy into a world where religion can be practiced in freedom. The new paradigm shift, however, did not come without perils. Under the militant activity of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church in post-1989 Romania and especially in the early and mid 1990s, the immortal ghosts of past ideologies—such as the fascism of national socialism promoted by the Iron Guard during the Second World War as well as the anti-Muslim attitudes running rampant after the Russian-Turkish War—surfaced again as late as 2015 by agressively asserting the Romanians' national identity as Eastern Orthodox in religion and politics. This time, however, it was not only to single out and favor Romanians as a nation 'protected' by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church but also to rage against people of different ethnicity and religion, especially those pertaining to the traditional and immigrant Muslim communities spread across contemporary Romania.[31]

Anti-Muslim Attitudes as Ecodomic Decommunistization

With the exception of the anti-Muslim feelings which were quite widespread in the wake of the Russian-Turkish War which led to the colonization of Dobrogea in 1880 (Van Assche and

Tempău,[32] anti-Muslim attitudes emerged as relatively new attempts to support country's national identity in post-1989 Romania; in fact, they erupted as late as the summer of 2015 when *B365.ro*, one of Romania's leading news websites, published a breaking news regarding the planned construction of what was then said to be the largest mosque in the whole of Christian Europe.[33] The news was published on June 9, 2015, following the Romanian Government's decision to allot a large piece of land for the erection of the mosque. Given the enormous influence of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church after 1989 as well as the country's staunch traditionalism, mufti Iusuf Murat—the leader of the Muslim community in Romania—hastened to declare that the generous donation of the Romanian government spoke 'by itself about the ethnic respect and understanding [which exist] in Romania.[34] Moreover, the building was not supposed to host only a mosque, but also an educational center and a scientific library with up-to-date teaching facilities for the research and dissemination of Islam, all financed by the Turkish government.

One clarification, predominantly historical in nature, is needed here. The land of Dobrogea became part of the Romanian Kingdom only in 1878, when the nation was still recovering after the Russian-Turkish War which resulted in Romania's independence from Ottoman rule. The Ottoman Turks, however, alongside

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[30] Sorin Şipoş, "Ideology, Politics, and Religion in the Work of the Historian Silviu Dragomir", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 7.21 (2008): 79–105, on 86.

[31] Corneliu C. Simuţ, "Negative Ecodomy in Romanian Politics and Religion: Anti-Muslim Attitudes in the Bucharest Mosque Scandal during the Summer of 2015", *Religions* 6.4 (2015): 1368–90.

[32] Kristof van Assche, Petruţa Tempău, *Local Cosmopolitanism. Imagining and (Re-)Making Privileged Places* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 50.

[33] Amalia Balabaneanu, Nicolae Vieru, "O moschee nouă va fi construită în Bucureşti. Terenul a fost acordat gratuit de govern". *B365.ro* 9 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.b365.ro/o-moschee-noua-va-fi-construita-in-bucuresti-terenul-a-fost-acordat-gratuit-de-guvern_227845.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[34] ***, "După Catedrala Mântuirii, în Bucureşti va fi construită cea mai mare moschee din Europa. Ce rol are guvernul", *Gândul* 10 iunie 2015. Online <http://www.gandul.info/stiri/dupa-catedrala-mantuirii-in-bucuresti-va-fi-construita-cea-mai-mare-moschee-din-europa-ce-rol-are-guvernul-14436215>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

various other Muslim populations like the Tatars—Daniela Stoica argues—had established a consistent presence in Dobrogea since as early as the thirteenth century.[35] When the colonization of Dobrogea started in 1880, most of the Muslim Turks and Tatars left the region but a consistent number of them eventually decided to stay. This is why, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Carol I—the very first king of Romania—decided to honor the Dobrogea Muslim community by financially supporting the erection of a mosque in the city of Constanța which he inaugurated on May 31, 1913. The mosque was named after its benefactor, so the 'Carol I' mosque became a symbol of the peaceful relationship between the Muslim Turks and Tatars, on the one hand, and the Christian—Eastern Orthodox quite obviously—Romanians. In 2015, however, Romania's Muslim population was not made up of the traditional Turks and Tatars who spoke mainly Turkish, but also of Arab and African migrants who spoke Arabic and had settled in the country after 1989. Keenly aware that most Romanians had already been inflamed by the idea of Islam—and especially radical Islam with its connection to global terrorism and the massive migration from Syrian and Northern Africa—mufti Murad attempted to reassure the Romanian public that the new mosque was meant to be a 'realm of peace' in the land of Romania which he described as 'our country'.[36]

Regardless the mufti's tireless efforts to explain that the mosque was not going to harbor Islamic terrorism, the scandal could not be stopped. Most Romanians were—and continue to be—deeply unaware about the differences between traditional Turkish/Tatar Muslim communities and the new migrant populations, mostly Arabic and African. While the former live in Dobrogea, the latter have settled in the cities, especially in Bucharest, the country's capital, where at least 17 unauthorized mosques were active in 2015.[37] Needless to say that while most Romanians perceived Islam as a threat to the country's Christian identity—as well as the Turks and Arabs as a peril to Romania's national identity—explaining why and the mosque project was beneficial to the country would most likely end up in trouble, which also happened in the weeks to come. The mufti's explanations were futile; nobody was either willing or ready to believe that the building of such a mosque would in fact bring Turks and Arabs despite their historical disagreements. Thus, by the end of June 2015, the scandal had not only exploded but also spread across the country's media, academic, political, and religious institutions. Prominent intellectuals like Radu Preda, Eastern Orthodox theologian and director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, and Neagu Djuvara, a highly reputed historian and accomplished academician, indicated that it was 'absolutely inconceivable' for an [Eastern Orthodox] country like Romania to host a mosque whose declared purpose was the study and dissemination of Islam—this would nothing less than an imminent treat to the country's religious and national identity.[38]

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[35] Daniela Stoica, "New Romanian Muslimas. Converted Women Sharing Knowledge in Online and Offline Communities", in K. Górak-Sosnowska (ed.), *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (Warsaw: Faculty of Oriental Studies/ University of Warsaw, 2011), 267.

[36] Sânziana Ionescu, "'Atentatul cu porci' la marea moschee, desființat de preotul Eugen Tănăsescu: "Nu vă islamizează nimeni cu forța! Calmați-vă".' *Adevărul* 26 august 2015. Online <http://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/ atentatul-porci-marea-moschee-desfiintat-preotul-tanas-escu-nu-islamizeaza-forta-calmati-va1_55ddb2fdf5eaafab-2cefe46f/index.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[37] Ionuț Cojocaru, "Construirea Moscheii de la București: doar un punct pe harta lui Erdogan", *Adevărul* 23 august 2015. Online <http://adevarul.ro/international/in-lume/ constructiamoscheei-bucuresti-doar-punct-harta-erdogan-1_55d9820cf5eaafab2cd5a2bf/index.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[38] ***, "După Catedrala Mântuirii, în București va fi construită cea mai mare moschee din Europa. Reacție dură a istoricului Djuvara", *Adevărul* 1 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.gandul.info/stiri/dupa-catedrala-mantuirii-in-bucuresti-va-fi-construita-cea-mai-mare-moschee-din-europa-reactie-dura-a-istoricului-djuvara-14524578>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

Former president Traian Băsescu added fuel to the scandal by attaching prime-minister Victor Ponta who responded in a like-minded manner,[39] the comments sections of the country's most prominent online newspapers were literally flooded with messages of hate towards Muslims and the Islamic religion,[40] and even the most cool-headed journalists were ready to admit that the whole issue of the mosque was at least problematic.[41] Leading intellectuals like Radu Carp, professor of political science at the University of Bucharest, and Andrei Cornea, a philosopher and classicist teaching at the same institution, expressed fears concerning a possible radicalization of Romanian Muslims through religious proselytism[42] or having Bucharest turned into a center of Islamic influence.[43]

In the end, however, what prevailed what the Romanians' acute concern for their national identity which turned into an ecodomic attempt to fill the Communist void in their common mentality with this reactionary attitude against their fellow Muslim citizens and the Islamic religion. Through the voice of Osman Koray Ertaş, its ambassador to Bucharest, Turkey conceded to 'hold back' if Romanians were 'against the mosque project' because it realized it was a 'national problem'.[44] Despite some, very few otherwise, favorable voices—such as Eugen Tănăsescu, an Eastern Orthodox priest and a native of Dobrogea who, in defending the local Turkish-Tatar Muslim community, openly accused his fellow Romanians of 'mega-hysteria', 'mega-stupidity', and 'mega-ignorance',[45] as well as Victor Opaschi, the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, who quite fairly hailed Romanian Muslims not only as 'perfectly integrated in Romanian society' but also as a 'balanced ... model of open, European Islam'[46]—the scandal showed that Romanians are so very concerned with their national identity under the umbrella of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church that any ecodomic attempt at effective decommunistization in post-1989 Romania does not yet include the acceptance of

[39] Ana Maria Lazăr, Florentina Mardale, "Băsescu, despre proiectul construirii celei mai mari moschei din Europa la Bucureşti: 'Nu există risc mai mare decât să aduci studenţi musulmani în ţară.' Cum îl caracterizează fostul preşedinte pe Ponta", *Gândul* 6 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.gandul.info/politica/basescu-despre-proiectul-construirii-celei-mai-mari-moschei-din-europa-la-bucuresti-nu-exista-risc-mai-mare-decat-sa-aduci-studenti-musulmani-in-tara-cum-il-caracterizeaza-fostul-presedinte-pe-ponta-14546622>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[40] ***, "Sondaj. Sunteţi de acord cu ridicarea celei mai mari moschei din Europa la Bucureşti?", *Gândul* 8 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.gandul.info/voteaza/sondaj-sunteti-de-acord-cu-ridicarea-celei-mai-mari-moschei-din-europa-la-bucuresti-14555579>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[41] Lelia Munteanu, "Marele Muftiu, prea mic pentru o confruntare atât de dură", *Gândul* 10 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.gandul.info/puterea-gandului/marele-muftiu-prea-mic-pentru-o-confruntare-atat-de-dura-14574929>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[42] Radu Carp, "Moscheea de la Bucureşti. Traseul sinuos al unui proiect politico-teologic", *Adevărul* 10 iulie 2015. Online <http://adevarul.ro/news/politica/moscheea-bucuresti-traseul-sinuos-unui-proiect-politico-teologic-1_559f8a78f5eaafab2c6cdc45/index.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[43] Andrei Cornea, "Bucureştiul, centrul de influenţă islamică?", *Revista 22* 6 iulie 2015. Online <http://www.revista22.ro/bucurestiul----centru-de-influenta-islamica-57342.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[44] Ionuţ Lupescu, "Ambasadorul turc la Bucureşti, despre mega-moschee: 'Ne vom retrage dacă poporul se opune.'", *Money.ro* 20 septembrie 2015. Online <http://www.money.ro/ambasadorul-turc-la-bucuresti-despre-mega-moschee-ne-vom-retrage-daca-poporul-se-opune>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[45] Eugen Tănăsescu, "Mega-moschee? Nu. Mega-istorie şi mega-inepţie", *Adevărul* 26 august 2015. Online <http://adevarul.ro/cultura/spiritualitate/mega-moscheenu-mega-isterie-mega-ineptie-1_55dda00df5eaafab2cef45f5/index.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

[46] Sânziana Ionescu, "'Atentatul cu porci' la marea moschee, desfiinţat de preotul Eugen Tănăsescu: 'Nu vă islamizează nimeni cu forţa! Calmaţi-vă.'", *Adevărul* 26 august 2015. Online <http://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/atentatul-porci-marea-moschee-desfiintat-preotul-tanasescu-nu-islamizeaza-forta-calmati-va-1_55ddb2fdf5eaafab2cefe46f/index.html>. Accessed 17/06/2018.

values and religions other than those promoted by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church.

Conclusion: Brief Assessment and Final Remarks

In post-1989 Romania Communism died as a political system following the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, who had been its most fervent promotors for over two decades. Although Communism was the only political system of the country since as early as 1945, the Romanians' collective memory remembered mostly the hardships of the 1980 which were deeply marked by severe economic problems and social interdictions as well as a general feeling of poverty, well extended beyond the realm of money and finances into the world of intellectualism and spirituality. Communist mentalities ran deep into Romanian society and everything was more or less controlled by the state through the political, educational, and economic structures of the government. When the Communist Party was dissolved in December 1989, the formal proliferation of Communist ideology was officially terminated even if it may be argued that Communist habits died a bit harder or later should this ever be accepted as a real possibility.

The early 1990s caught Romania ideologically off-guard, so the supposed intellectual and spiritual vacuum created by the demise of Communist ideology was in need of being filled with new ideologies. Thus, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church seized the moment and initiated a series of measures aimed at providing Romanians with new or different values than the previous Communist philosophy. Since Communist habits were harder to quench, one can speak of a real program of decommunistization started by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church whereby Romanians were supposed to be steered towards other fundamental concepts. Decommunistization was therefore supposed to be essentially deconstructive in matters pertaining to Communist ideologies but this negative component would have solved only half of the problem if left on its own. This is why decommunistization needed to acquire a positive side in the sense that once Communist ideologies had been dealt with, new values were meant to be put in place. Consequently, I decided to present this positive aspect of decommunistization with reference to the notion of ecodomy, defined as 'constructive process'.

Following the dramatic events of December 1989, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church set in motion a sustainable program of ecodomical decommunistization at the end of which Romanians were supposed to have been provided with a new cluster of values, both Western and Eastern as specific to their national identity. Four such attempts were identified and discussed in this article: culture, ethnicity, religion, and anti-Muslim attitudes. From the very start, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church insisted on the close dealings between its clergy and the Romanian State, so the classical relationship between church and state was set at the very foundation of the new ideological package. Privileges were meant to be singled out within this context, in the sense that the church must be supported by the state by any means necessary, including the financial support of the state for the clergy and ecclesiastical work in general. It has been shown that the relationship between church and state established the need that Romanian culture, ethnicity, and religion be made subject to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church which, quite unfortunately, revealed some close connections with the country's recent fascist and nationalist-socialist past represented by the extreme ideology of the Iron Guard and the Legionary Movement.

Thus, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church succeeded in creating a sense of national conviction that all Romanians should be Eastern Orthodox in religion, extremely proud of their ancestral origins going back in time to Dacians and Romans, that the Western Latinity of the Romanian language blends uniquely with the Eastern values of the Orthodox Church, and the need to preserve this national identity against all external threats, including—in more recent

years—radical Islam and the possibility of having global terrorism spread across the whole country. This is why, having been aided by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church to view themselves as some sort of a unique people with a distinct culture, an illustrious ethnicity, a special—if not perhaps even superior—religion, Romanians acted rather violently, especially in the press but also beyond the virtual realm of electronic newspapers, when a mosque was supposed to be erected in Bucharest on a piece of land donated by the Romanian State for this purpose. Perceived as a real threat against the very core of their national identity, a significant number of Romanians reacted quite violently as if their most revered values—their Eastern Orthodox culture, ethnicity, and religion—were dismantled and their national identity blown away by the external, non-Christian, non-Romanian, anti-Western, and anti-peaceful values of Islam.

It is significant to notice that while these ideological attempts to build a sustainable program of decommunistization were supposed to be ecodomic in nature, constructive, and positive for all Romanian citizens, it turned out that they were in fact negative and deconstructive for at least some of them. Provided that not all Romanians are culturally folk-minded, ethnically Romanian, and religiously Eastern Orthodox, one can correctly assume that some Romanians value Western culture more than their own, some are Hungarian, German, Slovak, Czech, and Gypsy in their ethnicity, and some are Protestant, Catholic, non-Christian, or even non-religious in their spiritual convictions. By insisting on the fundamental connection between the state and the church, the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church not only created the theory that Romanian culture, ethnicity, and religion—as subordinated to the Orthodox Church—are the very essence of national identity, but also severely discriminated against a significant part of Romanians who, as a result of complex historical realities, may not fall within one or more of these categories.

This is why the post-1989 ideological attempts to present Romanians with a concrete program of decommunistization under the patronage of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church ended up being ecodomically favorable only to those Romanians who embraced in the same definition of culture, ethnicity, and religion as presented by the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church. For all remaining Romanian citizens who entertained different cultural values, shared different ethnic backgrounds, and accepted different religious or non-religious convictions, decommunistization proved to be characterized by 'negative ecodomy', a kind of process which is constructive and positive for some but deconstructive and negative for others. Unfortunately, far from remaining a theoretical construct, this notion turned into a visible reality when the scandal of the Bucharest mosque caused Romanian society to unravel its profoundly xenophobic and aggressively anti-Muslim attitudes in the summer of 2015.

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