

Between God and Civic Action: Saving Heritage Buildings in Bucharest

By

Ioana Miruna Voiculescu

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Supervisors:

Professor Vlad Naumescu

Professor Daniel Monterescu

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Abstract

I have started my present inquiry with the umbrella research question: how do people turn values into action? I further specify it through my ethnographic inquiry which covers the articulation of values through action in both the secular and religious spheres. I discuss three cases of saving heritage buildings in Bucharest, churches and one market hall, covering two distinct temporalities: socialist (1980s) and postsocialist (2000s). Applying concepts from the anthropology of morality, I show how moral conceptualizations of “legality”, “heritage” and “civil society” are specified both in the private sphere of the ethical and in the public sphere of claim making, how they change under the contingencies of history, across temporalities, discourses and practices feeding into each other. The resulting picture is of co-existing ethical repertoires that do not only compete but can also complement each other.

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Introduction

In the last five years or so, there were at least two topics that heated up the Bucharest public scene splitting it in camps and eventually leading to more or less vigorous civic action. One topic was chaotic urban planning in Bucharest and the resulting low quality of city life. Concretely, a few dozen NGOs came together organizing protests and media and Internet campaigns around disastrous and illegal development projects both private- and Municipality-run. The climax was reached this year when the president of the most active such NGO (*Salvati Bucurestiul/ "Save Bucharest"*) decided to run for General Mayor of Bucharest and managed to gather 50.000 signatures in support of his candidacy. The second topic hotly debated was the project for an Orthodox National Salvation Cathedral (see Novac 2011a for a detailed discussion) of an estimated height of 130 meters and estimated cost of 400 million euro. The climax was reached this year when construction works on the Cathedral have actually begun on a location next to the 80-meter high House of Parliament, the second largest building in the world, and 5 million euro worth of public money were allotted to it.

Against over-arching theories of power, ideology, structure and culture ultimately, I side with the new kind of anthropologists of moralities/ethics/values (Heinz 2009, Zigon 2011, Lambek 2010) and ask anew the question: Where does people's action spring from? Instead of looking at the ideological frame of the socialist era, for instance, it is much more fruitful to look at people's both everyday and extraordinary action and try to discern their

justifications and, even deeper, the underlying values. How do people turn values into action? Instead of searching for explanations in the political, economical, and other spheres conceived of as working independently and constraining people's life, I choose to acknowledge that, when acting, people choose between freedom and constraint and in doing so they do not simply apply norms but have to constantly renegotiate their criteria for choosing. Take the opening paragraph, for instance, it would be very simple to relegate the explanation for this NGO or religious effervescence to the political or to the economic sphere, emphasizing interest and wish for political capital or a threatening global menace that affects all cities in the capitalist world. I choose to look at the fine articulation of interest and disinterest and, moreover, to explore how such articulations happened in the past and what possible implications they have on the present.

More importantly, my research will be dealing with what we can loosely call "heritage preservation" action coming from two different "spheres" (religious and secular) and from two different temporalities: socialism (1980s) and postsocialism (1990s-2000s). As I see it, the preservation of heritage buildings (Orthodox and Catholic churches and one market hall) is a meeting point for the religious and the secular, while the two temporalities allow for an inquiry in how the two spheres overlap and constitute each other over a period of time that includes an important moment of disruption (the 1989 fall of the socialist regime). My research focus places me in the relatively young tradition of researchers that challenge the "teleology of transition" and thus the applicability of Western models to the former Eastern bloc (Hann, Verdery 2002). In this sense, Hann's broad definition of civil society as "specific practices and normative codes through which people are made accountable and responsible to other members of the society" (1996:19) could be a good

starting point. The distinction “practices” – “norms” in this definition will require more discussion but the emphasis on responsibility fits my view of things.

Concretely, I start my first chapter by defining my own epistemic stance in the field and continue by grounding my research in theories of “ordinary ethics” (Lambek 2010), values (Joas 2000) and “multiple moralities” (Zigon 2009).

In the second chapter, I am exploring the historical case of Orthodox churches relocated in the 80s, in Bucharest. The relocation was part of an ample urban renewal project, under Nicolae Ceausescu’s socialist regime, whose epitome and rationale was the building of the House of the People (currently House of Parliament). The topic of the relocated church has received much attention after 1989, in the postsocialist context, being revalued by different actors. I will be looking at how “urban planning”, “legality” and “heritage” are constituted as values or “embodied moralities”, as ethical stances against the background of the 80s demolitions and relocations, and will discuss the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church (the dominant religion in Romania) and of other actors in this historical context.

My third chapter deals with two events that occurred roughly in the 2000s, in Bucharest, and which prompted action from both the secular and the religious sphere. In the first case, the urban development NGOs form an alliance with the Romanian Catholic Church (a minority religion) which reopens the debate around “urban planning”, “legality”, “heritage” and “civil society” issues. The second case, NGOs protest the demolition of a 19th-century market hall, is meant to deepen the discussion of values by looking into the

dynamics of establishing an ethical repertoire. Not only do values change but they also compete, become obsolete, are revived or simply dormant.

The conclusions will wrap up the discussion only to open it up even further. I will insist on the relation between the Romanian Orthodox and Catholic Churches and how theological aspects on both sides contribute to a better understanding of the cases. This way I am placing myself in the even newer tradition of anthropologists dealing with Eastern Christianity in comparison with Western Catholicism, in my case, in search of more comprehensive explanations for social change in Eastern Europe (see Hann 2010).

Methodology

The period allotted to this research was around three months, from February till April 2012. The site of my research was Bucharest, the capital city of Romania. Of the entire research period, I spent about a month doing research in the library reading mostly history books to understand the background of the historical case, theology to better understand the religious dimension and books on the architecture of sacred spaces, namely churches. Entering the field was not problematic as I had previous contacts (I have been observing the urban development NGO movement since basically its birth) and, not unexpectedly, I obtained further contacts from my interviewees.

My research also had a spatial dimension as I had to commute between the different locations: Catholic churches, Orthodox churches, NGO offices, my interviewees' homes (even outside Bucharest). I also ended up going on a tour of the relocated churches once at the beginning of my fieldwork and once at the end of it. This gave me a chance to actually

experience their current locations and observe different moments in their lives in the urban context. Similarly, I went on tours of the Matache Market Hall area, on one occasion being accompanied by another anthropologist who had written on the topic and gave me extensive explanations. There was also an important temporal dimension to my fieldwork. April was the month when both the Orthodox and the Catholics celebrated Easter. This was a good opportunity to participate in different church celebrations and experience the different temporalities: the secular temporality of the city and the religious one, the contrasts between the Orthodox and the Catholic celebratory times. Joining the Catholic Palm Sunday procession worked as an exercise in anamnesis given that I didn't participate in the actual protest processions at St Joseph's Cathedral in the past.

I did interviews with as varied actors as I could. I chose to interview both official representatives (whether of the Churches, NGOs or other) and ordinary participants so afterwards I could structure my data into official and informal accounts of the events. This proved particularly useful for my embodied/public/institutional moralities approach. The interviews themselves were not even semi-structured. I prepared questions in advance but the interview usually extended beyond my questions. Some of the interviews turned almost into life histories, the wealth of biographical data being more than welcome for my moralities theoretical approach. The autobiographical account is particularly important for anthropologists of moralities because of its emphasis on experiences, the assumption being that values are articulated experientially (Heinz 2009:9).

Finally, my own positionality was itself problematic. Dealing with people dedicated either to causes (the NGOs) or to God, I was often in the position of choosing between keeping my distance or joining in. Exercising my judgment in each situation was not

comfortable but it was definitely informative as to just how difficult it is to navigate between freedom and constraint. The ethical, goes without saying, comes with the anthropologist's territory. Further, as many of my interviewees are public or semi-public people, I had once more to exercise my judgment in deciding to take my analysis of their actions and discourses to its last consequences or not. Despite using initials to ensure their anonymity, the people in my account are perfectly recognizable. I made it clear from the beginning that the interview was for research purposes and indeed some of my interviewees showed an interest in reading my thesis. However, I am not sure that they would not find some of my conclusions objectionable.

Chapter 1: Looking For Values in the Midst of Things

“Life shall be [built in] doing and suffering and creating.” (William James)

Beyond and behind the public/private divide in anthropology, there lies the assumption that people switch from the small to the big, the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the mundane to the ritual, from the everyday to the official, and in doing so they can be tracked by the anthropologist. Celebrated authors of the everyday urban, such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, gave enchanted accounts of people’s subversive ordinary actions, from city street level, against some all-pervasive grand narrative. We need only to use the right gaze and we see the subjects of our inquiry engaging, from the everyday level, with the extraordinary burden of the State, public morals, ideology of the day, neoliberal governmentality, etc. Or we can theorize with Habermas, tracing back the moment when the public and the private separated, putting forward “communicative rationality and action”, exercised in the most profane of situations, as the citizens’ only means to ensure effective public protection of the right to participate in deciding their own political fate.

Whether prompted by a wish to (re)politicize the everyday or not, the temptation of binary oppositions remains and proves particularly strong with those authors who claim to have bridged the gap, showing how the two elements of such pairs constitute each other dialogically. Maurice Bloch’s (via Malinowski) metaphor of the “long conversation” between two times, two languages, two cognitions, two modes of remembering, two ways of being culturally and historically in the world is a beautiful illustration of that. In this logic, the ‘ordinary’ everyday element of the pair constantly, throughout time and space, challenges the ‘extraordinary’ ritualic one (Bloch 1977, 1998, 2011). Following from this is that the secular and the religious form just another dichotomy. Furthermore, the implication of the

“long conversation” between the religious and the profane is that the anthropologist is the mediator of choice, the one bi-lingual able to switch between systems and report on them.

In a rather sober(ing) intervention, Michael Lambek (2012) attacks head-on the ‘twisted’ relationship between the secular and the religious via anthropology and, consequently, reformulates the role of the anthropologist and modern scientist more broadly. As an alternative to the established view opposing the religious to the secular and placing anthropology in the camp of secular sciences (itself a pleonasm to some), Lambek suggests that the two are in a relation of “incommensurability” with one another. To put it simple, there would be no secularism without religion and neither of them without the anthropological endeavor – originating from within a secular discipline (note the role of history here) – to study or influence where one draws the line between the secular and the religious. Lambek points to the mission of the anthropologist as a responsible explorer and creator of the boundaries of incommensurable concepts and fields of knowledge. At least in the question of the secular and the religious, anthropology in particular and academic disciplines in general have an important say in the constitution of conceptual boundaries while at the same time being constituted by this boundary drawing enterprise and thus constantly having to transcend them.

I will be dealing myself with quite a few not at all unproblematic distinctions, public – private, socialist – postsocialist, tradition – modernity, sacred – profane, secular – religious, State – civil society, being the most general of them. This does not however mean that my position is in favor of a value-free enterprise, a position which modern scientific discourse is supposed to have overcome anyway, or not without amendments. By claiming the incommensurability of concepts/worldviews, I point to the overarching argument of my

thesis which is that addressing the East and West, the secular and the religious, the public and the private from a dichotomy perspective is not only theoretically unfruitful but also speaks of a Western bias (see also Hann 2010, 2012). It is a common scientific perception that modern capitalism is the creation of the Protestant spirit as Weber famously postulated it (Hann 2010), which might explain why the relationship between modernity and religion in the East has not generated much scholarship. As social scientists, i.e. both producers of a discourse on and inhabitants of the social world, we have to keep in mind that our scientific choices are very much shaped by our epistemological traditions. Following from this, there is also a risk in claiming the existence of “multiples” (modernities, secularisms, moralities, etc.) – which through overuse and abuse can become as conceptually questionable as their monolithic counterparts – and that risk is to reproduce our own epistemological stances while trying to overcome them.

From a Range of Theoretical Approaches

Given that my research focuses on how values are articulated at the intersection of the secular and religious spheres, the debate around the invalidation of the secularization thesis (originally based on Weber’s positing the unavoidable nature of the modern rationalization process) appears as one possible theoretical framework. What is there to replace the secularization thesis? Hann (2000) refutes Casanova’s (1994) model of the “denominationalist marketplace”¹ or the successful adaptation of religion to the “impositions of modern reflexivity” (Habermas 2006), the Catholic human rights discourse being exemplary in this sense, on grounds of them being Western models that fail to do

¹ This model excludes the Eastern Christian Churches from the game creating yet another dichotomy: world religions vs non-world religions.

justice to Eastern European contexts. Hann uses the case of the Polish Catholic Church to argue that a dominant religion, which was not even privatized in the first place, can have, without the human rights discourse, an emancipatory effect and help build a civil society in opposition to the socialist regime².

Both Casanova's "denominationalist marketplace" and the "civil religion" solutions speak once more of a Western bias and Asad (2003) has shown rather eloquently how secularization is a construct modeled on Christianity. Asad nonetheless assumes Christianity to be homogenous and thus overlooks Eastern Christianity (Hann 2010). Is then the privatization/deprivatization distinction relevant in my cases? First, the church relocation case shows clearly that the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to make it into the public even under Ceausescu's dictatorship without openly opposing the system. Second, although the postsocialist case of St Joseph's Catholic Church seems to benefit from Hann's observations on civil-society building in Poland, the relevance is somehow misplaced since Catholicism is a minority religion in Romania.

Finally, the city of Bucharest is both the setting for and the material transformed through people's action and not so much by "higher" forces of the Market or the Capital or Neoliberalism. A discussion of "the right to the city" (see Lefebvre 1996, Harvey 2008, etc.) would be fruitless since it focuses too much on "villains" and "heroes" whereas my data shows how villains can become heroes and the other way around. Also, "the right to the city" literature resorts to the same problematic dichotomies, such as the public and private

² Hann's concept of "civil religion" does not overlap with that promoted by Bellah, Berger, and even Taylor who are eager to usher in the age of an American type of "civil religion" supposed to give fresh strengths to the political thus settling both the political and moral crises. The latter cannot apply to Eastern European countries since it carries with a distinctly Western flavor of tolerance and openness that historically does not fit the former socialist space.

space. The work of the people on the city gives it a memory of its own but a memory constantly rewritten, erased, built as a palimpsest, illegible at best. Therefore, a discussion of memory would be superfluous as the concept needs too much unpacking. Moreover, the anthropologist needs his/her object for inquiry to be somehow 'alive and kicking'. In the words of one informant (talking of demolitions): "The city is a living organism – it's young, it grows, it develops and eventually dies. [...] The history of a people cannot be read only in the remains, archeologically". This being the case, how can one do better than reading the remains?

Norms and Values

For all the reasons above, I opt for a values' approach in researching the way people mobilize around "saving" buildings from demolition or from deterioration in socialist and postsocialist Bucharest. As I see it, the buildings in my four cases are forcing people to articulate and re-articulate their values through ordinary and extraordinary acts. The way people define the 'good' at a particular point in history, especially under conditions of uncertainty, how they negotiate the constraints of social norms to translate their beliefs and convictions into action, such should be the material of an anthropological approach focused on values. I prefer a discussion about 'values' – instead of 'moralities' or 'ethics' – because of the focus of my research. *Bref*, I am looking at how people are being moral together and how they articulate their values in what could be called a moral public debate. This being said, my use of 'values' – also an emic term – does not equate them with Kantian abstractions, they are very much connected to practices as people's conceptions of 'the good' change contingently. The 'good' and 'the right', 'values' and 'norms' are useful concepts as long as the relations between them are not of strict opposition. My general research questions are

then: How do people turn values into action? And what happens to these values after being articulated in action? For theoretical purposes, I will ground my analysis in different theories of values/ethics/morality.

There seems to be agreement among theorists that the Durkheimian view of society as the collective “good” and of individuals being bound together by their observing of the collective “good” norms without questioning them is to be avoided by the new anthropologists of morality (Heinz 2009, Zigon 2009, Lambek 2010a). Nonetheless, when it comes to the actual object for study of this new branch of anthropology, differences arise. For instance, Lambek (2010a) singles out “ordinary ethics” and rejects “morality” on grounds of the latter’s strong connotations of constraint while Zigon (2009) favors “moralities” considering that “ethics” represents already the reflective level of morality³.

Lambek (2010a), advocate of Aristotelian “virtues” and not so much of Kantian “values”, posits a special relation among the ethical, action, and language. Being ethical means first verbally committing to something and then following through with it in action. Hence, there arises a tension between freedom and constraint, between ‘the good’ and ‘the right’, the attractive ingredient and the constraining ingredient of values (Joas 2000). This tension can be used creatively to change the criteria for evaluation as ethical choices confront us with the limits of such otherwise tacit (embodied) criteria when we apply them in concrete situations known as “ethical moments” or “moral breakdowns” (Zigon 2009).

³ “Ordinary ethics” is supposed to be “relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself” (Lambek 2010a:3). Zigon’s “embodied morality” “is not thought out beforehand, nor is it noticed when it is performed. It is simply done.” (2009:260). Both definitions seem to speak of a kind of moral habitus.

Being ethical in the world is then about maintaining a balance between obligation and freedom, interest and disinterest. How do people maintain this balance? Through the exercise of “practical judgment” where “judgment is predicated in practice and proclaimed in performance” (Lambek 2010b:56). In the case of the Orthodox churches relocated under Ceausescu’s regime, the exercise of “practical judgment” in the narrow open space between liberty and constraint is manifest in the innovative technical solution of rolling the buildings away on rail tracks to save them from demolition.

Zigon’s notion of “multiple moralities” (2011) is supposed to explain how people go about solving their moral dilemmas in everyday life and working on their selves to become moral persons. Zigon clearly steers away from a Durkheimian morality, a single moral sphere dominated by a single value, and at the same time distances himself from “self-mastery” and “authenticity”, the Foucauldian goals of self-fashioning (2009:261). As social conditions are ever changing, the work on the moral self, whether in isolation or with others, never ends throughout a person’s life so it cannot culminate in “self-mastery”. Further, the same changing conditions make available to people “a range of possibilities” (Zigon 2009) of competing moral conceptualizations that they can choose from.

This “range of possibilities” is organized along three types of moralities that influence each other: institutional morality, public discourse morality and embodied morality (Zigon 2009). As I am writing about being moral together, in public, this differentiation is useful. The public discourse and the institutional moralities are in permanent dialogue, the latter informing the former without necessarily overlapping. The public morality retains only partly the content of the institutional one in the form of “people’s everyday articulations of their moral beliefs and conceptions” or it can differ from it completely (Zigon 2009:260). The

third kind, embodied morality, is – as mentioned above (see footnote 4) – a sort of moral habitus: it becomes apparent only when verbalized in the form of public or institutional morality. These three moral categories become activated in the ethical or the moral breakdown moment (Zigon 2009, 2010, 2011) when people wake up from their moral slumber to articulate their values consciously and sometimes even alter them. This is followed by the return to their previous nonconscious (embodied) state of being moral, i.e. to being comfortable in the world (Zigon 2009). It is this ethical movement that helps me gain insight into how the people in my cases articulate their unspoken individual values contributing to a current or future public debate.

What Zigon's theory of "multiple moralities" brings is the notion that a conscious (re)shuffling of values – something borrowed (from other cultures if the available repertoire is too poor), something old (religious values) and something new (secular values, for instance) – is intrinsic to the human mode of being morally in the world. Values leave traces, endure, wither away, shed their skin, and all these processes are visible at the articulation level, in the strife for coherence. This is useful for my analysis that follows the evolution of particular values from socialism to postsocialism.

In a recent piece, Zigon (2012) reaches a rather startling conclusion, that the "range of possibilities" he previously theorized did in no way announce. Instead of a "fair" competition among moral orientations, the entire work on the self, at least in the post-Soviet Russian context, is targeted at a very specific "moral assemblage"⁴ and, eventually, at creating neoliberal subjects. As Yan (2012) rightly points out this is a rather Durkheimian perspective, where one dominant set of values makes and unmakes the moral and therefore

⁴ Made up of neoliberal ethics mixed with historical strands of Soviet and Orthodox ethics (Yan 2012:4).

the social. Yan explains this by Zigon's change in focus from work on the self as articulated in individual experiences to techniques of reshaping the self by institutions (2012:4).

What I see missing from Zigon's latest "moral assemblage" concept, however, is desirable action, a lifelong orientation towards good (despite Zigon's acknowledgment of the lifelong nature of the work on the self). Zigon's actors are exposed from the beginning to disruptions and changes, hence their need to go back to a state of being comfortably in the world, which, in turn, elicits the exercise of their freedom and, implicitly, their agency. Unfortunately, according to Zigon's most recent work, being comfortably in the world involves choosing from a rather poor range of possibilities, hence the actors' appearing crushed by normative action (on their way to becoming neoliberal subjects). In the cases I analyze, there is an obvious hierarchy of "goods" and a problematization of "the right": both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches are able to successfully mobilize and centralize, hence their powerful institutional moralities, as opposed to institutions like the Government, which fail to even articulate an institutional morality, or the NGOs who strive to make their morality public around issues of legality. Nonetheless, it would be peremptory to claim that all these different moralities can be hijacked and made to come together in one powerful stream.

Taylor argues that there is a higher level of evaluation, which follows the articulation of values, what he calls "Best Account principle" (qtd in Joas 2000). As an alternative to a view of humans switching from one value/moral articulation to another, Taylor proposes an integrative (religious in general or Catholic in particular?) perspective which reveals the indispensable-for-one's-life-on-earth nature of some of our values on which their reality is predicated (Joas 2000:138). Zigon's latest work seems to suffer from a similar case of

universalism anchored in particularism as he tacitly pushes on us a different but just as totalizing “Best Account”: all-pervasive neoliberalism.

If one “Best Account” would prevail there would be no more need for a discussion of values. In practical terms, even socialism, which managed to mobilize entire populations and their material resources, pretending to have control of both their public and private lives, failed in its attempt to create “the new (ethical) man” – secular and ideologically pure. (Why should then neoliberalism succeed?) In this sense, the idea of a “public sphere” can be recovered but not at an all-discourse level as suggested by Habermas’ theorization of it ([1962] 1989) but through the practice(s) of freedom (call them “values” or “moralities” if you will) with their necessary ingredient of constraint. There is thus no need to restrict the good to the moral sphere (private) and the right – to the political one (public).

Along with Joas (2000:171), I posit the complementarity of the right (the law) and the good (the moral) since the actor doesn’t only need to justify his/her choice but to specify what the right and the good mean in a given situation. In other words, the actor needs to find the right balance between Ought and the good under contingent conditions and this requires articulation in action and not mere discourse and exchange of rational arguments. As I will show in my analysis chapters, the relationship between the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) is not as straightforward as the accounts of Habermas and the secularist camp would assume it and the response of the citizens itself bears some refining. The cases I will be dealing with show exactly how the good and the right are specified alternatively and simultaneously, both in the private sphere of the ethical and in the public sphere of claim making, how discourses and practices feed into each other.

The good as articulated in both discourses and action by the actors⁵ involved in “saving” churches can very well coexist, overlap, with the right articulated by the actors struggling “to save” a 19th-century market hall. I will not claim that by this I bridge the gap between the private and the public but I hope to open up a bit the notion of being ethical/political in the world. Turning my initial question around “how do values turn into action?”, it becomes: What are those actions that make people experience the feeling of “good-in-itself-for-them” (Joas 2000:143)? And, in order to answer it, I will look at how values change, make a come-back, are reinterpreted under the impact of historical contingencies. I aim to show that people differentiate between the good and the right, during moral crises, and in time develop their own ways of being moral/ethical/political through a learning process using practical judgment as a privileged tool. The result of this process is the building of various ethical repertoires that not only coexist but can complement each other.

To limit our view of human action to “the right thing to do” would be to crush the “corolla of wonders of the world” (Blaga 1919). The poem goes on: “And I don’t kill/ with *reason/* the *mysteries* I meet along my way⁶” [my emphasis], reminding us that this

⁵ Priests, architects, civil engineers, architects turned photo collectors and historians, historians turned priests, church goers, NGO members.

⁶ *I will not crush the world’s corolla of wonders*, translated from the Romanian by Andrei Codrescu:

“I will not crush the world’s corolla of wonders
and I will not kill
with reason
the mysteries I meet along my way
in flowers, eyes, lips, and graves.
The light of others
drowns the deep magic hidden
in the profound darkness.
I increase the world’s enigma

metaphor comes from a long tradition that gives precedence to contemplation and a view of man that stretches beyond the capabilities of his/her intellect. *Mysteries* (*Taine* in Romanian) here is a clear reference to the Orthodox word for “sacraments”; the Romanian *Taine* literally translates as “mysteries”. Conceptually, *Taine* is central to Orthodoxy and is not an equivalent of the Catholic or Protestant sacraments. In the words of Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae, the underlying idea of the Church’s *Taine* is that God can (invisibly) act/work on the visible dimension of His creation (2010). Further, the broadest meaning of *Taină* is the unity between God and His entire creation. In this unity, the human being is endowed with the special characteristic of transcending the limits of the created world, with his/her spirit and reason, being the only one capable to “endlessly deepen the meaning of the world or its wealth of meanings” (Staniloae 2010:5)⁷.

I have so far invoked action and agency as the prerogatives of being ethically in the world. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s view of “activity” (1998) and on Rappaport’s view of ritual (1999), Lambek posits the “inextricable connection between action and passion”

with my light
 much as the moon with its white beams
 does not diminish but increases
 the shimmering mysteries of night –
 I enrich the darkening horizon
 with chills of the great secret.
 All that is hard to know
 becomes a greater riddle
 under my very eyes
 because I love alike
 flowers, lips, eyes, and graves.”

⁷ “It is thus that the human being realizes better than any other unit of the world the paradoxical nature of the *Taină*, uniting the spirit as conscious reason and the matter as unconscious modeled rationality, simplicity and composition, subjectivity and objectivity, the definite and the indefinite, and even the created and the uncreated.” (Staniloae 2010:5). This is clearly an approach that transcends any distinctions that we might draw in our scientific endeavors. It is also the basis for the way Orthodoxy sees the relationship between the human being, God and His creation, culminating with man’s capacity to become deified (the notion of *theosis*).

(2007:31, 2010b). “Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a ‘doer’ but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin” (Arendt qtd in Lambek 2010b:50-1). It follows that acting and being acted upon, being both social subject and agent (Lambek 2007:32), “being freely present to one’s act [Rappaport’s indexical component of ritual] and submitting to an order that is not of one’s making [Rappaport’s canonical]” (Lambek 2010a:27) as best illustrated by rituals in general and sacrifice in particular is intrinsic to human social life. In other words, being together with other people means giving up some of our individuality to become part of a higher order but at the same time we appropriate that order by freely choosing to become part of it.

This dialectic of passion and action, freedom and constraint, value and norm is present in the *Taine* of the Orthodox Church, in its very paradoxical nature invoked by Staniloae: human beings participate both in the creation and in God, they are both sufferers and doers. Another Romanian theologian, Andrei Scrima described the attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church towards the communist regime as “a spiritual conspiracy” (2008:222). Instead of martyrdom, BOR encouraged the inner life of the believers, making sure that they became “contemplator[s] in the midst of the world” (Scrima 2008:222). This fits very well with the idea that action cannot be understood without its counterpart of being acted upon, submitting. This sets the premises for the next chapter which discusses a specific case of ethical action in socialist Bucharest whose object was the relocation of Orthodox churches.

Chapter 2: “Come and See the Wonder of Maglavit⁸”: Saving Churches from Demolition in Socialist Bucharest

Mrs. S. received me in the parlor of her flat in a one-storey house, with high ceilings, the sign of an old bourgeois architectural style for anyone familiar with Bucharest’s buildings. On the table, in neatly ordered in envelopes, there were photographs she and her friends or acquaintances had taken of the Uranus-Izvor quarter and its built “treasures”, which disappeared in the late 80s to make room for dictator Ceausescu’s megalomaniac architectural dreams. She told me how the demolitions were done according to Ceausescu’s “precious indications”, dutifully recorded by the municipal officials during and after his site visits and later on translated into scale models as the dictator was unable to read the architects’ plans. Most famously, Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, carried back and forth by an escalator, would remove and relocate at their will polystyrene models of buildings, in a 20x20 sqm scale model of the entire Uranus-Izvor area. Much in the same way, Mrs. S. took me up and down the picturesque sloped streets of the quarter, filling up with stories, images and maps the big waste land around the present-day House of Parliament, Ceausescu’s *opera magna* and the reason for the razing to the ground of this part of the old city.

⁸ “The wonder of Maglavit” refers to one shepherd from a small village in Southern Romania to whom God spoke allegedly, in the 1930s. Once the word got out, crowds of people would go to ask advice from this shepherd and get cured, to see the wonder of Maglavit (the name of the village). One of my informants used this expression to refer to the fuss around the moving of the churches on wheels and the people who came to watch.

Building Under the Strict Gaze of the Socialist State

Taken at face value, the 1974 “Systematization Law” proposed the application of unified building standards to all Romanian urban and rural areas, which even had a positive ring to it (Giurescu qtd in Lambru 2012). When they proceeded to the actual “systematization”, however, the result was a complete transformation of the built environment through massive urban demolitions, the razing of entire villages, and large scale construction of buildings among others (Giurescu 1989). To understand the extent of the transformation, one needs to go beyond the physical configuration and imagine a project meant to centralize and plan the economic and the urban and rural built environment together, with a view to balancing out development inequalities. In so doing, any and all resources available, whether human or material, are subordinated to the systematization project which penetrates all sectors of life (Sampson 1984).

As part of the national systematization plan, the old city center of Bucharest (and of all other Romanian cities) was remade into a Civic Center. The idea was, in fact, not an entirely new one for Bucharest. In the mid 1930s, there had been similar talk of building an administrative and political center in the same area, on top of the Arsenal hill. As we will see, Ceausescu’s systematization moment fits in the discourse about a larger modernization vision for Bucharest, which originates at the beginning of the 20th century and is very much unfinished today. In this chapter, I analyze how discourses and actions of opposition to Ceausescu’s reshaping the city through demolitions, more specifically, the saving of particular buildings contributes to a long and multifaceted conversation about the “right way” to modernize Bucharest. This particular episode of “saving churches” in communist Bucharest, I argue, reveals a competition among multiple moralities with long-lasting

consequences not only for the conversation about urban renewal but for a particular way of being ethical/political understood in a very broad sense of being and engaging with the social world. For this chapter, the complexities of the conversation are further deepened by the dual nature of the saved buildings, Orthodox churches, both heritage monuments and worship places.

Two of my informants (Mrs. S. and E. I.) were directly involved in the planning and execution of the systematization works ordered by Ceausescu. A third informant (Father F. S.) was a victim of the demolitions, his father having been the priest of the parish largely overlapping with the Izvor-Uranus quarter that disappeared. They all associate the beginning of the systematization works with an act of God: the 1977 earthquake, with very serious consequences on the built environment and many casualties. E. I. insists that, after the earthquake, the Institute Project Bucharest (*Institut Proiect Bucuresti*), which he was heading back then, was ordered to do an inventory of all the damages and prioritize them in order to start important reconstruction and consolidation works. This order was cancelled by another one to simply do a “lifting job” on the buildings most affected.

In the case of the first church demolished right after the earthquake, Enei Church in the heart of Bucharest, all my informants talk of a “mistake”. They acknowledge that it was destroyed on purpose because of its high “visibility” – it was facing one of the big boulevards – and that the Directorate for National Cultural Heritage, which had refused to technically approve the demolition, was dissolved that same year. However, they don’t see it as part of the organized action to build the new Civic Center. Nothing had announced Ceausescu’s intention to demolish churches in Bucharest, there had been no real precedents. Nonetheless, “visibility” as a feature is common to all the churches removed or relocated at

the dictator's orders. "Visibility"/"invisibility" and "secrecy" are two terms that seem to structure the accounts about the efforts to "save" some of the churches. The churches had to be made "invisible" and all this had to be done in secrecy.

According to E. I., only the employees of the Institute Project Bucharest knew about the plans to build the Civic Center and not even they knew the actual extent of it. In the logic of systematization, the national resources were at the disposal of the socialist state. Therefore, the idea of making the project public lost any meaning. Nonetheless, they began working with no clear plans, just site visits by the civil engineers, architects and local officials meant to map out the terrain and to do yet another inventory of streets, houses and number of inhabitants. According to my informants, this lack of definite plans made it possible to preserve the little that it was preserved, with the downside that it also led to farther and farther reaching destruction as Ceausescu changed his mind. The story of the first relocated church, "Nuns' Convent", is eloquent in this sense.

It was 1982, E. I. was doing his usual rounds, accompanied by the vice-mayor, when they reached the "enchanted garden" of the "Nuns' Convent" which included the Orthodox Patriarchy's Workshops (icon painting, manufacture of religious gold and silver objects, etc.) and a tiny church dating back from 1726. Confronted with the reality of actual buildings and people and not simple plans and inventories, which were part and parcel of his job as an engineer, E. I. becomes obsessed with finding a solution to preserve the church. I call this the "moral breakdown" moment, when the constraint of the orders from above to demolish the church crushes E. I.'s freedom to choose. His "embodied morality", whether professional (engineers build and not destroy things), religious (a sacred space) or esthetical (the beauty of the place), clashes with the "institutional morality" of the socialist state according to

which all property is subjected to the will of the state. But this is also a creative moment as his going back to being morally comfortable in the world means keeping the church. Inspired by the way a waiter carries glasses on a tray without them moving a bit, he develops the technical solution – in Romanian *translare* (more or less, “translation”) – to relocate the church and thus avoid demolition⁹. The travel of the “churches on wheels” begins with the vice-mayor’s complicity and willingness to present the idea to Ceausescu who agrees to it. Given that the socialist state ideology officially rejected religious worship, Ceausescu’s agreement to the relocation came as a surprise.

According to E. I. , this first attempt to move a church was deemed so improbable that they proceeded to work without having any official papers to back them up, just the vice-mayor’s assurance that Ceausescu had given his OK. When the works were done and the Ceausescus came to see the result, Elena Ceausescu allegedly whispered to her husband: “You see? They managed to move it finally”. Two of my informants, Father F.S. and E. I., explain her remark as unpleasant surprise to see that they had managed to do the impossible. However, I find out from my third informant, Mrs. S., that the “Nuns’ Convent” was first relocated in a sort of garden, surrounded by houses. Only later, after Ceausescu decided to expand the project and, consequently, the houses and garden disappeared, was it moved to its current location, squeezed between two big new buildings.

When prompted about the way the “great systematization” was planned, E. I. explains that everything was done as they went; they (the architects and engineers) never knew what the actual extent of the demolitions would be as Ceausescu changed his mind

⁹ After consolidating the building, they would cut the foundations horizontally, pull the building up and pour a concrete plate underneath meant to work as the waiter’s tray, and then slide it onto rail-track-like devices and roll it away to its new location; the orientation and angle of the building stay the same.

constantly. “It is like when you prepare a meal and the meal is done only when it is done”, my informant says. This tautology goes to show that the “great systematization”, despite the mobilization of huge material and human resources, was a trial and error process which is in blunt contradiction with the official ideology that held centralized economy and planning as infallible. This created a small free space between the state “institutional morality” (secular, *par excellence*) and the way it was translated in the different “private” moralities since there can be no talk of real “public discourse moralities” in a world where the distinction between public and private was at best duplicitary (Yurchak 2006, for example).

As I find out from my informants, dozens of designs were created of which only one was approved based on completely obscure criteria. According to E. I., the “Nuns’ Convent” was the first experiment in several ways: the first building to be relocated using his invention and the only not to be backed up by official documents. He explains that after the first church relocation, the “Nuns’ Convent”, a bureaucratic system was developed around the demolitions: Ceausescu would go on site visits, the people accompanying him would take notes of his “precious indications”, the notes would be turned into a very official-looking “Chancellery Memorandum” based on which the architects would start drawing plan after plan until one of them would get approved. At the very end, a decree would set the approved plan in stone as it were, turning it into a law.

So what does this mean for the “saving” of the churches? The post-1989 media, for its largest part, interpreted it as an obvious act of bravery; E. I., “the savior of churches”, single-handedly subverted the communist regime to save from oblivion some of Romania’s oldest architectural monuments. When I asked him about the risks he faced, he peacefully answered: none. This can only be explained by the convergence or accommodation between

the socialist “institutional morality” and E. I.’s own moral dispositions as the “translation” method appears to have solved his “moral breakdown”.

To some extent, the engineer’s ethical dilemma mirrors that of a whole part of the society whose sense of the moral is openly questioned by large-scale demolitions that literally disrupt continuity of living, working, leisure. As in other socialist countries, there were people who chose to openly oppose the socialist system and ended up in prison or house arrest, others were sent in exile and they protested from there but generally there were no big open protests against the regime in socialist Romania such as the ’56 Hungarian revolution, for instance. Nonetheless, when the communist bulldozers threatened Bucharest’s oldest and most “visible” churches, St Friday’s Church and Vacaresti Monastery, opposing voices were heard. There were two types of open opposition. First, ordinary people exposed themselves to what we could call “real risks” by refusing to tear down churches (the construction workers were eventually replaced by convicts who got shorter sentences in exchange). Others wept openly or even shouted anti-Ceausescu slogans as it happened during the demolition of St Friday’s Church. Second, a few art historians, architects and other prominent figures sent letters to both Ceausescu and the Orthodox Patriarchy asking to stop the destruction of Vacaresti Monastery, a valuable heritage edifice from the 17th century, and even managed to pass on the news to the foreign press¹⁰ (Giurescu 1989). I would call this second type the 80s ‘proto’ Western-type civil society and retain it for use in my next chapter.

¹⁰ Radio Free Europe, Deutsche Welle, the Guardian, and other foreign newspapers publish articles on Ceausescu’s systematization: “The Bulldozers of Tyranny”, “Save Our Churches”, “Doomsday in Bucharest”, “Les ambiguïtés de la l’Unesco”...

Both attempts spell out a “moral breakdown”. Despite the secular official discourse, religion had not been eradicated from the country and it was part of the people’s “embodied moralities”. Moreover, St Friday’s Church was a very popular one. Hanganu’s (2010) discussion of Orthodox icons in term of “biography of objects” to explain why certain icons are more effective than others based on, among others, the personal way people relate to them. Both types of protests which voiced the actors’ “public discourse of morality” (Zigon 2009) failed. But how is this possible since the “public discourse morality” is supposed to articulate, to verbalize the “embodied morality” (Zigon 2009:260)? In order to answer this question, we need to turn our attention to yet another actor, and not a marginal one for sure, the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR).

The Romanian Orthodox Church Meets the Socialist State

As we saw, there were multiple moral responses to the State’s brutal handling of the problem of the churches, all of them based on some type of judgment: the open although weak and mostly emotional protests of the “civil society”, the Church’s silent resilience and “interventions” through proxies to temper the destructive momentum, the “recorders for posterity” (such as my informant, Mrs. S.) who had inside information about what buildings were to be demolished and created almost compulsively “objects for remembering” (Radley 1990) (photographs, drawings, publishing books about the demolitions after 1989) and, finally, the church relocation technical solution.

When I ask my informant, Father F.S., about the form of resistance to demolitions practiced by his father and, more generally, the Orthodox Church, he talks about “resilience” (his father kept on performing the religious service until the very day of the demolition despite the church having been disconnected from basic utilities) and more specifically

“silent resilience” when it comes to the higher-ranks of the BOR. Patriarch Teoctist is “adamant” in his silence when Ceausescu keeps insisting that the Orthodox Patriarchy should be moved from its current location – very close to his new Civic Center – to another one, less central¹¹. A third type of resistance by the priests, which comes out of my informants’ account, is using an informal network to change the decisions of the Ceausescus through proxies: the dictator’s brothers and other influential people in the entourage of the dictatorial couple. However, the extent to which this type of resistance was successful is rather hard to prove despite stories about churches being saved due to these “interventions”¹². Now, if the “embodied morality” is unsettled to such extent by the destruction of churches that it results in open protests facing violent repression from the regime, how come BOR’s institutional response to it was silence as a form of opposition?

I will argue that in the particular case of the relocation of churches, the moralities of the socialist State, the Romanian Orthodox Church and E. I., the inventor of the “translation” method, converged. The representatives of socialist state ideology were of course interested in making the churches disappear from plain view as this would legitimate their secular “institutional morality”. E. I., the engineer, was a professional in charge of the implementation of a systematization grand project governed by the logic of high modernism (see Novac 2011b for a detailed discussion) and its underlying belief in progress. From this perspective, his technically innovative solution solves then more a professional dilemma more than a religious or aesthetic one. As for the Orthodox Church’s position, Mrs. S.

¹¹ This other location is the Vacaresti Monastery, probably the most valuable church demolished by the communists, its preservation being offered in exchange for the Patriarch’s agreement to the relocation of the Patriarchy, according to Father F. S.

¹² Sapientei Church was going to be demolished in order to relocate Mihai Voda Monastery in its place but the parishioner’s efforts saved it literally from destruction (according to Mrs. S.).

summed up wonderfully the new status of the churches relocated behind the grey blocks of flats: “You see them alright if you know they’re there.” Once again visibility/invisibility, absence/presence are not be read dichotomically by a secular mind. God is present in everything although one cannot see Him.

To support my argument, I will use a sort of parabola I heard from Father F. S. He was told by one of the actual participants that, around 1949-1950, Justinian Marina, the BOR Patriarch at that time, summoned six trusted priests to ask for their advice. The meeting took place in a dark room, in the Patriarchal Palace. The six priests were asked by the Patriarch to stay in the dark for two hours, in perfect silence, alone with their consciences, and choose between two options for the future of BOR under the communist regime: (a) martyrdom, and (b) accommodation. The result was 4 to 2 in favor of accommodation to the regime or what Conovici (2010) calls “institutional survival”. I claim that the church relocation choice mirrors this historical choice by BOR. At a profane level, it reveals, an underlying ethical judgment in favor of cohabitation with the system to ensure the survival of the institution as a whole. At a religious level, however, this emphasis on “secrecy”, on “silence” speaks again of the Orthodox belief that God acts invisibly on the visible world, as in the mystery of *Taine*, and that human beings are capable of being both this-worldly and other-worldly as long as they acknowledge the invisible presence of God. Moreover, the “institutional survival” argument is to be understood both historically as the survival of an institution and from the Church’s perspective which is eschatological. Both the ethical choices to “accommodate” to the regime and to accept the relocation solution appear in a different light once we go beyond the compromise with the regime reading.

Furthermore, my informant E. I. claims that Patriarch Iustin Moisescu, head of BOR at the time of the demolitions, was somehow “grateful” to him for coming up with the idea of relocating the churches as this gave him a reason to leave the Patriarchal Palace and go towards the Orthodox believers whose shepherd he was. Still according to E. I., the Patriarch was also “grateful” to have something to show his guests such as the Cardinal of the Anglican Church (as per a photograph shown to me by E. I.). Religious guests of the Patriarch were not the only ones “to come and see the wonder of Maglavit”; E. I. showed me photographs of various political, cultural and other public figures that came to have a look at his extraordinary technical achievement. Passers-by would stop and wonder, even Ceausescu himself visited several relocation sites. I further claim that it was here that originated not only a newly-found publicity of BOR but also a new kind of public morality more generally. What the “translation” method did was quite the opposite of what it was expected of it. By making the churches invisible, E. I. unwittingly translated from the religious sphere into the secular one of the most obvious Christian truths: you do not have to see it in order to know that it is there.

To conclude, the relocation of the churches seems to have complex and long-lasting implications for society at large. The competition between the public moralities of those times (of the State and the 80s ‘proto’ civil society) did not lead to a resolution. It was the non-public tactics of the architects in charge of the systematization (drawing plan after plan in the hope to preserve some of the heritage buildings) and the accommodating technical invention of E. I., backed up by BOR’s silent approval, which solved the dilemma. Indeed, the “moral or ethical breakdown” creates a space for freedom and choice but the choice is most of the times made under conditions of severe uncertainty, especially in the context of an

authoritarian political regime. I believe that morality, and particularly religious morality, can be a way of being political where political has a very broad sense basically overlapping with being and engaging with the social world. BOR managed to be political under these particularly tough historical circumstances precisely because the State's, the engineer's and BOR's own morality converged in the "churches on wheels" episode.

Further, this episode resulted in a new kind of public morality very much celebrated in postsocialism. Not only did E. I. gain a lot of post-1989 symbolic capital – the media called him repeatedly "the man who saved churches in the 80s" – but he gained some very concrete capital as well by being, for instance, appointed advisor for the Patriarchy as part of the project for a new grand National Salvation Cathedral whose construction has started this year. Furthermore, during the recent scandal around the demolition of a market hall (to be discussed in the next chapter), the relocation of the building was publicly pushed forward as a valid alternative to demolition. This proves that the relocation method has made it to the level of "public morality" in just a few decades; socialist mainstream ideology was internalized as practice.

And finally, the whole bureaucratic construction around Ceausescu's reshaping the city set the criteria for future urban renewal. All of my informants involved in the "churches on wheels" story say that all the systematization works were done "legally" quoting the host of documents that accompanied the works. "Legality" is made, it is learnt as you go, adding layer after layer of official documents to legitimate projects ordered from above. "Heritage" is very much defined as national value, national symbols are connected explicitly with heritage by all my informants (most of all by Father F.S. who spends an hour praising the typically Romanian Orthodox architectural style – as if there were only one). The nationalist

morality exalted by socialist state ideology (see Verdery 1995, for example) becomes part of their moral habitus, their embodied morality. Both these definitions will prove very relevant in the next chapter where I analyze clashes produced by urban development projects in postsocialist Bucharest.

All my informants frame systematization and urban renewal as a matter of “judgment”, “discernment”, “measure” and “care” (for tradition) while being quite straightforward about who is supposed to exercise all of these: “experienced architects” as opposed to inexperienced ones (Mrs. S.), architects and urban planners as opposed to real-estate developers and private interests (E. I.), architects and planners respectful of national tradition as opposed to architects producing a “design of window panes” (Father F.S.). To some extent, we are talking about a field and its rules but not necessarily in the classical Bourdieusian sense. As Lambek rightly points out, the rules of the game are not always about the “goods external” to practices (fame as social capital, for example) but also about the “goods internal” to practices as in “protecting heritage for heritage’s sake” (2010a:21-5). In the next chapter, it will become clear that this “field of experts” (architects, engineers, urban planners, even historians) connects the old practices with the new practices in a not at all univocal way.

In this sense, looking at the two different temporalities (socialism and postsocialism) allows me to explore the various kinds of ‘goods’ (or values) embedded in people’s practices and how these values interact, i.e. to “examine the juxtaposition of practices and the exercise of judging among incommensurable goods in “the art of living” (Lambek 2010a:23).

Chapter 3: “Each Protested In Their Own Way”¹³: Saving Heritage Buildings in Postsocialist Bucharest

Issues of legality, heritage preservation, civil-society building and the role of religion in the public sphere constitute the ‘skyline’ of the first case under scrutiny in this chapter, the St Joseph’s Catholic Cathedral. A closer and more analytical look, however, will reveal how the ethical is once more attached to the saving of heritage buildings with quite different implications this time. While in the previous chapter values were shaped and publicized in a context of full colonization (at least in theory) of the public domain by Ceausescu’s ideology, in the postsocialist context freedom of speech and of association are democratic givens (at least in theory) that allow for a revisiting of older values and older means of articulating them.

To open up the discussion of values in postsocialism I will briefly analyze another event that stirred public passions and debates in contemporary Bucharest, namely the very recent case of the 19th-century Matache Market Hall threatened to be demolished by the Municipality in order to make room for a wide boulevard that would connect the North with the South of Bucharest. The parallel between the St Joseph’s and Matache cases is meant to unveil a bigger picture of the multiplicity of moralities populating the current public sphere of Bucharest and, to the extent possible, explore the dynamics and the consequences that such a public discussion of values has on social relationships. How is the threat to demolish or damage heritage buildings, as an ethical moment, triggering the articulation of different types of moralities in connection to already available articulations? What does it mean to be ethical/political at the beginning of the 21st century in Bucharest?

¹³ Statement made by one informant when asked what other means of protest people used at St Joseph’s Cathedral.

“Ugly Tower, You’ll Be Down Within the Hour”¹⁴: Protests at St Joseph’s Catholic Cathedral

Over the past five years, St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral in Bucharest has been the stage of what can be called vigorous protests by the civil society against the construction of a 19-storey high office tower building (*Cathedral Plaza*) within ten meters from the church. Everyone still recalls the huge banners saying “Now, St Joseph’s Cathedral! Pray!” covering every Catholic church and the posters all over the city. This urgent call to prayer was supported by long marches and protests, including hunger strike, in front of the Government and the Romanian Presidency by the Catholic believers, monks and nuns, and the clergy in the winter of 2007. Nothing odd so far: the Catholic community¹⁵ defending their most valuable and oldest temple – the Cathedral was built in the 1850s, which makes it a heritage building, and is the seat of the Romanian Roman Catholic Archbishopric.

In 2007, the year of the vigorous protests, the *Platform for Bucharest* was born bringing together more than 40 NGOs (just a couple of members each) focused on sustainable urban development. In the history of the city, this was the first instance of organized civil mobilization against chaotic real estate development supported by corrupt urban planning practices. Their concerns were codified into a *Pact for Bucharest* covering eight policy areas to be improved: transparent decision making, urban planning, building regulations, mobility and transport, environmental protection, protection of heritage

¹⁴ Slogan used at the protests organized after the final decision of the court stipulating the illegality of the building permit for *Cathedral Plaza* came out.

¹⁵ Roman Catholicism is a minority religion in Romania (around 5% of Romanians declared to be Roman Catholics at the 2002 Population and Household Census as compared to around 87% - Orthodox).

buildings, social protection and animal protection¹⁶. Starting with 2009 the *Platform*, through its main representative *Salvati Bucurestiul* (“Save Bucharest”) became one of most important allies of the Archbishopric in the legal case they filed against the *Cathedral Plaza* developer and in the protests unfolding parallel to the lawsuit.

Of Laws...

At this stage (May 2012), after years of legal battle and five trial relocations, a final court decision is out stipulating that the building permit for *Cathedral Plaza* was issued illegally. I claim that the Romanian Roman Catholic Church (RRCC) and the urban development NGOs use “legality” and “heritage preservation” in the St Joseph’s case to become legitimate actors in the public sphere. Whereas the RRCC draws on its Romanian and general history and a social doctrine already proven successful to build a new “institutional morality”, the NGOs articulate their “public discourse morality” through legal action. What the two allies share is a vision of a Western-type of civil society standing for that part of the public sphere that mediates between groups and individuals, on the one hand, and the state, on the other, between the private and the public (Hann 2000:15).

I further claim that “legality” is shaped, much in the same way the “legality” of Ceausescu’s demolitions was constructed, as the story unfolds and the actors gain expertise or learn the “rules of the game”. The main difference between the socialist then and the postsocialist now is that Ceausescu also held the legislative power to turn the urban systematization plans into laws. In postsocialist Romania, the law is supposed to be power neutral although the application of it by state institutions appears to be strongly biased. It is its application that will be challenged through protests and legal action.

¹⁶ Press release of the *Platform for Bucharest*, May 23, 2012.

The *modus operandi* of the real-estate developer, Millennium, was the falsification of urban planning documents and, most importantly, of the various permits necessary to build the 20-storey high office tower. Ironically, it was precisely this “paper trail” that allowed the Archbishopric to build their case against the developer. Just like the innovation of one man saved the day in the 80s “churches on wheels” episode, the ‘myth’ of individual responsibility crops up in the present-day St Joseph’s case too. I learn from my informants that the technical documentation would have been illegible to the Catholic side was there not for the expertise of engineer B., a “providential man”, who dedicated the last years of his life to the cause. Like in the socialist case, legality/illegality is defined within the field of experts: engineers, architects, and now lawyers. They work as translators between the old socialist way of doing things and the present postsocialist (capitalist) practices and between institutions. Engineer B. knew people in state institutions but he was a “trusted man” (*om de casa*) of the Archbishopric.

Father F., in charge of public and media relations for the Bucharest Archbishopric, tells me that due to the developer’s “aggression”, the Catholic Church gained “voice”, came out to the “square”, the *agora*, to defend the “common/public good” of the “*polis*”, here heritage preservation, against the “system” of corrupt mayors and investor financial interests, this kind of responsibility being the Church’s true vocation according to the Catholic social doctrine. So far, it looks like the text-book case of a successful process of “deprivatization of religion” à la Casanova (1994). However, by the end of my interview with Father F., several layers were added to this reading of the Church’s position. He repeatedly underlined the learning dimension of this experience, how this was a “coming of age” for RRCC and the society at large. In his words:

“It must be done with baby steps. First, we thought that the implosion needs to be immediate [he talks about the demolition of the tower now that the building permit was declared illegal]. But now we realize that coming of age with baby steps means that you, as a Church, come of age and along with you the entire society, you no longer wait for an immediate reaction. The way we got all the way to here, it is not only about solving a problem, it is also the coming of age of a generation, of a system, of the faith that comes out of the church and into the square.”

How was it a learning experience for the Romanian Catholic Church¹⁷? The “aggression”, “the problem” worked as an ethical breakdown that forced them to use their practical judgment or choose “the lesser evil” as Father F. put it. He mentions several times the difference between the silent, discrete, “well behaved” position of the Catholic Church before 1989 and the need for voice, for coming out of the confinement of church space after 1989 when the Catholics are no longer persecuted as a minority religion¹⁸. The Catholic Church becomes “the pebble”, “the David” (Father F’s words) that takes on “the Goliath” of real-estate development allied with the corrupt state institutions. They are defining their post-1989 institutional morality in relation to the pre-1989 situation. Then they were persecuted by the socialist regime, now – by the corrupt state system and financial interests. They did not collaborate then, they are not collaborating now either. Hence the need to explain away the Archbishop’s initial agreement (from 1996) that sparked a lot of media attention and of Catholic church-goers (according to V., another informant). A generation

¹⁷ In very concrete terms, they created a body to handle the public articulation of their morality, the Public and Media Relations Department of the Archbishopric, which did not exist prior to the *Cathedral Plaza* event.

¹⁸ Note should be made of the history of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church under the socialist regime, whose property was seized by the state and given to the Romanian Orthodox Church (see for example Mahieu, Naumescu 2009).

(post-1989) and the Church itself come of age by gaining a strong public voice and visibility. To some extent, the morality of the new generation (visibility, voice) is trying to overcome the institutional morality of the old generation (“quiet”, “born of habit”).

Interestingly enough the first “lesser evil” Father F. says they chose was to make sure that the developer’s men cannot enter the premises of the Cathedral (“keep them out of our house”) so they cannot assess the impact the tower building will have on the structure of the church. When the issue is framed in these terms, we see Father F. leaving aside the “institutional morality” in favor of the theological one. The Cathedral is not, after all, any building, it is the house of God, and the need for visibility disappears when it becomes a threat to the invisible spiritual life of the church.

Finally, “the baby steps” refer to an entirely different temporality than that of the public sphere, namely eternity. “The coming of age” of a generation is safely positioning RRCC in a historical context (socialism and postsocialism) but it is not the end of the story. Indeed, the ‘good’ promoted by RRCC in the public sphere is backed by a long history of presence in the public affairs of the world. Father F. uses a comparison with the “pendulum movement” to describe this presence: sometimes very powerful, overtaking the public sphere, sometimes almost invisible. However, the Catholic ‘good’ does not need loud protests or spectacular demolitions because of it can always safely fall back on its unchanging nature. On the other hand, the NGOs’ ‘good’ needs all the loudness and visibility available to change this-worldly order because for them there is no other-worldly order in sight. Despite their shared interest in “legality”, it appears that the two ‘goods’ are incommensurable without this, however, ruling out cooperation and the complementarity of the two.

...And Protests

It's a warm spring Sunday morning and I travel by bus to a village right outside Bucharest where I am supposed to attend Catholic Mass and then talk to an informant. I have instructions: go straight till you reach the big Orthodox church and right across the street from it is the Catholic church, the "nuns' church" as the villagers call it. I reach the big Orthodox church, Liturgy is ongoing there as well¹⁹, and I look around for what I imagined to be a rather small "nuns' church". What I actually see is an impressive building, all white and clean, with a nice park in front of it and an ample staircase leading to the entrance. After Mass I manage to find my informant, V. We are driven to his house in a van that drops people off on the way. They all think I am a journalist.

"All you can hear these days is trials, trials everywhere. Back in Ceausescu's times there weren't so many trials", V., age 63, tells me at the end of a short monologue about how faith could "domesticate" today's people and teach them how to stick together and help each other in need instead of fighting. The law cannot do that. I ask him about the protests. He heard about the St Joseph's protests in his village church and decided to get involved along with other parishioners. He proceeded to the Cathedral where he found a man, an architect, who was on hunger strike and asked if he could join him. The two men then spent 14 days camping close to the Government's building²⁰. V.'s "embodied morality" reacted to the call of the Catholic Church whose "semiotic ideology" (Keane 2010) emphasizes fraternity and responsibility towards the community. V.'s Catholic "embodied

¹⁹ I later find out that this particular Orthodox church received the iconostas of one of the churches demolished on Ceausescu's orders.

²⁰ In total, there were about four people who went on hunger strike.

morality” was trained at an early age when his father (physically) disciplined him into going to church and not just lying about it. However, he did not attend church too much in his youth, during Ceausescu’s regime which strongly discouraged it, as he had to fight off plenty of discrimination already because of his “unhealthy origins” as a “kulak’s son”. These biographical details might explain in part why the St Joseph’s event constituted an “ethical breakdown” for him.

Additionally, when it comes to why the St Joseph’s Cathedral should be saved, his discourse has a distinct nationalistic tinge sharpened by his trips to Italy, France, Turkey, Israel where he could see other nations properly protecting their “values”. Heritage preservation to him is inextricably connected to national pride, an association evocative of the Ceausescu era cultivation of nationalism (some traces of socialist public discourse morality) and his own passion for history. There is also a financial component to it as he believes tourism could bring a lot of money if only our national heritage “treasures” (churches, fortresses, archeological sites) were put to good use.

His only memories of the organized civil society’s involvement (he remembered one TV show host) are about how they walked up and down the pedestrian crossing to prevent the loaded trucks from getting to their destination (the construction site of the *Cathedral Plaza* tower). But “the sabotage action” didn’t work because the construction workers worked night shifts. According to V., the protests didn’t succeed because too few people mobilized, the parishes didn’t organize well to provide more protesters, and, finally, the Monsignor (Archbishop Ioan Robu) did not go on hunger strike himself (“imagine the magnetism!”). Here he articulates some form of public discourse morality. The “baby steps coming of age” institutional discourse has not reached V. as he takes this critical stance on

the institutional handling of the whole event. Finally, he is skeptical whether they should tear down the tower at all since it would be such a waste of money. His experience at the protests left him convinced that big money and interests always prevail. In terms of moral transformation, he seems certain that steady faith and remembering God not only when we are in trouble pave the way to a peaceful life.

V.'s critiques of the high clergy being out of touch with the people (anti-clericalism), the people themselves believing in God only when it suits them, the degrading morals of Romanian society are standard public discourse morality even for average Orthodox believers. They speak of a model of cohabitation between the secular and the religious in postsocialism and also of nostalgia about better morals under the strict surveillance of the socialist state. RRCC can indeed harness the St Joseph's protests to build its institutional morality both from an eternity perspective and from a historical perspective connecting it to a Western notion of the public sphere and civil society. However, the church-goer's "embodied morality", when spelled out in such ethical moments, reveals a hierarchy of 'goods' that sometimes attaches more importance to secular values such as money, nationalism (as a "secular religion") and personal experiences of solidarity with other individuals (in the hunger strike case).

This does not imply, however, that the secular and the religious values of church-goers are in any way incompatible. Nationalist feelings, commitment to the St Joseph's cause and religious tourism beautifully come together in V.'s story about his and his wife's trip to visit the Holy Land. In the airport waiting for their flight back home, while he was talking to a Romanian who approached him because he was wearing one of the "Now, St Joseph's Cathedral! Pray!" t-shirts, his wife kept nagging him about buying several bags of Dead Sea

mud and salt as they were on a discount to which he retorted: “woman, we have perfectly good mud back home, Techirghiol²¹ mud.”

Saving Matache Market Hall: Systematization Practices Strike Back

One winter night of 2011, the Bucharest Municipality started to demolish around 78 buildings, of which 7 heritage buildings, on the left side of two streets (Buzesti, Berzei) to make room for the first section of a 25-30 m wide and 12.5 km long road. “The North-South axis” or “Uranus Boulevard” is a modernization project that dates back from the 1980s, and a sizeable one since the road will cross most of the central part of Bucharest connecting the North (*Piata Victoriei*) and the South (*Piata Progresul*). At the time of the events, the Municipality didn’t have the necessary permits for tearing down heritage buildings plus the compensation for the expropriations operated had not yet reached the citizens’ bank accounts. The urban development NGOs, the *Platform for Bucharest*, promptly intervened filing legal actions against the Municipality and winning them: the demolitions were conducted illegally, the first section of the road had no “public utility” – such were the rulings of the courts.

The NGOs also organized protests (the turn-out being much smaller than expected) and a strong media (mostly Internet) campaign. The campaign, “Save Matache Market Hall”, was focused on a particular heritage building, a 19-th century market hall, which had escaped the bulldozers but was very much under threat as it stood in the way of the road. The court decisions, the media exposure and the mediation of the then Minister of

²¹ Sea-side resort famous for the special therapeutic properties of the mud collected from the Techirghiol salty lake.

Development and Tourism led to a negotiation session between the NGOs and the Municipality in the summer of 2011. This was meant to bring peace so that activity in the demolished area could resume (construction site works had been frozen). The NGOs claimed that Matache should stay put and a general competition of urban development projects for the now empty area should be organized. In reply, the General Mayor of Bucharest suggested relocating the market hall, simply moving it a few meters. The NGOs were adamant in their opposition: the relocation would mean removing the building from its rightful urban and social context, i.e. killing it. Further, they explicitly referred to the “churches on wheels” episode as an inglorious one that “didn’t save anything”. Finally, the Mayor promised not to demolish Matache Market Hall and even to consolidate it in exchange for the unblocking of construction works²².

Almost one year later, construction works to the road have slowly resumed and Matache Market Hall still stands. But not for long. I., journalist and NGO member, tells me in a half angry half resigned voice that it is high time she stopped “obsessing” about Matache, since it is going to crumble down any day now because its entire iron skeleton was stolen by scrap iron collectors, and all it is left is a “piece of junk”. Her “embodied morality” no longer shaped by nationalist ideology, she already has a different definition of “heritage”. Nonetheless, she is trying to organize a flash mob this weekend at Matache. Will I come? I. appears to be an honest and self-reflexive person. Her ethical dilemma is written all over her features as she tries to understand her own “embodied morality” as made manifest by this event. She admits that once she steps outside the circle of NGO people, even her friends do

²² He made a press statement saying that because of the “NGOs’ market” the new road will no longer be straight and instead will resemble “the mark left by a walking and peeing ox” (http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/bucuresti/Oprescu-_Bulevardul_Uranus_va_fi_in_forma_de_pisu-_boului_0_548345181.html).

not understand her “obsession” with that building. Why is she so bent on saving it? It’s just an old building. And who are they, the NGOs, representing anyway (as Municipality representatives often bluntly ask them during discussions)? Bucharest inhabitants do not care about Matache. And they do not care about urban development NGOs.

S., an architect this time, claims that the problem at Matache is the communication breakdown between the Municipality and the civil society. This is due to the uneven positions at the negotiation table: NGO representatives, i.e. architects and urban planners and sociologists, had to sit and discuss with Municipality representatives who were at best specialists in traffic issues and therefore lacked any general picture of the project implications. He also speaks about a semiotic resistance of the Romanian mind to the concept of “old”. “It has a bad connotation in our collective mentality.” Further, he claims the Romanian dictionary definition of “traditional” includes the negatively-connotated word “reactionary”²³. “To be traditional means to be a rightist I guess,” he concludes.

As I see it, the experts (architects, urban planners, sociologists) are in a “between and betwixt” position: between all the moral feelings of why it is wrong to tear down Matache (people do their shopping there, it is a landmark in the area, it is a national symbol etc.) and the arguments in favor of modernization and the need for Matache to disappear. They also connect the past and the present, tradition and modernity, socialist and postsocialist urban planning practices. For instance, the negative reevaluation of the 80s relocation method to save buildings from demolition is done within this field and it informs the actions of the NGOs. Moreover, when S. speaks of tradition, of being a “rightist”, he speaks for himself. I., the NGO member, would never adhere to this self-definition.

²³ I do check the dictionary definition and I do not find “reactionary” in it.

The Matache story contains all the subtleties of a Shakespearian play of moralities. I will only explore a few of them. First, there is the institutional morality of the Municipality which has the actual power (both in terms of democratic representativeness and urban planning decisions). As an institution, it seems to have inherited the 80s “chaotic” practices when urban planning was done as they went and polished off at the end (with the exception now that they cannot turn these results into proper law decrees as they could then but the Municipality can and does invoke legitimacy based on representativeness). In this sense, I claim that “systematization” was institutionally internalized. The method of demolish first, decide later what to do with the empty plot also fits with the postsocialist governmentality. The neoliberal state seems to like wide open spaces and to practice “spatial cleansing” for fear of “matter out of place” and taxonomic disorder (Herzfeld 2006:143-144). In the Matache case, the Municipality also feared the social “matter out of place” in the area: prostitutes and pimps, Roma inhabitants, “a snake infested dump”²⁴ as famously described by an anonymous angry Bucharest citizen or the Mayor himself (debatable origins).

Second, there are the NGOs which, just like in the St Joseph’s case, are trying to establish their own public morality against the abusive Municipality and corrupt financial interests behind the abuses. Lacking the power to mobilize people in the Matache case²⁵, the NGOs’ practical judgment confines them to being ethical in the narrow space of legality and legal action (unavailable to the 80s ‘proto’ civil society), with a Western model of civility as their overall goal. They promote a human rights discourse, their notion of heritage is no longer national value but something more abstract: human value (the social, the economic,

²⁴ Notice that the title of the blog post is: “Destructions 80s style”, an allusion to Ceausescu’s systematization demolitions <http://art-historia.blogspot.com/2011/02/distrugeri-ca-n-anii-80.html>

²⁵ In the St Joseph’s case, the mobilization of people was done by the Catholic Church.

the urban, the historical cannot be dealt with separately). Third, there is the field of experts that emerges as some sort of interface or mediator between various embodied moral dispositions and institutional moralities, and between temporalities (socialism/postsocialism). The result of the mediation is a type of public discourse morality, the expert's morality, according to which it is wrong/right to demolish heritage buildings *tout court*. They can be the "trusted men (and women)" of any of the camps. As Lambek (2010a) says there is competition among moral claims, "goods internal" and "goods external" to practices, which is always settled by practical judgment, choosing the appropriate solution (camp) in a given situation.

Fourth, there are the self-reflexive NGO members, non-affiliated to a profession, or the church-goer on hunger strike whose ethical being in the social world is fashioned at the intersection of all the other moralities which function as a "range of possibilities" to choose from, the resulting personal ethical kaleidoscope being indeed unpredictable. Their existence make it evident that it is impossible to write about the morality of the "RRCC", "NGOs", "the Municipality" even "the developer" without falling into the trap of some sort of dichotomy, the basic one being "good" and "evil" or, just as well, "moral" or "immoral". Extraordinary ethics must be complemented by ordinary ethics. Norms must be complemented by practices. Action must be complemented by passion. By having their ethical selves fashioned at the intersection of all the other moralities, they are the "sufferers" and not so much the "doers". They are the "contemplators in the midst of the world" (Scrima 2008:222).

Conclusions

I have shown how values and their articulations change under historical contingencies and how they are passed on from one historical period to another, in my case, from socialism to postsocialism. I have also shown how ethics and morality attach themselves to buildings and how, when these are churches or heritage edifices, i.e. materiality imbued with symbolic meaning, they prompt people to action bridging the secular and the religious sphere. The need or the impulse to save is spelled out in people's ethical practices and not dictated by 'higher' forces such as power, ideology, structure and culture. However, my last chapter brought me back to my original theoretical dilemma. Whether we call it civil religion, civil society, civility (see Hann 2006), public morality or even "civilization" (as one informant did), they all seem to point into the direction of a "social glue" needed to keep together society, a neo-Durkheimian aspiration if you will. And my theoretical dilemma: Is this "social glue" indeed that uniform and unifying?

I have argued that the urban development NGOs and the Romanian Roman Catholic Church constitute their public discourse and institutional moralities around issues of legality/illegality and heritage preservation and I have shown how this construction takes the form of a learning process. I have also claimed that the Catholic 'good' is in no way incompatible with the NGO 'good' as they share a vision of Western civility. But this would mean to miss the wider picture. For values and moralities do compete whether they do it "invisibly", as in the "churches on wheels" episode, or "visibly" – in the two postsocialist cases.

Both RRCC and the NGOs articulate their moralities in a social context dominated by the Romanian Orthodox Church whose "semiotic ideology" still informs many people's

“embodied morality”. By emphasizing “visibility” and explicitly calling its public discourse a “translation” of the Catholic values, a catechesis for the entire Romanian society (in the words of Father F.), RRCC is articulating its “institutional morality” with direct reference to the Romanian Orthodox Church. The latter has been repeatedly reproached with a lack of emphasis on catechesis and with not engaging with social matters (Scrima 2008, for example, see Conovici 2010 for a more detailed account of BOR in postsocialism). But this would mean again to stop at the surface of things.

To claim BOR’s incompatibility with a Western model of civility based on its rejection of a human rights discourse is just as risky as to claim RRCC’s compatibility with it based on its embracing human rightism. In both cases, the implication would be that the actual “social glue” is one or the other religion which, I hope, I have shown not to be true. Reading the religious through a secular lens cannot amount to a comprehensive understanding of it. Similarly, Hann (2012) makes a good point that the social scientists’ are not only reading religion through a secular lens but it has been the same one for too long: the Weberian dictum that Protestantism created capitalism. Thus they fail to see how social changes impact religions and not only the other way around.

If we connect, as I did, BOR’s acceptance of the “invisibility” of the relocated churches to the theological notion of *Taine* (“mysteries”), the relocation solution loses its aspect of compromise with the temporal socialist regime, whose finite nature compared to the eternity of faith was surely obvious to the leaders of BOR. Finally, the connection sheds

light also on Scrima's statement that "we could not have been all martyrs²⁶" (2008) vis a vis the socialist regime, a reproach often heard from one part of Romanian society and directed at BOR. The reaction to the socialist regime that Scrima deems typical of Romanian Orthodoxy is an exclusive focus on the inner life of the believer, the Liturgy and the pastoral life (the relationship between the believer and his/her personal confessor and spiritual mentor). If we understand this attitude as not the opposite of resistance, then paradoxical statements such as Turner's: "Persistence [is] a striking aspect of change" (1975) will no longer seem paradoxical. And a discussion of the public life of BOR during the 80s will no longer emphasize the lack of action while overlooking this tradition of contemplation.

²⁶ Scrima was member of an Hesychastic group, the "Burning Bush", created in 1945, practicing the "prayer of the heart", which involves silent continuous repetition of the prayer until it comes to accompany every waking and sleeping minute of the one who performs it.

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