Scalar holism. Some methodological reflections on Bucharest's religious mega-projects
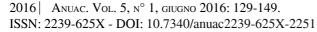
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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to reframe current religious architectural projects in Bucharest resorting to the methodological purchase of the concepts of scale and holism. In the first part, I aim to put holism back at the centre of contemporary urban anthropology. After sketching the main nuances this term assumed so far, I will point out which is its main configuration today and how it still inspires, though without any apparent recognition, some well-established approaches in urban anthropology. Through the notion of "scalar holism", I hold that scale is the new avatar of holism; therefore its properties are worth of further discussions and reflections. A more accurate description of a specific case study (the construction of the national cathedral) forms the second part of the paper together with some of the ethnographic material I have been able to collect in Bucharest so far. The Romanian capital is today a contested arena animated by specific forms of religious revival, strategies of townscape re-consecration and anti-clerical drifts. In order to figure out how these social facts interact, I matched nation-scaled contextualization with city-scaled practices and discourses reported in my ethnographic accounts. Here holism – intended as a theoretical approach based on the concept of scale – comes back at the heart of the matter: at the light of the Bucharest example, the script ends offering some reflections on its analytical and methodological value.

Keywords: Scale, Holism, Religion, Public space, Bucharest's Orthodox Cathedral.

Introduction

At the top of the Arsenal Hill, one of Bucharest's highest points, an impressive construction site is at work[1]. Even at late night, workmen, cranes and aerial work platforms are still in action, illuminated by imposing floodlights. Hectic work rhythms have to be kept up to build the biggest Christian Orthodox religious complex in the world within the next three years. The «Cathedral for the Salvation of the Romanian People» (in Romanian «Catedrală Mântuirii Neamului», henceforth CMN), is rising surrounded by four minor buildings, right at the back of the most known symbol of the city, the Palace of the Parliament, a landmark of the late Ceauşescu's communist era.

In addition to this, two other cases draw the attention to the growing presence of religious elements in the urban milieu of the capital. In the autumn of 2015, plans for a new mosque were included in the agenda of the Bucharest urban development bureau. Even though the local Muslim authority talked of «the largest mosque in a European capital, it will be the largest in just Romania. Apparently, the Turkish government is to finance it, while the Bucharest municipality has already provided a suitable location in the northern part of the city. Even more recently, the senate approved a rather unusual proposal: to build a 25 meter cross – adorned with 40 light bulbs – in the heart of the capital, as symbol of resurrection after the dark communist era. Even if this last project is unlikely to be implemented, it still retains some relevance if we are to study different strategies of marking urban public space that operate by means of religious signifiers.

This paper is an attempt to reframe current religious controversial architectural projects in Bucharest resorting to the methodological purchase of the concepts of scale and holism. In the first part, I aim to put holism back at the centre of contemporary urban anthropology. In fact, holism has always maintained a core position in anthropological practice and theory, its features changing together with the main streams of thought which left a mark in the discipline over the years. After sketching the main nuances this term assumed so far, I will point out which is its main configuration today and how it still inspires, though without any apparent recognition, some well-established approaches in urban anthropology (Low 1999, 2002; Brumann 2012). Recent criticism about holism (Candea 2007; Cook, Laidlaw, Mair 2009) have been addressing a specific understanding of it, whose roots have to be found in the «world-system» paradigm spreading since the 1970s. Instead, through the notion of «scalar holism», I hold that scale is the new avatar of holism; therefore its properties are worth of further discussions and reflections.

A more accurate description of one (the national cathedral) of the three cases I sketched above will be presented in the second part of the paper together with some of the ethnographic material I have been able to collect in Bucharest so far. The Romanian capital is today a contested arena animated by specific forms of religious revival, strategies of townscape re-consecration and anti-clerical drifts. In order to figure out how these social facts interact, I matched nation-scaled contextualization with city-scaled practices and discourses reported in my ethnographic accounts. Here holism – intended as a theoretical approach based on the concept of scale – comes back at the heart of the matter: at the light of the Bucharest example, the script ends offering some reflections on its analytical and methodological value.

Fifty shades of holism

Ton Otto and Niels Bubandt edited recently an excellent anthology about holism aiming to show how such a fraught and problematic concept «is still at the heart of the anthropological endeavour» (2010: 1). The term is indeed an ambivalent one, as in the very same volume different contributors tend to identify two (Holbraad) or three (Kapferer) main «forms» of holism. I start by quoting the latter one because of the clarity of the distinctions he operates:

> Holism has at least three distinct uses in anthropology: (1) anthropology as a holistic dis-
> cipline in which potentially all branches of human knowledge may be engaged to under-
> standing the specific practices of human beings, (2) the study of human society and com-
> munities as wholes in which all practices are interconnected and mutually influential, and
> (3) holism as a search for the principles whereby assemblages or forms of human social
> realities take shape (Kapferer 2010: 187)

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

analytical tool[2]. Though, George Marcus has downgraded the role of methodologic re-flectivity to rather highlight the aesthetic pull that holism exerted in socio-cultural an-thropology: «holism […] has been less a theoretical problem or a topic of methodolo-gical concern than a regulative ideal and an aesthetic of practice and discourse express-ive of professional culture» (Marcus 2010: 28).

Some other anthropologists discussing the «sitedness» of ethnographic fieldwork found themselves evaluating the relationship between the holistic logic engendering multi-sited research and some possibilities to overcome its shortcomings, like «bounded-site research» (Candea 2007) and «un-sited research» (Cook, Laidlaw, Mair 2009). This specific form of holism is firmly rooted in the «world-system» strand that developed in social sciences starting from the late '70s, whose main by-product in an-thropology was George Marcus' multi-sited ethnography (1995). We can label this fourth kind as «systemic holism». Its theoretical point of departure holds that «ac-counting for local ethnographic phenomena must involve locating them within an en-compassing trans-local "system" located theoretically at a "higher" level» (Cook, Laid-law, Mair 2009: 48). Candea calls it «new holism», setting it against the old society-based one (the Kapferer's second kind of holism). According to him, anthropologists cannot escape the arbitrary framing of their field-sites and multi-sited ethnography is not going to change this: «with multi-sitedness we have eschewed the contrived totality of a geographically bounded space for the ineffable totality of a protean, multi-sited "cultural formation"»[3] (Candea 2007: 180). Criticism here is not targeting holism itself - which is a moving target - but rather the system-orientated nuance it adopted in multi-sited research. Still it sounds odd to define «new» an approach whose ideological roots date back to the seventies and which has been already widely downgraded be-cause of the totalizing tendencies it retained. This is why it seems reasonable to focus on the new guise that this protean term assumed in the last years.

First, it must be acknowledged that Marcus himself has adopted more recently a softer conception of holism. For example, the interest in grasping whole systems comes out more cushioned, leaving room for a less value-laden definition. Thus, holism be-comes «a particular style of thinking [which encourages the researchers] to be broad-minded, to contextualize the particulars in which they specialize in wide scale and scope, and to discover unsuspected connections and make something of them» (Marcus 2010: 29). Therefore, the choice to put aside any interest in parts and wholes is a decis-

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2. Holism can also be an object of ethnographic description, like proved by scholars as Willerslev and Pedersen (2010), Wagner (1991) and Strathern (2004).

3. In fact Candea rightly highlights that Marcus left open the *sited* part of his multi-sited approach. On the other hand, it must be reminded that in specific domains like migration studies, scholars largely re-sorted to multi-sited ethnography (inspired rather by the *multi*) producing relevant findings (especially in Italy see: Riccio 2011; Boccagni 2014; Gallo 2011; Cingolani 2009; Capello 2009; Vietti 2010). The huge literature about migration studies also offers interesting cross-fertilizations between transnational-ism and city-scaled research (Glick Schiller, Caglar 2007, 2011).

ive one when it comes to rethink holism from a new perspective: for Tim Ingold it is thus necessary «to dissociate [it] from a concern with wholes. Holism is one thing, totalisation quite another, and [the] argument for holism [must be] … an argument against totalisation» (Ingold 2007: 209 in Willerslev, Pedersen 2010: 263). Stripped of its etymologic root, holism is not anymore about ὅλος: its understanding becomes «dehomogenized, destructured, fragment-friendly» (Murawski 2013: 62) and its mission not dedicated anymore to «grasp whole systems» (Marcus 1986:91). The transformation from «wholism» to «hole-ism» is complete.

It is exactly this kind of holism which is informing some well-established paradigms in contemporary urban anthropology. The term is also mentioned in the definition that Setha Low gives of the discipline, which «combines the strengths of participant observation and intensive research with small groups with holism and political economy within a comparative framework» (Low 2002: 15999). If we are to stick to such an interpretation, then handling different scales should become a precondition, rather than a simple analytical or methodological choice among many others. Driven by scale-thinking, holism becomes a theoretical commitment to fill some gaps and holes by tracing «causal connections running all the way from national law and macroeconomic processes to the peculiarities of historically grown neighbourhood boundaries» (Brumann 2012: 10). It is such a double movement – jumping from political economy to the ethnographic ground – that sketches a first, raw understanding of scale. On one hand, it maintains the typical verticality of the systemic school and of the Burawoy's «extended case method». However, unlike the former, it does not necessarily bear any simplistic top-down ideology, rather leaving room for a sort of causal open-endedness. A little excerpt from Burawoy's methodological manifesto illustrates the employment of different scales as a tool to unpack local power strategies:

> I could have extended the principle of structuration by regarding the arrangement of state and classes within Zambia as a structured process nested in an external constellation of international forces. Instead I stopped at the national level and looked upon 'international forces' not as constraints but as resources mobilized by the ruling elite to legitimate its domination (Burawoy 1998: 20).

Interestingly enough, Steven Sampson published in 1984 a monography about socialist planning in a Transylvanian town. In the first pages we find a description of his method, «The Vertical Slice Approach»: «we select a discreet societal institution (Romanian planning apparatus) and examine how it manifests itself through all the levels of society (from the national polity down to the community) » (Sampson 1984: 10). What if we replace the aforementioned institution with a specific project of religious architecture (the national cathedral)? In accordance with Sampson's vertical strategy, I propose to match some ethnographical account of how the CMN is perceived on a city-based layer to a broad contextualization of the institutional actors involved in its realization on a national layer. My point is that the wider process of post-communist «re-

consecration» the CMN is part of would not emerge properly without a multi-scaled methodological effort. «Scalar holism» is then an approach which encourages the researcher to take advantage of different levels of interaction in the name of causal open-endedness (or indeterminacy). Being it multidimensional by definition, it is the opposite of «flat» anthropology (Latour 2005: 172).

In the next sections, I hope to show how thinking through scales can turn out to be productive in grasping recent changes in Bucharest's architectural landscape and religious atmosphere. The following paragraph contains a few lines introducing some basic information about religions in Romania, after which I focus on the anti-clerical nuance of the demonstrations occurred in Bucharest in the autumn of 2015.

«The bible is modern, but they are not»

There are eighteen recognised cults in Romania, each denomination receiving public funds according to the principle of proportionality. According to the 2011 census, the 86% of the population belongs to the Romanian Orthodox Church, followed by Roman Catholics (4.62%), Reformed (3.19%) and Pentecostal (1.92%). The Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek Catholic) has been officially recognised in 1990 after more than forty years of clandestine survival during communism. Though, the disbandment of this Church made the great majority of their components pass to the Romanian Orthodox Church: while in 1930 the Greek Catholic composed the 7% of the religious population, they amount today only to the 0.80%. The Romanian Orthodox Church is organized in the form of the Romanian Patriarchate. The Holy Synod is the highest authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It is formed by six metropolitanates, sixteen archbishoprics and thirteen bishoprics accounting for Romania, plus some representatives for Romanian Orthodox communities abroad. The Patriarch is the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

On November 3rd 2015, fifteen thousand people rose up against the main political institutions deemed responsible for a dramatic accident which caused the death of dozens of youngsters in a Bucharest club on October 30th. After protesting in front of the Government, the big crowd scattered in different directions: while some targeted the House of the Parliament or the local municipal institution, some others went protesting in front of the Patriarchal see, shouting slogans against the new cathedral and the Patriarch.

The following day, seventy thousand people all around the country took to the street. The head of the government, Victor Ponta, resigned in the morning, forcing the head of the Republic Klaus Iohannis to choose a new Prime Minister to lead a new government. The lack of public participation and of support for the victims by the Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC) during the three days of national mourning was then the spark for the burst of anti-clerical sentiments. In Sibiu, a Transylvanian city whose identity is strongly forged by its Saxon roots and Habsburg heritage, me-

dia reported that at the sound of the cathedral's bell the people started booing and shouting «We want hospitals, not cathedrals! » («vrem spitale, nu catedrale»), «Shame on you!», «No politics in churches!», and «Thieves!». In Bucharest – a city well trained with demonstrations in the last years - outright anticlerical performances took place: for example, a man dressed like the Patriarch went collecting money for indulgences among the protestors. This is a form of satire engendered from the atmosphere of general de-legitimization of the local authorities (political, administrative, religious etc.) one can breathe during street demonstrations. In other words, Church representors had come to be perceived as part of the «system». This could sound even more astonishing after considering that the ROC did not suffer of such a widespread unpopularity not even during communist times. Some people rightly pinpointed that Patriarch Teoctist, the one who experienced the transition to post-communist, was contested and shouted «Teoctist Antihrist!» («Teoctist Antichrist»). Discontent, though, never rose to the point to contest the whole ROC as a corrupted institution because of its representatives (that is mainly the Patriarch and the hierarchs, but not exclusively, for the disappointment of many people targeted the alleged excessive wealth priests enjoy in contemporary Romania).

In the introduction, I briefly described three cases that show how religious monuments and houses of worship re-gained relevance in marking Bucharest's post-communist public space. They all represent – although for different reasons – a process of symbolic demarcation by means of religious signifiers. The giant cross to be installed in University square has been described by the senator who proposed its construction as a symbol of resurrection after the communist Dark Age. In July 2015, the land where the mosque is supposed to be built was defiled by a Christian-orthodox protester who buried three dead pigs. Two months later a few hundred people gathered on the same land to plant crosses (one for every bystander, around 350 crosses plus a one tonne stone cross) and re-Christianise the area, while an Orthodox priest celebrated mass[4]. And, finally, the erection of the CMN has been explained by Patriarch Daniel as a compensation for the five churches torn down in the area under Ceauşescu's will. Moreover, the fact that the dome of the new cathedral will tower over the hallmark of the communist regime (the «House of the People», today «Palace of the Parliament») bears an evident token value: after half a century spent in the shadow Orthodoxy is back at the core of public life, taking its revenge over communist materialism and its atheist ideology.

At this point, it should be clear that Bucharest is undergoing – among other things – a general process of re-consecration of its public space and another of contestation towards the Orthodox clergy. Restricting the discourse to the cathedral issue, my hypothesis is that, if Orthodox institutions are losing legitimacy in front of the faithful, some of the reasons have to be found in the controversial strategy adopted by the ROC hier-

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4. The priest celebrating the mass was actually on retirement, while the whole initiative was soon disapproved by an official press communication of the Romanian Patriarchate.

archy to occupy the public arena. From one side, the gigantic cathedral is widely per-
ceived as a form of 'over-presence' in the architectural landscape of the capital (and in
the taxpayers' pockets). On the other hand, the absence of any public declaration of
support towards the victims of the fire kindled an already heated atmosphere. Protest-
ers addressed mainly the Patriarch in this specific case, since he declared that «people
should go to the church and not to the club»[5], while the ROC spokesperson explained
the absence of any Church representor by replying that «they had not been invited»[6].
This inability to step back and apologize with clarity fostered widespread displeasure
against Orthodox hierarchs. Only some days later, on occasion of a video message shot
to quieten the conflict, Patriarch Daniel added that «we apologize if our words have
been misunderstood»[7].

Another brief ethnographic vignette from the demonstration days helps to frame
what is at stake: during the last days of still significant protests – just a couple of days
before that the people meeting in University Square became just a few dozens – I ran-
domly joined some men in their forties who were talking about what was wrong with
the ROC. One of them started commenting on the attitude that Orthodox clergymen
had assumed recently: «The bible, the faith… they are modern! Their message is mod-
ern! But they [Orthodox hierarchs and priests], are not!» His dissatisfaction was due to
the cold attitude that some Orthodox priests kept regarding the fire at the club: since it
happened during a hard rock concert, some clergymen justified the tragedy as a direct
consequence of the celebration of Satanist music. This is to remind the reader that cur-
rent anticlerical streams are not necessarily sustained by atheists[8] or «militant secular-
ists»[9] (Habermas 2008). If one excludes the youngest generations, the integrity of reli-
gious «belonging» and «believing» (Davie 1990) is not at risk: it is common to hear
people in Bucharest complaining about Orthodox clergy and then immediately pin-

5. www.gandul.info/tragedia-din-clubul-colectiv/patriarhul-daniel-reactie-nervoasa-dupa-tragedia-din-
colectiv-sa-vina-lumea-la-biserica-nu-la-club-14872479.
6. www.ziare.com/bucuresti/stiri-life-show/reactia-bor-dupa-tragedia-din-colectiv-nu-am-fost-invitati-
5777942
7. www.agerpres.ro/social/2015/11/05/patriarhul-daniel-ne-cerem-iertare-daca-unele-cuvinte-ale-
noastre-au-fost-insuficient-de-lamuritoare-16-17-01
8. Whose population represents only the 0.2% of the whole nation and the 0.43% in Bucharest. Never-
theless, their number has grown by three times in the last ten years. (Data from the 2012 national census
see also http://www.gandul.info/stiri/recensamant-2012-harta-noii-romanii-9978083).
9. Beaumont and Baker (2011) define one of the elements of the postsecular city «the indication of di-
verse religious, humanist and secularist positionalities». Even thought the controversy presented in this
manuscript is animated by similar positionalities, it would be inappropriate to label Bucharest as such.
The postsecular city the authors have in mind arise «by contrast to the utopian liberal uplift of the secu-
lar city (in which the role of the church and theology is to act as force of social progressive change and a
cultural exorciser against all oppressive practices which reinforce hierarchies of power and
dependency)». Such a secular city never existed in the Orthodox world, where state-church relationships
are radically different from the Western Christian one.

pointing their Orthodox Christian identity[10]. The heart of the matter is not related to personal faith or religious identity, but rather to the perception of Church representatives at a time when their presence is being strongly reaffirmed throughout many layers of public life (the most debated topics being teaching religion in schools; the liaison with some political parties during elections and the impressive church-building rates in the whole country).

Brief history and financing of the national cathedral

The project of the national Orthodox cathedral was firstly conceived after the Kingdom of Romania won independence from the Ottoman Empire following the 1877 Russian – Turkish war. Due to lack of resources the project was temporarily abandoned and regained momentum after 1918, when the Romanian kingdom incorporated Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bucovina and formed the so called Great Romania. It was within this context that the current name took form. Anyway, during the interwar period the Orthodox clergy could not find a suitable location for the new building. Therefore, after the WWII, the project was put on the back burner until the communist regime had collapsed. After communism, the rapid re-churching of Romanian cities, towns and villages made this project come to the fore once again. Following a decade of tense negotiations about the location of the new cathedral, in 2005 State and Church representatives finally agreed upon placing it on the Arsenal Hill, at the back of the Palace of the Parliament.

The institutional actors contributing to its realization are manifold. In 2005 The Parliament approved the previous governmental ordinance regulating the main financial and property issues: the Romanian Patriarchate was accorded the plot of land where the cathedral is now arising free of charge, while the money necessary for the construction would have been provided by State organs under the request of the beneficiary. Governmental funds contributed with 146 million Lei, that is around 32.5 million €, to the total expenses (amounting to 206 million Lei on June 2015[11]), when the Bucharest municipality and Bucharest city districts earmarked at least 63 million Lei[12] in the 2009-2015 period. As already highlighted, State and Church institutions are not the only actor behind Romania's massive re-churching. Rich businessmen, private entrepreneurs and construction firms, parish communities and everyday faithful often lie behind the erection of new houses of worship. To a some extent, this is the case for the

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10. At this purpose, an episode reported by media during the anti-clerical protests in Sibiu is telling: during a harsh confrontation between some protesters and Priest Constantin Necula – a local archiepiscopal advisor famous all over the country for his fresh communication style – the priest asked to say all together the "Our Father". The background noise ceased and all the people started praying immediately, thereafter the demonstration went on.

11. This is the sum declared by the person in charge of the Romanian Patriarchate, Pr Nicolae Crângaşu. See www.b365.ro/cum-arata-acum-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-galerie-foto_231167.html

CMN as well: according to the Romanian Patriarchate, till March 2016 private dona-tions have covered the 35-40% of the expenses[13] (considering only the cathedral build-ing, thus excluding the cadastral value of the land of 200 million € and future costs like the finishing touch, paintings and the construction of the rest of the religious com-plex). In order to collect such donations, starting from 2009 Patriarch Daniel himself inaugurated a capillary campaign of fund-raising in all the parishes of the country and in the Romanian Orthodox communities abroad.

The role of state financing represents the main difference from other recently built Christian-Orthodox cathedrals, like St. Sava in Belgrade or Christ the Saviour in Mo-scow[14], whose funding has been sustained wholly or in large majority by private sup-porters and by faithful's donations (Aleksov 2003; Eady 2009; Sidorov 2000). Public funding of the new national cathedral – which belongs to a *private* institution of public interest - is, ultimately, the most widely criticised aspect of the whole project. From militant secularists[15] and all those shouting «vrem spitale, nu catedrale» to those who simply expressed some doubts, all of them opposed this project in the name of social justice, calling for the public spending to be more oriented towards welfare priorities.

An institutional revival

Thus far, I have addressed two main drifts marking the religious atmosphere one can breathe in today's Bucharest. I called the first a 're-consecration' of the public space, and the second a strong 'anti-clerical' wave. Aiming to show how these two tend-encies influence each other I will resort to the concept of scale, whose usefulness be-comes immediately apparent through contextualization. Scale has primarily to be inten-ded as the «size» (Gronhaug 1978) of a certain layer of social organization: consider for example the range from household (Marston 2000) to neighbourhood, city[16], region,

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12. www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/bucurestenii-finanteaza-fara-voie-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-228502; www.pmb.ro/institutii/cgmb/buget/docs/2015/20151112/2.21-
2_administratia_monumentelor_si_patrimoniului_turistic_situatia_lacasurilor_de_cult_540_541.pdf;
www.gandul.info/stiri/fotografia-de-moment-a-catedralei-mantuirii-neamului-500-de-muncitori-lucreaza-zi-si-noapte-pentru-ridicarea-celui-mai-mare-lacas-de-cult-din-romania-10668322 (accessed on 05.01.16). This sum is incomplete, since Sectors 1 and 5 have not made public whether and how much they sustained the project.
13. This is because of the taxes the beneficiary has to pay back to the state concerning VAT and workers' social insurance.
14. Being the current Moscow's cathedral a faithful reproduction of the one destroyed by Soviets, the money coming from public sources has been siphoned in the name of the local cultural heritage.
15. A perfect example of what I mean by this term is the deputy Remus Cernea, former president of the association "Romanian Secular-Humanist Association" (ASUR). In the name of state secularity, he has been organizing protests and demonstrations against the massive public financing of cults and the realiza-tion of the CMN through public money. The slogan "we want hospitals, not cathedrals" has appeared for the first time in the context of such protests.
16. One can also consider towns and villages, when referring to suburban and rural areas.

nation-state, supranational entities and so on[17]. It is also what Burawoy calls «level» in the quotation above. Adopting a holistic perspective would firstly mean to make sense of the Bucharest' recent urban developments I mentioned by locating them in their national context. According to the same logic, the new national cathedral has to be read against the background of the stunning church-building rates that Romania registered in the last twenty-five years (and that seem far from abating).

According to a survey conducted by the State Secretary for Religious Affairs[18], from 1990 to 2015 8.413 houses of worship belonging to the eighteen cults recognised in Romania have been finalised and 1.578 are on construction. This means that after the collapse of the communist regime, every day a new house of worship has been arising in Romania. For what concerns the ROC, 3.191 new churches (considering also chapels, monasteries etc.) have been finalized, while around 1.078 are still on construction. These data show that only 60% of the houses of worship erected after 1990 belong to the ROC, while Pentecostalism and Baptist cults have been able to build respectively the 10.68% and the 5.74% of them (despite they represent only the 1.92% and 0.60% of the Romanian population).

The construction of new churches was the very first point of the agenda of the first post-communist Orthodox Holy Synod in January 1990. Some of these buildings are imposing cathedrals, since the ROC intends to erect more representative buildings in its bishoprics. This is also the case for the CMN, one of the main motivations for constructing it being the small capacity of the current patriarchal cathedral. The process of post-socialist churching of the whole country is a complex one, whose reasons depend on many factors: firstly, the chance to live religion publicly again made evident the faithful's need of more (and roomier) churches. Private donations coming from simple faithful as much as from construction firms, wealthy businessmen and entrepreneurs constituted an important source of financing. Furthermore, state institutions (not only the government, but also counties and municipalities) tried to compensate for the communist anti-religious policies by allocating substantial funds for new houses of worship. The ROC has regained its prevalence and strong presence in Romanian villages, towns and cities by constructing new (sometimes huge) houses of worship at a striking pace. This process is only partly explainable as a material and symbolic compensation in regard of the abuses suffered during the Communist regime[19]. For example, beyond the re-establishment of those bishoprics disbanded by communists, in the post-socialist era seven new bishoprics have been created: Slobozia și Călărași, Harghita și Covasna, Alexandria, Giurgiu, Tulcea, Slatina, Sălaj. Therefore, since every bishopric must include

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17. My understanding of «scale» is here very basic, since my aim is rather to reflect on an inter-scalar methodological approach. The fact that I used terms like «layer» and «level» as synonyms for it suggests that «scale» also suggests the conceptual neutrality of the term. Nevertheless I am convinced that anthropology can fruitfully draw on Human Geography in regard of phenomena of «scalar structuration» and «sociospatial processes» (Brenner 2001: 604)

18. www.culte.gov.ro/library/files/noutati/situatie-lacasuri-de-cult_2015_forma_de_pe_site2.pdf

a representative cathedral in its borders, in the last 25 years, I esteem that 15 new cathedrals[20] have been built in Romania, but in only six cases the construction works are over. Many construction sites (eleven on fifteen) have been set in the very first years of the 1990s, but only the economic growth experienced in the next decades made it possible to finalise them: the first to be ready was the one in Slobozia in 2004, the last one the Suceava cathedral in 2015.

FIG. 1: *The Cathedral for the Salvation of the Romanian People on construction. In the background, the Palace of the Parliament.*

19. A proper discussion of the impact that 40 years of communist rule had on religious life in Romania is definitely out of the reach of this short contribution. It is worth mentioning that the collaboration between the ROC and the communist regime allowed Orthodoxy to survive and keep their basic activity alive, at a time when other denominations had been disbanded (like the Greek-Catholic Church in 1948) or harshly persecuted (Evangelical Protestant and Jehova Witnesses). In exchange, around the 80% of the priests cooperated with the communist secret police by giving the information they received from confessions (Stan, Turcescu 2007: 78). On the other hand the late Ceauşescu era caused the destruction of twenty Orthodox churches (and the relocation of a few others) in order to realise the new 'civic-administrative center' in the heart of the capital: after almost thirty years, church demolitions still represent an open wound in many locals' collective imagination.
20. Excluding the national cathedral in Bucharest, the cities welcoming the construction of a new cathedral after 1990 are Zalău, Arad, Oradea, Suceava, Baia Mare, Bacău, Fagaraş, Caranşebeş, Turnu Severin, Buzău, Curtea de Argeş and Slobozia. Some other cathedrals are in construction all over the country (for example, in Mioveni and Fălticeni), but they do not serve as bishopric see (thus their classification as such is improper, though their size is way bigger than a simple church).

In a nutshell, a true religious revival is happening in Romania after Communism. Most importantly, such a revival does not only entail that forms of «believing», «belonging» or «practicing» (Davie 1990) gained new public visibility after 1990, but also portrays an institutional revival. By this term I allude to the fact that the ROC has started a process of administrative re-organization, capillary church building, strengthening of media services and enlargement of both clerical and lay personnel. At the same time, by exposing some ethnographical data from Bucharest and matching them with national-based data, I do not infer that no other level of interaction is relevant nor I suggest adopting a simple top-down approach. Specific cases like the construction of the national cathedral have shown that the actors participating are manifold and refer to many levels of social organization.

State funds for cults have been growing year after year, marking a new record in 2014 after a foreseeable decline due to the economic crisis (see table 1). The last column of the following table shows the money allocated by the government to the construction and the restoration of houses of worship (for every recognized cult in the country and according to a proportional redistribution, keeping in mind that Orthodoxy is the faith of 86% of the population in Romania). The 2014 budget reserved a significant sum for constructions and repairs – 148 million Romanian Lei (about 33 million Euros) – but one third of this sum has been swallowed by the construction of the national cathedral.

This last table does not represent all the public money dedicated to religious edifices: regional councils, municipalities and district councils[21] constitute further means of economic supply. On a national scale, the material conditions at the base of such an institutional revival of the Romanian Orthodox Church have been provided by the constant growth of governmental funds assigned to recognised denominations: in this sense, the state has played a major role in developing an outright church-building industry in Romania. On a symbolic level, this process has been intended as a form of re-consecration of a domestic soil spoiled by communist profanations[22]. Such a re-consecration is being carried out in the capital mainly through the construction of the national cathedral, ostensibly a «symbol of national dignity»[23]. Widespread dissatisfaction with Orthodox Church hierarchs in Bucharest is fuelled by the cumbersome presence of the new national cathedral, a hulking project which represents the tip of an iceberg consisting of the thousands of new churches and a dozen of new cathedrals that have been mushrooming in the country in the post-communist era.

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21. Bucharest is organized in six districts (with their own budget and local mayors) plus the city municipality, which manages the richest budget and is run by the mayor of Bucharest.
22. In the very same area where the construction site is, Ceauşescu's "systematization" of the city centre erased whole neighbourhoods, thus abating or relocating also churches and monasteries. In order to commemorate this dramatic event, the new cathedral will include five altars, one for every church destroyed in the area.
23. http://www.construimcatedrala.ro/

TAB. 1: *Situation of the amounts allocated from the State Budget for the salaries of the personnel of religious units and for the construction and repair of houses of worship and other activities carried out by religions in 1990-2014 (in Romanian Lei, not adjusted with inflation).* Source: State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, 2015.

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

* As of 2002, according to provisions in Government Ordinance nr. 82/2001 payments for non- clerical staff are paid from local budgets.

When asked about the impressive trend to erect new churches, many of the people I spoke with in the capital criticized the ROC in regard of the imbalance between the number of houses of worship (18,000) and hospitals (425) in Romania[24]; although they often ignored that the former indicates an estimation of the whole number of churches in Romania, including those belonging to other denominations. Still, very often their target was exclusively the Orthodox clergy: many protesters in University Square perceived them as a clique of devious people whose collective image has been sliding in that mud where politicians are usually considered to wallow. In a sense, the strategy adopted by the ROC to re-occupy the public space turned out to be a double-edged sword in Bucharest: «Grandomanie! » («Megalomania! », exclaimed more than once some taxi drivers on my way home, when driving by the construction site[25]. Due to the huge cathedral whose construction seems to be out of place, onerous and detached from people's everyday needs, Orthodox hierarchs are seen once more as part of the rotten system leading the country.

So far, I have tried to clarify how some events accounted on a local scale (anti-clerical thinking, performances and practices in Bucharest) gained momentum due to other phenomena taking place on a different level (the ROC institutional revival and its growing presence in the national, and specifically Bucharest's, public space). It goes without saying that the dissatisfaction expressed in the capital towards the ROC has compelled the Orthodox powers-that-be to carry out some relevant adjustments: among other things, a newly chosen spokesperson and several commemorative mass celebrated by the Bucharest Archbishop for the victims of the fire on October 30th, one month after the tragedy. Things are more uncertain in the government bureau: the new technocratic executive branch installed after the protests proposed – in an attempt to satisfy the demands coming from the demonstrators – that the first state budget draft for 2016 would have stopped the state financing of religious constructions and repairs, raising at the same time the state contribution for religious (+12%) and non-religious (+55%) personnel[26].

Scale, context and field (site)

Talking about scales is, to a certain extent, talking about context, which: «in short, is about holism, one of the hallmarks – along with ethnographic fieldwork and intercultural comparison – of social and cultural anthropology» (Otto, Bubandt 2010: 1). At

24. These data have been used in public debates and often appeared on the mass media. The number of houses of worship refers, though, to a survey conducted in the very first 2000's: a more recent estimation (updated to 31.12.2015) counts 27.384 houses of worship, whose 1.578 are on construction.
25. I chose to settle in the cathedral area (Dealul Arsenalului) in order to report how locals are experiencing the construction of the largest religious architectural compound in the Christian-Orthodox world.
26. http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/politic/premierul-ciolos-a-vorbit-la-telefon-cu-patriarhul-daniel-despre-bugetul-pe-anul-2016-ce-i-a-transmis.html. Such a growth in the budget for salaries was explained to me by a member of the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs as caused by the new state regulations regarding the minimum wage.

this point, a basic question arises: «How much context to seek? » asks Candea (2007: 173). A possible answer could be «whatever is enough to make sense of what happens locally». In my Bucharest case, this means taking my cue from a slogan shouted in the streets, «We want hospitals, not cathedrals», to gather data about state financing for recognised denominations, the ROC administrative expansion (though the establishment of new bishoprics) and the flowering of new churches and cathedrals all over the country. Though some denominations (like Baptist, Roman-Catholics and Pentecostal) present a higher church/believers ratio than the ROC, anticlerical dissatisfaction in Bucharest addresses only Orthodox representors, led by the controversial visibility of Orthodox representative buildings. To put forward another example, the mosque case which I mentioned in the introduction appears extremely negligible when framed in its international background: the Bucharest mosque becomes only a little spot after considering Erdogan government's plan (already ongoing) of building new mosques all over the world[27]. This represents an intriguing example of how religion can be employed globally to gain consensus on a national ground. Also, when getting down to locally-scaled reactions, it produces forms of rejection, defilement and re-consecration mainly fostered by historical revanchism (since the Romanian kingdoms suffered under Ottoman rule for centuries) rather than by the effective impact of the project itself.

Marcus observes that holism can provide «the material […] out of which the field of ethnography must be tailored» (Marcus 2010: 40). Agreeing with Candea, I would not go that far in considering scale-thinking as a tool able to operate non-arbitrary cuts in framing one's own field-site. The information we obtain from the people we interact with during the fieldwork, and that heavily shapes our own ethnographic account, are the result of everyday chance interaction, and no method is going to change this[28]. Still, holism maintains a certain purchase in orienting the researcher's interests while in the field. For example, while interviewing a member of the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs I learnt that some churches in Bucharest were facing pressures to destine money

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27. www.theblacksea.eu/index.php?idT=88&idC=88&idRec=1211&recType=story.

28. «Now, there is an apparently banal sense in which this agenda is already built into the practice of anthropology, namely, in the method of ethnographic fieldwork. The habitual justification of fieldwork is roughly that long-term engagement with people allows us to get a deeper insight into their point of view. But this is arguably a poor justification, since such appeals to experiential osmosis – verstehen in German – hardly crack the logical conundrum of alterity (the dilemma of infinite regress vs. obliteration outlined above). A better justification would advertise the role of coincidence. If there is one thing we know about fieldwork (though we feel we should keep it a secret), it is that it is the antimethod par excellence. We go to the field only to expect the unexpected, which is to say the coincidental. In that sense, fieldwork is the exact opposite of lab work: an experiment out of control, fieldwork is by nature oriented not toward planned eventualities but rather toward arbitrary coincidences. Happiest when things happen to themselves, the ethnographer is professionally vulnerable to the unexpected. Indeed, arguably the value of pretending that fieldwork could ever be systematic (the writing of proposals, research itineraries, and even the key – but typically arbitrary – decision as to where to do fieldwork in the first place) is that such pretenses construct a backdrop against which the coincidental character of what finds us in the field can appear as such» (Holbraad 2010: 82).

on a monthly basis towards the centre (that is, the Romanian Patriarchate) for the purpose of collecting more funds for the national cathedral. It is not surprising that this insight came from an institution operating as redistributive centre, thus in a position more favourable to detect frictions, conflicts and needs of Orthodox churches in the capital. This helped me in targeting some Bucharest parishes and in addressing more specific issues, in order to grasp how their religious life and economic management changed after that the biggest Orthodox complex in the world began to rise a few kilometres away from them. To build the CMN is indeed an impressive enterprise that drains money not just from the different layers of the public spending but may also affect smaller churches in the capital and in the whole metropolitanate[29].

Conclusion

I have already hinted that moving through different scales is a well-established exercise in today's urban anthropology. Importantly, this kind of «scalar» holism is not meant to lead to an old-fashioned, systemic-based and top-down reductionism:

> Latour argues that the conjuring up of such [social] entities, alleged to exist on a higher plane or sphere and therefore on an intrinsically greater scale, appears to be explanatory because it appears to lend the picture the social scientist paints an impression of "depth". He argues for the virtues, instead, of eschewing this optical illusion and instead making our observations "flat" (Laidlaw, Cook and Mair 2009: 56).

World is multi-dimensional and «depth» is a property operating in it as far as there are people whose acts have an effect over other people. I argue that «scale» is a concept apt to render this «depth», while holism is still a valid term as far as we do not associate it with totalisation or system-inspired reductionism. If holism is not anymore about wholes, then why should we keep this term? Mainly because a holistic perspective still maintains a certain nuance of verticality that I deem crucial in social sciences. When renouncing to it, we also lack to report how specific groups (in the CMN affair, they would be Orthodox hierarchs and some politicians) manipulate decision-making processes, thus affecting other social actors located on a different scale (Romanian taxpayers and especially Bucharest citizens). If ethnography revealed emic forms of disapproval against Orthodox Church representatives, it was only by looking at the administrative entities that it was possible to outline the process of institutional revival that the ROC is experiencing. State funding at all its levels, from governmental funds to regional and municipal councils, plays a relevant (though not the only) role in the re-consecration of the country and of its capital city. The abundant and multi-layered public financing of the national cathedral – together with some other dubious aspects, like the free concession of the relative plot of land by means of a controversial government ordin-

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29. The Patriarch holds also the posts of Metropolitan of Muntenia and Dobrogea and Archbishop of Bucharest. Even though the fund raising campaign is being carried all over the country, the Patriarch has very limited power over the other five metropolitanates.

ance – serves as a clear instance of the tight partnership ongoing between the state and Orthodox Church in the post-socialist era. If anthropology is to maintain any explanatory ambition, it cannot avoid providing basic contextualisation in the name of flattening (and flattering) temptations. It is not by denying the existence of different scales of social organization that we improve our analytical endeavours[30], but rather acknowledging their role without ignoring that they are made, in turn, of individual interactions and practices.

To sum up, thinking and operating through scales orientated my enquiry in two directions: first of all, I collected information on the financing of the cathedral, putting together data from different sources to find out that so far, its construction has been mainly funded by public money. Moreover, it helped me to detect the institutional nature of the «religious revival» Romania is currently undergoing. Secondly, I focused my attention on the impact that the CMN exerts on a local scale, which is on the neighbourhood where it is located and on a few churches in the capital whose priests and churchgoers I got in contact with. The draining of resources and donations that such an impressive project imposes on smaller Bucharest churches helps to draw a more detailed picture of the events, revealing minor forms of resistance and friction inside the Church itself. In this script, though, I rather tried to shed light on the sentiments of intolerance against Orthodox hierarchs which burst out recently in the capital. Anticlericalism takes the shape of a reaction to the ROC strategy of occupying the Bucharest urban landscape by means of a bulky building whose usefulness and favourable cost-benefit ratio are hard to see for many locals.

For a long time, anthropologists operating «in the city» (Hannerz 1980) tended to leave processes of transformation out of their accounts, thus facing religious questions in the city just like they would have done in a rural setting. By insisting on differences of scale I don't intend to dilute our own field-sites, chasing endlessly political and economic implications. On the contrary, I believe with Marcus that holism is «what makes anthropology more than ethnographic expertise» (Marcus 2010: 29) and a necessary theoretical exercise to understand and explain facts happening on a micro scale. In Bucharest, I took my cue from local anticlerical waves in order to sketch the outline of an institutional religious revival in the country and suggest that the by-product of such revival – that is, the re-consecration of the capital by means of the national cathedral – turned out to be a double edged sword for the image of the Church itself. In the attempt to build a symbol of national dignity, it has rather ended by stirring up widespread indignation.

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30. Hoefle (2006) holds a similar argument against Marston's (2005) critic of «scale» and adoption of «flat ontology» in geography.

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