

# EURO POLIS

## Journal of Political Analysis and Theory

**Issue 4 December 2008**

---

*Article*

*The Interplay between State and Church in  
Romanian Constructions of National Identity*

**Bogdan Radu**

---

**ISSN: 1582-4969**

**Edited and published by the:**

**Centre for Political Analysis**

**Department of Political Science**

**Babes-Bolyai University**

**[revista.europolis@yahoo.com](mailto:revista.europolis@yahoo.com)**

**<http://www.polito.ubbcluj.ro/cpa/rev/europolis.html>**

## The Interplay between State and Church in Romanian Constructions of National Identity

Bogdan Radu  
Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

### Abstract:

The main goal of this case study on Romania is to explore the unique relationship between church, state and society, and to explain the strong association between religion and nationhood. From a historical perspective, Orthodoxy has been a unifying factor for Romanians living under different foreign empires, and because of its important role in history, it became the dominant discourse in constructions of nationhood in Romania. The Romanian state traditionally granted the Orthodox Church a privileged status in comparison to any other religion. I argue that its privileged status indicates the state's recognition of the historical role played by the Orthodox Church in preserving nationhood. Through the use of constructivist and institutionalist perspectives, I analyze two alternative histories of the Romanian people, as told by the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic Churches respectively. I conclude that the relationship between church, state and society in Romania is in a state of dynamic transformation, and thus reject arguments of path-dependency.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

According to mainstream theories of democratization, a clear separation between church and state is recommended for a country to successfully consolidate. Nonetheless, there is also growing evidence according to which religion can and should play a part in democratic politics, secularization being the consequence of modernization only in some areas of the world (Casanova, 1994). Therefore, in this research, I show that the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian state is historically embedded, and that, in time, this relationship remained strong, major political changes notwithstanding. I also argue that, while the privileged relationship between state and church in Romania suggests a path dependent evolution, significant historical conjunctures did take place. These conjunctures create points of contestations of the dominant discourse, which also suffers transformations as a result of contestation. For example, the Greek-

---

<sup>1</sup> This article represents research taken from a broader project, that I still work on Please address all correspondence to bogdanradu2000@yahoo.com

Catholic Church is one contender for the role of representative of national identity. Its construction of identity emphasizes the common Western Christian inheritance of Romania and the rest of Western Europe. Therefore, Orthodoxy and Catholicism offer two versions of nationhood. The Romanian state privileges the Orthodox Church, but the Greek-Catholic Church's construction of nationhood is also considered, although indirectly, through the latter's relationship with Western Christianity, and the democratic European Union.

I analyze the Romanian case for two related reasons. First, Romania is the only Orthodox non-Slavic country in the former communist block. This uniqueness, together with its history of resistance to imperial conquests makes it a complex case to analyze. Second, Romania also displays the highest rates of religiosity and religious participation in the whole subset of former communist predominantly Orthodox countries. Therefore, understanding the relationship between church, state and society is of both pragmatic and theoretical importance.

From a methodological standpoint, the institutionalist approach is complemented by the tenets of social constructivism. One needs to analyze institutions as contextually dynamic entities, in permanent interaction with other institutions and individual political actors. If one accepts that institutions affect each other, and in turn, they affect political agency, the next step is to also accept that structure and agency cannot be separated. In this case study, the Romanian Orthodox Church cannot be understood without also analyzing the historical evolution of the state, and the role that the church had in the formation of Romanian nationhood. The ongoing interaction between church and state through the channel of nationhood renders this research compatible with the constructivist approach, because of the latter's emphasis on intersubjectivity and the importance in understanding institutions.

This study nuances the discussion on the potential arrangements that can be made between a democratizing state and a monopolistic church in times of transition. The study thus adds to the growing literature on democratization without secularization. Additionally, the study also offers important insight in the applicability of constructivism and new institutionalism in the study of democratization and national identity formation.

The relationship between church and state in Romania is historically embedded. The state and the Orthodox Church fashion their interaction following an apparent path-dependent strategy. Through the use of national identity symbols, the church asserts itself as a strong political actor, not only one privileged by the government, but also one heavily supported by the citizenry. This use of national symbols also explains the high levels of religiosity in Romania, compared to its Eastern or Southern neighbors. The path-dependency refers to the privileged status of the Romanian Orthodox Church throughout centuries, due to its identification with nationhood. I qualify this path dependent approach as apparent because both state and church transformed their shape and identity countless times throughout centuries, and consequently, so did their relationship. Indeed, the strong connection between church and state survived both communist secularization and post-communist liberal democratization. Privileging the Orthodox Church means different things in the newly independent Romania of 1878, in communist Romania of 1950, and in democratic Romania of 2008. At every major political turn in history, both church and state had to re-define their identity and interests, and also their relationship with each other. Therefore, characterizing the relationship between church and state as path-dependent would be reifying and historically inaccurate.

In the following section, I discuss institutionalism and constructivism and their methodological suitability for this case study. Second, I offer a historical account of the relationship between church and state, focusing on the role of Orthodoxy in Romania's quest for identity and independence. Cosmopolitan and indigenous understandings of national identity have been constructed throughout two millennia of history. I end by discussing the concept of this critical juncture and its application in the formation of Romanian nationhood.

### **Constructivism and institutionalism as useful episteme**

Ontologically, "constructivists characterize this interactive relationship between what people do and how societies shape their action as the mutual constitution of structures and agents" (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 7). While the Romanian state had to change fundamentally in 1989, the church also had to adapt to new circumstances. When changing, the church also takes into consideration its role in Romanian history and its identity. Correlatively, the state and the society both have to redefine their relationship with the church, and reconfigure their identities. Because of this emphasis on identity, constructivism is a helpful

conceptual tool. In the triad church-state-society, the church is at once a structure and an agent. As a structure, the church influences the creation of beliefs and attitudes, and also impacts the behavior of its confidants. As an agent, the church tries to change the political context, according to its interests. Since Romanian national identity is mostly constructed by reference to the Orthodox faith, the interaction of church, state and society concentrates around the concept of national identity.

The process of understanding this interaction is facilitated by three key concepts in constructivist thought: intersubjectivity, contextualism, and power. According to Klotz and Lynch (2007), "intersubjective understandings comprise structure and agents. These norms, rules, meanings, languages, cultures and ideologies are social phenomena that create identities" (p. 7). Particular meanings can become stable over time, and can create social orders. The intersubjectivity of the relationship between church and state in Romania is illustrated by the role that the church played in history, and the ways in which different Romanian regimes constructed this role as a preserver of national identity. Correlatively, "official" understandings of the role of religion and state affect societal attitudes regarding the centrality of religion in post-communist politics.

Contextualism is also critical in analyzing the relationship between church and state in Romania. This is a consequence of an attempt to quantify context for the sake of obtaining generalizable results. The limitations imposed by quantitative data analysis on the analysis of context are reduced when conducting a case study. In this chapter, context can be particularized further and, thus, "reified, essentialized, or static notions of culture which preclude the possibility of change" can be avoided (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 9). Furthermore, in this case study I can also take into consideration the dynamic features of the contextual relationship between church and state, and analyze how they interact with each other too.

Finally, according to constructivism, power materializes itself in relationships, and it is not simply measured by material capabilities. The relationship between church and state exemplifies the relational character of power.

From an epistemological standpoint, constructivism employs the genealogical method, which is particularly interesting to apply in this

case study, because of its rejection of deterministic or teleological arguments of historical evolution. Through a genealogical approach, one accepts the possibility of change even in the most stable structures and genealogies that “enrich or challenge previous interpretations, rather than producing one correct objective history” (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 35). Genealogical methods originated with Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, and were employed to much acclaim by Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish*. In the analysis of how penal systems have constructed punishments throughout time, Foucault focuses on the disciplinary control in the society. Through a genealogical method, he notes how different institutions have been made more effective in controlling people’s behavior and values, although these institutions’ primary purpose was not necessarily societal control. The genealogical analysis implies the idea that history does not unfold as a predetermined rational sequence of events. Rather, it unfolds according to contingent turns of history and becomes part of the constructivist approach, as Reus-Smit (2002) shows (quoting Bartelson (1995)): “a method that “is strategically aimed at that which looks unproblematic, and is held to be timeless; its task is to explain how these present traits, in all their vigour and truth, were formed out of the past” (p. 73). Institutionalism’s critical junctures play an important part in the genealogical approach through the space for agency that they create. As it will be shown below, different readings of Romanian history identify different critical junctures, conducive to very different conceptualizations of nationhood.

Finally, the constructivist take on identity is also highly useful for this analysis: “constructivists view identities as social relationships that change over time and across contexts” (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 65). Constructivism started the discussion of identity by criticizing reifying constructions of the other. In mainstream literature, the other is a fixed and antithetic reference. In contrast, constructivism challenges the reified status of the other, and elaborates on portrayals of other through the power-imbued discourse of elites, through a process of fixing group identities and complexes of inferiority. Most importantly, constructivism recognizes that identities are fluid, multiple and overlapping. In direct relationship with this case study is the idea that some overlapping identities may not be consistent with each other, and so “domestic regimes may have a legitimacy crisis when competing identities cannot be reconciled. Indeed the most relevant other may be a person’s or country’s past” (Klotz and Lynch 2007, 81).

As a response to failures in behavioral theory, institutionalism hails the coming back of institutions in the study of politics. Institutions encompass rules and norms of behavior, they affect political agency, and also diminish uncertainty of outcomes. Three major schools of thought are prevalent in institutionalism: rational choice, historical and sociological. There is agreement in all three schools that institutions structure behavior. The differences between the three kinds of institutionalism refer either to the conceptualization of institutions, or to their respective methods.

Historical institutionalism tries to understand and explain political outcomes. According to Pierson and Skocpol (2007), it has three defining features. First, it addresses big, substantive questions that have relevance for the broad public and not just the community of scholars. Second, it places heavy emphasis on temporal sequencing, establishing causality according to a historically adequate perception of time. Third, it analyzes macro contexts and hypothesizes about the combined effects of institutions and processes. Although historical institutionalists start off with an empirical puzzle, they theorize at a broader level usually preferring mid-range theorizing on a set of cases that are unified in time and space (Thelen 1999). Therefore, historical institutionalism is usually associated with a more empirical approach, in opposition to rational choice institutionalism that starts off with a hypothesis, constructs a model, and then tests it. In this respect, historical institutionalism is inductive, because it attempts to explain political outcomes (Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth 1992), and it is not a theory in search of evidence. For historical institutionalists, institutions are structuring variables through which battles over interests, ideas, and power are fought.

In contrast, rational choice institutionalists employ a deductive approach, through which they test the empirical validity of a theoretically created model. In classical rational choice institutionalism, each actor has exogenous and clearly formulated preferences and interests. Making behavior routine through institutions is a function of reducing uncertainty. From a rational choice perspective, institutions have a coordinating role, while for historical institutionalists different institutions originate at different moments in time, in different contexts, and therefore they do not form a coherent whole, and are not necessarily synchronized (Orren and Skowronek 1994).

In both approaches, institutional change is problematic. For rational choice theorists, equilibrium is the stable outcome of any interaction, and institutions are there to ensure that a particular equilibrium is reached and secured. Actors are self-interested and prefer the existence of stable rules. Consequently, after a particular institution has been put in place, very few changes will be operated because these would increase uncertainty, threaten the equilibrium and attract higher costs of operation. The question of path-dependency is understood as an institutional arrangement, that, for many reasons may not be the best, but its repeated use leads to its preservation. Historical institutionalists view path dependence as responsible for institutional stability, with each institution creating its own mechanisms for survival and preservation, which, in turn, start affecting acceptable modes of behavior.

Sociological institutionalism differs from the first two species from the very beginning by its different conceptualization of institutions: "relatively enduring collections of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources" (March and Olsen, 1989, 1995). Sociological institutionalists stress the endogenous nature of institutions, and their social construction. The main differences between sociological institutionalism and the previous two types are the emphasis on the meaning that institutions create, and the dynamic process of interaction between institutional meaning, roles of conduct and identity. Institutions are

constitutive rules and practices prescribing appropriate behavior; structures of meaning, embedded in identities and belongings; common purposes and accounts that give direction and meaning to behavior and explain, justify and legitimate behavioral codes (March and Olen 2005, 2)

Their emphasis on constructions of meaning and the extent to which they are embedded in culture also leads to two of their most important concepts: logic of appropriateness and historical inefficiency. The logic of appropriateness is the motivation behind an action that does not seem to be the most rational or efficient, and it is opposed to the logic of consequence: "prescription based on a logic of appropriateness and a sense of rights and obligations derived from identity" (March and Olsen 2005, 6). Actors comply with cultural norms and customs that do not necessarily lead to efficiency. Choosing an inefficient but culturally desirable course of action forms the principle of historical inefficiency.

For sociological institutionalists, institutional change occurs as an adaptation to a new context, but the change is slow and mostly incremental, precisely due to its “cultural embeddedness.” Multiple institutions function simultaneously, each of them developing its own organizational identity (Orren and Skowronek 2004), and sharing partially overlapping audiences. Simultaneous, overlapping institutions result in the creation of multiple identities, which need to be harmoniously reconciled at the societal level. This reconciliation can sometimes be a difficult task.

Thelen (1999) does not believe that the differences between the three schools of institutionalism are pronounced, and she notes increasing border crossing for scholars within each sub-field. There are illustrations of such border crossing processes such as the combination of rational choice deductive approach coupled with an effort at contextualization or the increasing attention devoted to collective action within historical institutionalism. These inter sub-field interactions also change conceptualizations of institutions: “ more expansive views of institutions, not just as strategic context but as a set of shared understandings that affect the way problems are perceived and solutions are sought” (Thelen 1999, 371). Thelen believes that institutionalism should move into a direction that combines methodological and conceptual tools from all three subspecies, and she stresses the importance of critical junctures and developmental pathways. Although institutional change is not the strength of any institutionalist school, it is made possible through the introduction of critical junctures: foundational moments when a particular decision is made, a model is adopted, that, then, becomes fairly unchangeable for a long time. It is yet uncertain how such an event becomes a critical juncture, and what makes it bear such a powerful legacy. Once adopted however, the path dependent model benefits from a self-reinforcing positive feedback – a trademark of historical institutionalism. Developmental pathways respond to changes in the environment but in ways that are consistent with the past. Therefore, institutionalism is neither purely theoretical (rational choice), nor empirical (historical), but rather a combination of both elements. Thelen argues that each institutionalist analysis should start with an empirical puzzle that informs the creation of a theory that is subsequently tested. In the following, I apply the main tenets of historical and sociological

institutionalism to the particular case of church within democratic transition.

### **The Church as an Institution – The Capturing of Context**

The institutionalized form of Christian faith is the church. Like any other collective actor in the society, the church has its rules and norms, practices of behavior, interests and preferences. In Central and Eastern Europe, the church as an institution cannot be analyzed without exploring the relationship between church and state, because of -at least- two reasons. The first reason is the strong secularizing effect of communist regimes. Marx's famous formulation of religion as opium for the masses served as a symbolic basis for the anti-religious policies of each communist regime. The communist experience instituted a practice of heavy control of the religious sphere by the state. It is interesting to find out the ways in which democratization affects this fifty year long tradition of state control over religion, and what are the consequences of re-establishing religious freedom on the relationship between church and state. The second reason refers mostly to Orthodox Churches, which historically have a much closer relationship with the state, than Catholic or Protestant churches. This close relationship between Orthodox Churches and the political regime suffers re-configuration during democratic transition. I argue that Orthodox Churches have more difficulty accepting democratic values especially because of this change in their relationship with the state, usually entailing the acceptance of religious pluralism and the consequent lowering of their religious monopolistic status. Understanding how a church affects one's political values is therefore influenced not only by the church's own interests and preferences, but also by its ability to do so, which is, in part, affected by its relationship with the state. For example, in a system in which the church is controlled by the political regime, its effect on believers is restricted to the freedoms that the state allows the church to have. Alternatively, in a situation in which the state is completely separate from the church, there will probably be many competing denominations, each of them having extensive freedom to gather new confidants and popularize their creeds.

From a rational choice perspective, churches are interest-maximizing institutions trying to acquire more power in the society, either through increasing numbers of confidants, or if possible, by securing a privileged relationship with the state. The applicability of the rational choice approach however, ends here, because the preference and interests of a

church are not exogenous. Rather, they were formed in the context of the historical relationship between church, state and society. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church may be less interested in attracting confidants, than in playing an important political role. I suggest that church interests are formed in the interaction between church and state, while also being influenced by the roles traditionally played by religion in society.

Historical institutionalism is therefore more helpful, because of its emphasis on critical junctures. All post-communist countries share two critical junctures in their recent past that determines not just the reconfiguration of their institutional settings, but also a change of values (Bunce 2002). The first juncture is the collapse of communism. All of Central and Eastern Europe shares at least half a century of communism, and, in the early 1990s, a change to a radically different type of regime. The second juncture, obviously related to the first, is the installation of democracy, in most of these countries, and the starting of a period of transition. For some countries the transition ended successfully and they became consolidated democracies. For others the transition stage became more or less permanent, and the arriving point is yet unknown. It is noteworthy that both critical junctures are rather sudden, not representing a true developmental pathway, in the sense that historical institutionalism talks about. The abrupt change of regime places even more tension on the system's need to adapt to new circumstances. This is not the place to go into the causes of the collapse of communism, but it is important to understand post-communist democratization as a major change of regime, that entails an even bigger change in all sectors of society. In this context, the church is also one institution that needs to adapt to these changes, and reconfigure its mission and place in the new political context.

Finally, sociological institutionalism is also a valuable tool for analysis in this respect, because of its emphasis on shared understandings and organizational culture. The collapse of communism and the ensuing transition created new institutions (and correlatively) citizens have to tune themselves in to the new arrangements. It is democracy's trademark to invite and require participation, and so the new institutions need to gather legitimacy through citizen participation. In and of itself, this is a novel strategy for acquiring legitimacy, especially in comparison to the former communist regimes. The change in political regime, that also entails a change in all social, political and cultural

spheres, is only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is represented by the meanings that people attach to these changes, their understandings of the new political space. Furthermore, citizens are not only individual passive recipients of this change, and future electorates, but also members of different institutions and groups, whose role in the new polity changes too. The Catholic Church in Poland was a strong anti-communist arena for dissidence, but once a new democratic government was in place, its mission has to change, and so did its place in society (Gautier 1998).

Histories of the church and state relationship, different communist regimes, the denominational configuration of each country – all affect the roles and mission of religion and church in a society. National, religious and political identities are also affected by the 1989 double juncture, and their interaction can result in many possible permutations. Moreover, while I attempt to capture contextual features that affect the relationship between church, state and society, I acknowledge that the large set of 14 countries encompasses an enormous amount of variation, and capturing context is bound to be a reifying process. This is why, in the case-study chapter, I will change lenses to allow for more space for maneuvering when interpreting the relationship between church, state and society in post-communist Romania.

### **Contextualizing the Relationship between Church, State and Society**

This section of the chapter identifies differences in the relationship between church, state and society that influence the ability and willingness of a church to affect citizens' formation of political and economic attitudes. These differences are important, not only for the effect of religion on attitudes, but also for the societal role and identity of churches themselves. Different relationships between church and state are the result of the historical constructions of religion, church and their role within the polity.

I argue that in Romania, the overlap between Orthodoxy and nationhood, while historically constructed, could become a situation of conflicting identities. Being Romanian now means being a democratic citizen and member of the European Union, while only 20 years ago it meant being under a communist regime. Seventy years ago, in World War II, it meant shifting allegiance from the Germans to the Russians. Yet, Romanians have always been Orthodox. Reconciling cosmopolitan and indigenous identities is one goal of successive Romanian

governments. In the language of ethnic and civic nationalism, I argue that the latter is an insufficient basis for national identity. Civicness in new democracies is a measure of internalizing democratic values, but it does not replace the need for having a strong national identity that legitimizes and guarantees the nation state. Therefore, I argue that Orthodoxy, as an indigenous construction of nationhood, pre-dates cosmopolitan versions of national identity, and is a “sine qua non condition” for democratic consolidation.

### **Christianization, Ethnogenesis and National religion**

I argue that, because of its geographical location, Romania became a battleground for the rivalry between the Orthodox and the Catholic streams of Christianity, while being at the same time a battleground for imperial conquests. Orthodox national identity accentuates Romania’s uniqueness, and glorifies its quest for independence and unity. It is Orthodoxy that legitimizes the need of a Romanian nation state, because Orthodoxy represents at once resistance to Muslim and Slavic invasions and opposition to Catholic proselytism. Repeated incursions of conquering empires are interpreted not only as acts of political war, but also as religious threats, either Muslim or Catholic.

The societal and political role of the Romanian Orthodox Church is embedded in the history of the Romanian people. Within Christianity, Orthodoxy proclaims itself the true Christian church, the right and only one (Ramet, 1988). Subsequently, Romanian Orthodoxy originated with the “true” church: “Christianity spread to our ancestors from the East, from the place of origin of Christianity itself” (Lupsa 1992). Orthodox histories accentuate Romanian exceptionalism and self sufficiency; during history, Romanians had to defend themselves from conquering powers, both religious and secular. This preoccupation with external threats resulted in a strategy of self-sufficiency and rejection of international alliances.

In the following, I present a history of the Romanian people, as it is constructed by the Romanian Orthodox Church. This history emphasizes Romanians’ ancient Christian origins and their uniqueness from the rest of the people in East Central Europe, as the only Latin Orthodox nation. Although the Orthodox view of history forms the dominant discourse in Romania, there is one contending discourse, namely, the view of history as it is constructed by the Greek-Catholic

Church.<sup>2</sup> The Uniate Church contests dominant discourse by emphasizing Romania's similarity with Catholic Western Europe. The Church sees, and I argue that the points of contention between the two rival histories are revealing of the two constructions of nationhood that the two churches defend, the indigenous and the cosmopolitan. While I concentrate on the Orthodox history of the Romanian people, I also analyze the Greek-Catholic contestations in order to demonstrate that the dominant discourse came under criticism throughout time. In other words, although Orthodox definitions of nationhood have been historically legitimized by successive Romanian political regimes, this was not the only possible outcome, because of the Greek-Catholic contending paradigm. In fact, throughout history, the two constructions of nationhood have been in permanent interaction, and it is the political context that promoted one or the other.

The historical evidence used in this research was published and distributed under church supervision. The publication of these histories by religious publishing houses qualifies them as almost-official church documents. They do not just represent the views of their authors, but also the institutional positions of each church.<sup>3</sup>

According to Lupsa (1992) and Savin (1992), the Orthodox Church selects three episodes that it considers fundamental in Romanian history. This selection and its presentation by the Orthodox Church is indicative of the church's construction of the Romanian past, and its self-assumed role in the creation of the Romanian nation. These episodes cover the whole history of the Romanian people, from their formation to the modern days, and they encompass fairly long periods of time.

The first episode consists of the Roman Empire conquering the territories between the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea, during the first two centuries AD. This geographical area marks Romania's contemporary borders. These territories encompass three historical regions: Moldova, Valachia and Transylvania. Romanian

---

<sup>2</sup> Because the Greek-Catholic Church originated through the process of Uniation, it is also called the Uniate Church. Therefore, the two titles will be used interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Lupsa was an Orthodox priest, theologian and historian of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Ioan Savin was professor of theology and was imprisoned during communism. Both authors published during communism, and were re-published by the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1989 in an attempt to popularize Orthodox readings of Romanian history.

ethno-genesis takes place during those times. According to the Orthodox Church, ethno-genesis of the Romanian people coincided with their Christianization. However, there is no precedence of one event over the other: Romanians were simply born Christian.<sup>4</sup> The second episode takes place during the Middle Ages and emphasizes resistance to Ottoman expansion, framed in both secular and religious terms. The third episode consists of the two unifications of the Romanian people (1859 and 1918), and the fight for Romanian independence and self-determination (1877). These episodes cover lengthy periods of time and, in the Orthodox reading of history, their symbolism is more important than the actual covering of historical events. The Romanian Orthodox Church sees each episode as a fundamental building block of Romanian nationhood.

The early phase starts with a dilemma. Some historians assert that after the Roman conquest, the entire population in the Romanian territories moved south of the Danube, and only returned in later centuries. The Romanian Orthodox Church opposes this view, and its reading of ancient history is focused on establishing Romanian continuity north of the Danube. Accepting disruptions in inhabitation would mean accepting that Orthodoxy arrived in Romanian territories from Bulgaria, and also agreeing on a foreign Christianizing source for Romanians. By establishing the continuity of Christianity, Romanians prove that “they were there”, before any of their neighbours were and also pre-dated their neighbours’ Christianization.

A major collection of proofs concerning Romanian-Orthodox continuity are linguistic. Romanian religious terminology preserves Greek terms, while the surrounding Christian peoples use either Latin or, later on, Slavonic terms:

some words of our fundamental religious terminology preserve until today their purely Greek version, insignificantly Latinized, while others are the translation of Greek technical terms, but not into those specific to Western Christianity, but rather terms improvised on the spot, in our traditional milieu (Lupsa 1992, 7)

---

<sup>4</sup> The simultaneity of ethno-genesis and Christianization is metaphorical. Obviously, both processes were rather long, and overlap was possible. The authors’ emphasis on this simultaneity however, proves its importance in the Orthodox discourse on national identity.

The very name of Jesus Christ was brought to the Romanian territories in its Greek version: *Iisus Hristos*, together with religious vocabulary such as: metropolitan, priest, monk, monastery, religious service, Easter, etc. Lupsa (1992) emphasizes that Romanian Christianity became spread by the work of Oriental/Greek missionaries and not Latin missionaries. For Romanian Orthodoxy, religion has to be performed in the people's language, thus solidifying the liaison between language, people and religion. National Orthodoxy opposes the privilege of a common church language - such as Latin in the Catholic Church, and Slavonic or Greek in the Orthodox Church. According to Savin (1992), privileged languages harm the cause of Christianity, presumably because they weaken the relationship between church and political authority. The Romanian Orthodox Church sees its long history of using the Romanian language as another proof of its interest in preserving national identity.

The Romanian Orthodox Church also places the rivalry between Western and Eastern Christianity at the core of ethno-genesis. Western proselytizing is a constant fear of Romanian Orthodoxy. The Christianization of the Slavic people on the Eastern borders of Romanian territories was therefore welcome, since it meant a consolidation of Byzantine power, and, at the same time, a barrier to Catholic proselytism. Nonetheless, starting with the Christianization of Hungarians in 1001, Franciscan and Dominican Catholic monks settled in the Romanian territories. Although on a papal mission for converting Romanians to Catholicism, these travelers were not effective in securing adherents because of two reasons. First, Orthodox Churches eliminated the money tribute that each citizen was supposed to pay to the Catholic Church (*dijma*). Second, these foreign monks had the disadvantage of not knowing the language and, correlatively, not being able to communicate.

The early episode is thus characterized by the simultaneity of ethno-genesis and Christianization:

we have ethnicity, language and religion in common [...] in Christian conception, the mission of each nation, and its goals, originates with a power, a higher regulating power of the world and of each nation, a power whose existence, even if hidden in mystery and often times difficult to understand, cannot be contested (Savin 1992, 1-7).

Between 1204 and 1556, the Catholic Church staged a large proselytizing campaign in Romanian territories. In response to these strong offensives, the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople created three Romanian Metropolitanates: in Valachia, Moldova and Transylvania, which correspond to the three historic Romanian regions that exist today. The creation of the three Metropolitanates, under the blessing of Constantinople, initiated the transition to the second historical episode, illustrated by Romanian opposition to Ottoman expansion. The course of history started to differ during this episode: while Moldova and Valachia fought Ottoman domination, Transylvania fell under the influence of Catholicism and Habsburg domination.

Moldova's and Valachia's resistance to the Muslim Turkish expansion was characterized by both physical resistance and the quest for recognition of their effort by the rest of Christianity. Savin (1992) asserts that the first mission that the Romanians had was the safeguarding of Christianity, against the Muslim threat. The author illustrates this point by invoking three Romanian political leaders, who defeated the Ottoman Empire at different times in history. These political figures represent all three historical regions and so they also represent the unity of all Romanians in fighting the Turks. The general argument is that by fighting for Christianity, Romanians also fought for their nationhood.

The first prince, Mircea cel Batran, led Valachia in a fight against the Ottomans, at Rovine in the 14th century, and won. In the 15th century, Stefan cel Mare also defeated the Turks at Podul Inalt, while in the 16th century Mihai Viteazul defeated the Turks while trying to unite the three regions into one. He was killed by Habsburgs who, theoretically, were his allies in the war against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Stefan cel Mare asserted, in 1475, that

Moldova is the gate of Christianity and if this gate is lost - God forbid - then the entire Christianity will be in great danger [...] and we swear on our Christian faith and with our word that we will stand and fight to death for our Christian faith" (in Savin, 1992: 10). Similarly, Mihai Viteazul made a pledge to Christianity: "all my life from youth to old age, in which I did not spare my effort, nor my blood, not even my life [...]"

---

<sup>5</sup> Romanian history textbooks emphasize the fight against Ottoman domination in a disproportionate measure. After 1989 such "patriotism" was called into question by the intellectual elite, but the structure of history manuals remained largely intact.

[all of these] I did not because someone asked me to, but only to deserve and receive a place and a name in Christianity (in Savin 1992, 10).

This military defensive was complemented by Orthodox cultural campaigns for the widespread circulation of Orthodox faith in all regions where Romanians lived. For instance, in Moldova, Vasile Lupu collaborated with Orthodox priests in the writing of *Testimony of Orthodox Faith*. Constantin Brancoveanu, in Valachia, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was concerned with the circulation of Orthodox writings across Orthodox territories. He supported Orthodox promotion abroad by ordering the printing of the Orthodox doctrine in Arabic. He ended up being decapitated with his entire family by the Ottomans.

The third episode of Romanian history consists of two major events: the unification of Romanian territories in one state and the winning of its independence. In 1859 Moldova and Valachia united under Cuza, and in 1918, Transylvania also became part of Romania, as a modern nation state. Also, in 1877, Romania acquired its independence in a war against the Ottoman Empire. Throughout this period of almost 60 years, the Romanian Orthodox Church was a vocal promoter of unification and self-determination. After 1918, the Romanian Orthodox Church began a campaign of strengthening its roots in Transylvania, which was primarily Catholic and previously had been ruled by the Habsburgs. During this period, a part of the Orthodox clergy formed a core of radical nationalist Orthodoxy. This reaction was triggered by the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the new Romanian state, and it eventually led to the formation of a fascist cell within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The peak of Orthodox nationalism in Romania was reached under the dictatorship of Marshall Antonescu, during the last two years of the Second World War (Livezeanu, 1995).

The Orthodox readings of Romanian history thus focus on Christian ethno-genesis and Christianization, the fight against conquering empires and proselytizing religions, and the glorification of the united and independent Romanian nation. This is, in fact, the dominant understanding of history in Romania, perpetuated during communism, and also after 1989. According to the Orthodox Church, Romanian national identity is an exclusively indigenous construction, resulting from opposition to both religious and secular enemies.

Nonetheless, the Greek-Catholic Church also claims to represent nationhood, and it has points of disagreement with the Orthodox reading of history. According to official Uniate history, both Catholic and Orthodox readings of history concur in affirming the continuity of the Romanized population after the Roman departure in 271-275 under Aurelius. The Greek-Catholics/Uniates argue that "the indigenous population, already Romanized after 170 years [...] will remain there, ensuring continuity, which is so contested by those that demand the return to old and dead times" (Prundus and Plaianu 1994, 8).<sup>6</sup>

After the initial agreement on Romanian continuity after the decline of the Roman Empire, Greek-Catholic history shows evidence of a strong relationship between Romanian Christianity with and the Holy See, through the work of several missionaries sanctified by the Catholic Church. Greek-Catholic history rightfully emphasizes the fact that until 1054, the year of the big schism, there was neither Orthodoxy nor Catholicism. The millennium before 1054, when both churches agree on the Christianity of Romanians, was thus the work of one church, apostolic and having several centers of authority, including both Rome and Constantinople - the new Rome. According to the Uniates, Byzantium never controlled Romanian territory, except for the small southeastern part (Prundus and Plaianu 1994, 9).

In addition to the emphasis on the independence from Byzantium, the Uniates also employ literary evidence, documenting the use of the Latin language in Romanian territories, in both religious and secular matters. Hence, Saint Ioan Cassian informed Rome about the religious situation of the Romanian Christians north of the Danube. According to his works written in Latin, *De incarnatione Domini contra Nestorium Libri VII*, Romanians were hostile to the Greek influence of the Byzantine Empire, whose only preoccupation was with world domination. Cassian further asserts, in opposition to Orthodox historians, that Byzantium clearly attempted to dominate the territory north of the Danube, and was perceived by the indigenous population, "the last bastion of Latin Christianity", as an illegitimate alien dominating power (Prundus & Plaianu 1994, 10).

---

<sup>6</sup> Clemente Plaianu and Silvestru Prundus are both part of the Greek-Catholic clergy, and also historians of the church. They are both vocal in the patrimonial conflict between the Orthodox and the Uniate Churches.

With the Christian Hungarian state growing, Transylvania became incorporated in various Hungarian and Hungarian/German empires, a situation that lasted until 1918 and resumed again in 1940 for a short time during the Vienna Diktat.

In 1688, Transylvania officially recognized the patronage of the Habsburg family. At that time, in the region there were 5 denominations: Calvinists, Lutherans, Unitarians, Catholics and Orthodox. The first three religions had a privileged status, while the latter two were discriminated against. After the official incorporation of Transylvania into the Habsburg Empire, Catholicism again became a privileged denomination.

The Uniate issue arose in this context. The 4 principles of a unification between Orthodox and Catholic, enunciated at the Council of Firenze-Ferrara (1438-1445), maintained the Orthodox rite intact, with the exception of the following changes: recognition of the Pope's supreme authority, the existence of Filioque - the Holy Spirit comes both from the Father and the Son, the existence of Purgatory, and the acceptability of azima for the Eucharist (Prundus and Plaianu 1994). The Romanian bishops, Teofil and Atanasie Anghel, signed the agreement for unification. The major rationale behind accepting unification was the receiving of advantages only available for other religions.

The two Greek-Catholic authors conclude that unification with the Catholic Church was not forced. However, the position from which the Romanians were negotiating was hardly one of equality, because of the privileged status of both the Catholic Church, and its secular supporter, the Habsburg Empire. The unification was framed in terms of a natural return to the mother church of Rome that implies a Catholic background and origins of Transylvania. In addition, there are writers who argue that the translation bias disoriented Romanian priests during the process of unification. They did not really understand the grandeur of the event - they were lured into making this move.

In summary, the Greek-Catholic Church contests the unique character of the Romanian nation, by emphasizing its traditional relationship with the Holy See and Catholicism (at least in Transylvania). The second point of contestation is represented by the formation of the Uniate Church itself in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For the Romanian Orthodox Church, Uniatism represented a forced action of proselytism. For the Greek-

Catholic Church, it represented the moment at which Romanian Christians could return to their Catholic roots.

This section presented the reader with the Orthodox reading of Romanian history, and also with the points of disagreement between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic histories. Both the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic churches claim to represent Romanian nationhood. Starting from the common point of continuous existence of the Romanian people north of the Danube after the decline of the Roman Empire, the two histories diverge on mostly every other point. While the Orthodox Church sees the Latin language and Catholic missionary expansion as the significant enemy “other” for the construction of Romanian nationhood, the Greek-Catholic Church constructs Latinity and connection with Rome as the essence of Romanian nationhood – a nation in Europe. On the one hand, Orthodox readings of history construct an independent unique Romanian nation, without any allies and surrounded by aggressive empires. On the other hand, the Greek-Catholic Church constructs a Latin nation, part and parcel of Western Europe. The Orthodox Church portrays an indigenous vision of nationhood, while the Greek-Catholic Church constructs a cosmopolitan one. The Orthodox emphasize exceptionalism and difference, while Greek-Catholics emphasize a natural alliance to Western Europe. On the one hand, Catholic nationhood benefits from a transnational European structure that opposes the Muslim and Orthodox Other. On the other hand, the Orthodox construction of nationhood accentuates the self-sufficient Romanian self, and opposes the Catholic, Muslim, and Russian Other.

The rivalry between these two religious histories of the Romanian people offer two important insights into the relationship between church, state and nation. First, there is the dynamic, long lasting interaction between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The “Orthodox nation” based on singularity, isolationism and independence, is rivaled by the “Catholic nation” emphasizing European values and the traditional Catholic transnationalism. Second, throughout centuries of interaction between churches, state and society, one can identify two critical junctures that are illustrative for my argument of contextualized path-dependency.

### Critical junctures and conclusion

The first juncture takes place in 1698 through the creation of the Uniate Church in Transylvania. Orthodox history portrays it as a tragic occurrence, through which Romanian Orthodox people were forced to convert to Catholicism. Be that as it may, the important piece of evidence is the presence of Orthodox clergy that accept conversion. Orthodox doctrinal unity was then shattered, and the acceptance of a combination of Catholicism and Orthodoxy shows that the Orthodox Church was not a unitary actor and its political strategy was influenced by the local context. The second juncture is the arrival of communism. According to Byzantine Orthodox tradition, the church should have resisted the communist regime's invitations for collaboration. Nevertheless, a significant part of the Orthodox Church clergy showed eagerness to collaborate with the regime, in order to safeguard its Orthodox identity. I argue that it is the unique nationalist nature of Romanian communism that led to maintaining the privileged status of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Consequently, when, after the collapse of communism, successive Romanian governments preserved the privileged status of the Orthodox Church, they attracted criticism from the part of the Greek-Catholic Church that accused them of promoting communist-type policies.

My analysis shows how the Romanian Orthodox Church became a symbol of national identity. With the arrival of communism, the government silently sanctioned the marriage between Orthodoxy and nationhood - a strategy that continued after the fall of the communist regime. Additionally, I also argue that the Romanian Orthodox Church, while the official carrier of national identity, was often put in positions of re-defining itself and its significant "Other" - which makes it a more flexible institution than commonly believed.

Finally, this research indicates that democratization does not have to necessarily entail secularization. In fact, privatizing religions and pushing it in a specialized niche may not be a good idea in the Romanian context. The fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church managed to portray itself as a symbol of tradition and unity, while also understanding the necessities of modernization and democratization, shows that the church secured a privileged place in the public sphere, where it can exercise its power and influence over both government and the society. Nonetheless, it is entirely up to the church how it uses its privileged position, being able to both deepen and slow down

democratic consolidation. More comparative research is needed in order to understand the mechanisms of exerting influence that orthodox churches possess. Comparisons with Greece may be particularly interesting, because of the similar privileged position that the church enjoys. Whatever comparison one chooses to make however, the relationship between church and state needs to be contextualized and understood in its dynamic evolution.

### **Bibliography**

- Anderson, Jon (ed.). 2005. *Religion, Democracy and Democratization*. New York: Routledge.
- Andreescu, Gabriel. 1998. International Relations and Orthodoxy in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. *International Studies*, 4, 1-32, Galati: Dominus.
- Berger, Peter L. 2001. Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today. *Sociology of Religion*, 62(4), 443-454.
- Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper. 2000. Beyond Identity. *Theory and Society* 29, 1-47.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1999. *Nationalism Reframed. Nationalism and The National Question in The New Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Bunce, Valerie. 2002. Comparing East and South. In Diamond, Larry, and Michael F. Plattner (eds.), *Democracy after Communism*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 18-32.
- Casanova, Jose. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Enyedi, Zsolt, and John O'Mahony. 2006. Churches and the Consolidation of Democratic Culture: Difference and Convergence in the Czech Republic and Hungary. In, Anderson, J. (ed.). *Religion, Democracy and Democratization*. New York, NY: Routledge, 171-191.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of The Prison*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Gautier, Mary L. 1997. Church Attendance and Religious Beliefs in Postcommunist Societies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36(2), 289-296.

- Gautier, Mary L. 1998. Church Elites and the Restoration of Civil Society in The Communist Societies of Central Europe. *Journal of Church and State* 40(2), 289-318.
- Greenfield, Leah. 1992. *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Klotz, Audie, and Cecelia Lynch. 2007. *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations.* Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Livezeanu, Irina. 1995. *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Lupsa, Stefan. 1992. Crestinismul romanesc a fost de la inceput ortodox. In *Ortodoxia Romaneasca*, Bucuresti: 67-84. ("Romanian Christianity has been Orthodox from the very beginning," in *Romanian Orthodoxy*).
- Neumann, Iver B. 1999. *Uses of The Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nielsen, Niels C. 1991. *Revolution in Eastern Europe: the Religious Roots.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Orren, Karen, and Stephen Skowronek. 1994. Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New' Institutionalism. In Dood, L., & Jillson, C. (eds.) *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretation*, Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Orren, Karen and Stephen Skowronek. 2004. *The Search for American Political Development.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pierson, Paul and Theda Skocpol. 2007. *Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science.* <http://polisci.berkeley.edu/faculty/bio/permanent/Pierson,P/Discipline.pdf>.
- Popescu, Emilian. 1992. Crestinismul pe teritoriul Romaniei pana in secolul al VII-lea, in lumina noilor cercetari. In *Ortodoxia Romaneasca*, Bucuresti, 85-99. (Christianity on Romanian territory until the seventh century, in the light of new research, *Romanian Orthodoxy*).

- Prundus, Silvestru A., and Clemente Plaianu. 1994. *Catolicism si ortodoxie romaneasca. Scurt istoric al bisericii romane unite*. Cluj Napoca: Viata Crestina (Catholicism and Romanian Orthodoxy. A Short History of the Romanian Uniate Church).
- Reus-Smit, Christian. 2002. *Imagining Society: Constructivism and The English School*. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 4(3), 487-509.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Savin, Ioan G. 1992. *Crestinismul in trecutul nostru istoric. Ortodoxie Romaneasca*, Bucuresti, 52-66. (Christianity in Our Historical Past).
- Steinmo, Sven, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth. 1992. *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Thelen, Kathleen. 1999. *Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics*. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2, 369-404.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1984. *The Conquest of America: The Question of The Other*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Todorova, Maria N. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Vulpe, Radu. 1979. *Romanitate si crestinism. Coordonate ale etnogenezei romanilor*. In *De la Dunare la mare*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului si a Dunarii de Jos. Galati, 16-22. (Roman character and Christianity. Traits of Romanian Ethnogenesis, in *From the Danube to the Black Sea*).
- Wendt, Alexander. 1994. *Collective Identity Formation and the International State*. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2), 384-396.