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ATHEISM, RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY OF RELIGION AND THE ISSUE OF EMERGENT SECULARIZATION IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

1. Introduction

In the past two decades the secularization theory has been the focus of important cross-disciplinary research: anthropology, sociology, political science, history, religious studies have all strived to put forth a comprehensive theory of the relationship between religion and modernity (Taylor, 2007). By challenging the classical theoretical corpus of secularization, under the heading of multiple modernities, these studies focus on the different path dependencies of religious practices and subjectivities in the context of the social transformations advanced by the expanding globalization process (Appadurai, 2001).

Within this contemporary debate, two dominant critiques of the classical theory of secularization have emerged: a weak *culturalist critique* and a strong *economicist critique*. The culturalist critique points out that secularization is not the byproduct of a modernization process (understood here as social differentiation, rationalization and pluralization of world-views), but is rather the byproduct of specific cultural factors that are peculiar to Western European countries (Berger, 2008). This means that Euro-secularism cannot be extrapolated to other social settings and can be traced back to specific cultural features of Western Europe such as the consolidation of a secular intelligentsia starting with the Enlightenment, social functions of the church, political culture, etc.

The economicist critique of secularization is informed by a rational choice theory of religion (RCTR) that analyzes religion as a symbolic product that acts as a social compensator for certain needs and goals (Young, 1997). In this paradigm religion is analyzed not from a demand-

side perspective (the way religious needs are structured by an increasing social rationalization of individual consciousness) but from a supply-side perspective, namely in terms of how religious agents are producing *different religious goods* and the way they are *supplied to religious consumers*.

Romania, an Orthodox country that has recently joint E.U. (2007), has experienced a strong restructuring of its religious mentalities in the past twenty years. After the fall of communism, religion was once again an important factor in shaping the public sphere of life. Some researchers, defending the rational choice theory of religion (Stark, 1999; Iannacone 1992,), argued that after the fall of the communist regimes the post-socialist countries have shown an increasing interest toward religion, which reveals a so called religious revival pattern that proves the secularization theory wrong. In this theoretical framework, Eastern Europe counts as a religious plural market only because atheism is re-interpreted as a religious-ideology (Froese, 2004). Post-socialist Romanian Orthodoxy by challenging this secular world-view is able to generate a competing religious market and so to bring fourth a religious revival.

My paper focuses on how this debate has integrated the case of Eastern-Europe and the post-communist transformations that followed after the communist attempt to implement state organized secularism. Using an Weberian and phenomenological model of analyzing religion, I criticize the shortcoming of the RCTR model (Bruce, 1999) by showing that Eastern-Europe in general and Romania in particular is developing a new pattern of secularization and that this is neither the outcome of specific cultural factors (cultural critique of secularization) nor of the way religious markets are regulated (economicist critique of secularization).

At the same time in my paper I show the inconsistencies of the "religious revival" thesis by analyzing the limited impact the atheist project had on the Romanian society and by showing that atheism in Eastern Europe was not the by-product of a genuine modernization process but a top-to-bottom ideology that did not managed to dislocate religious beliefs; during communist period the Romanian society was still very religious in spite the atheist regulations and persecutions.

2. Sociological epistemologies of religion and secularization

An important aspect in analyzing the secularization / religious revival issue, which remains largely unaddressed in the field of sociology and anthropology of religion, is the strong dependency of the various theories of religious change on the specific social epistemology that the researcher assumes. By this I mean the necessity of a meta-theoretical discussion of what it means to research religion and what are the main epistemological axioms that inform social research. When we analyze the issue of secularization we have to differentiate not only between the locus where this process takes place (as Doebelaere, 2002) does, when he differentiates between societal, organizational, individual secularization) or the major consequences secularization has on the field of society and every-day life (as Tschannen, 1991) does, when he identifies core aspects of modernization and their impact on religion), I argue that we need a deeper critique of the social epistemologies that are implicitly used when religion is conceptualized as an sociological and anthropological category of investigation.

Social epistemologies are not constitutive of the empirical data we analyze; they are rather paradigmatical juxtapositions (Kuhn, 2008) or axioms regarding the chosen strategies of explaining and understanding social reality and social action. Social epistemologies are grounded on ultimate ontological assumptions regarding the nature of social reality and the methodological principles that guide social research. Religion, as a sociological category, is not an exception to this and it is always analyzed in terms of a specific social paradigm that establishes the main epistemic coordinates of approaching this form of (social) interaction. Secularization is first of all a distance-concept that aims at capturing the social transformations of the "religious" processes into "non-religious" ones: the catalyzing structures that trigger these transformations and the way the categories of "religion" and "non-religion" are used are always determined by the specific social paradigm that informs the research.

In the past two decades the field of sociology of religion has been dominated by the rational choice theory of religion which has been acclaimed by many sociologists and political scientists as the most comprehensive paradigm of researching religion. In what follows I would like to underline some of the epistemological assumptions that informs the supply side approach to religion in post-communist Eastern Europe and

the way this research program has focused on the religious transformations of this region.

The sociological study of religion using a rational choice framework has its genealogy in the application of the micro-economic approach to human behavior which analyzes religion in terms of a commodity that is produced and consumed just like any other commodity (Iannaccone, 1990, 1997, 2005). The distribution of the fluxes of "religious capital" (Iannaccone, 1998) follows the economical laws of demand of supply and this is why the central theoretical device of RCTR is that of the "religious markets" and the emphasis set on the impact that religious pluralization (supply) has on religious consumption (demand).

A novel thing that is advanced by the RCTR paradigm is the shift from a "demand-side" perspective of religion to a "supply-side" perspective. Religion isn't anymore analyzed in terms of how subjective religious needs are structured by an increasing social rationalization of individual consciousness; now it is analyzed in terms of how religious agents are producing different religious goods and they way they are offered to religious consumers. It is not the demand that counts but the supply.

An important concept for RCTR is the concept of religious market and religious goods. A diversified religious market where there is a strong religious competition between the different religious suppliers will result in better quality of religious goods and so in a positive stimulation of religious consumption which increases religiosity. This is how RCTR explains the difference between the United the States and Western Europe in terms of the degree of religiosity. In the US, in spite the fact that this is one of the most modern countries in the world, there is an institutionalized religious pluralism that stimulates the production of religious goods. In Europe the religious markets are monopolized by one religion that is supported by the state, which controls all religious activities. Religious monopolization leads to low structural competition and to low quality of religious goods and services and eventuality to a decrease of religiosity. RCTR argues that secularization is not an irreversible process but rather a temporary situation that has to do with the way religious markets are regulated and not with an erosion of religious needs triggered by social modernization.

This argument is further employed to show that Western Europe is an exceptional case and that the secularization of Western countries is not due to the modernization process, but due to this particular way of organizing the religious market (Finke, 1992; Iannacone, 1992, 1998; Stark, 1999). The monopolization of the local religious markets by a dominant religion

(Catholicism or Protestantism) which is supported by the state blocks the institutionalization of genuine religious competition and so the possibility of religious vitality.

The RCTR approach represents an important shift in the field of sociology of religion in terms of the theoretical paradigm used to research religion. A Weberian-phenomenological paradigm has been replaced with a rational choice theory of religion. The RCTR approach to religious studies has been informed largely by an economicist approach that is based on an ethnocentric concept of instrumental-rationality. This represents an important departure from Weber's analysis of purposive rationality and the relationship it has with religious practices and subjectivities. For Weber the emergence and institutionalization of purposive-rationality led to a social pluralisation that had as a main consequence the disenchantment of the world (Schluchter, 1989). This allows us to put the concept of pluralism advanced by rational choice theory of religion in a different perspective.

Weber's methodological individualism and his emphasis set on understanding the rational motives of action does not overlap with the rational choice theory agenda as RCTR claims. Weber's view on the rationality of action is much more complex than the one supported by the RCTR and draws on a distinct social epistemology that views the generalization of purposive rationality and the institutionalization of societal rationalization as a specific historical and cultural process. Paradoxically theses process have a religious origin and are responsible as well for what Weber labels as the "*disenchantment of the world*" (Weber, 2003).

The differentiation of distinct spheres of values and the emergence of various cultural systems of action has generated according to Weber a permanent conflict between the religious system and the other sub-systems. The institutionalization of the purposive rationality that has been popularized through the Protestant ethic has led to an abnormal societal rationalization and to the transformation of the capitalist culture and institutions into the "iron cage" of modern life-world (Gog, 2007). This approach enables us to formulate an important critique of the rational choice theory of religion: the pluralization of values spheres leads according to Weber to a decline of the religious forms of structuring social reality and not to a religious revitalization, as RCTR claims.

The emphasis on the specific logic and rationality of the religious sphere that cannot be reduced to instrumental rational action has been later on developed by the social phenomenological approach of religion.

Following Alfred Schutz (Schutz, 1990), Berger (1990) and Luckmann (1991) have developed a distinct social epistemology that emphasis the various aspects of the inter-subjective constituted religious life-world. The Schutzian phenomenological approach proceeds from the epistemological assumption of the uniqueness of the religious finite province of meaning and of the way meaningful action is constituted in relation to specific structures of the life-world (Schutz, 1990).

This distinct social epistemology represents a radical break from the classical phenomenological tradition which draws on a pre-Husserlian concept of phenomenology (Ryba, 2009) that is not sensitive to the social and cultural embeddedness of religion and most of all to the inter-subjective structures of the social life-world in which religious subjectivities and practices are articulated. The post-Husserlian phenomenological theories have enabled the development of a new paradigm of analyzing social action that informed as well the sociological study of religion and secularization. In this social paradigm, the concept of secularization has to be related to the general de-coupling of the religious finite province of meaning from the ever-day life-world. The religious finite province of meaning is not capable anymore of providing religious motives for action and religious interpretation of every-day life (Schutz, 1990, 1990b). Secularization does not mean the vanishing of the religious finite province of meaning but its generalized incapacity to structure all other spheres of life. Both Berger's and Luckmann approaches to the issue of secularization emphasized how religion is a social constructed category and how the transformations induced by modern pluralism generates deep socio-structural changes of the religious sphere of life.

It is clear now to see the shift that is taking place in recent sociology of religion: one of the main differences between the various social epistemologies of secularization has to be related to the way the impact of social pluralism on religion is conceptualized. In the Weberian and phenomenological approaches post-modernity and social pluralism leads to the emergence of multiple plausibility structures and so to an erosion of religion; in the rational choice paradigm social pluralism generates a pluralization of the religious markets and so to an increased religiosity. The way relationship between pluralism and secularization is imagined within the new dominating social epistemology has changed dramatically.

We have to point out that RCTR it is based on a narrow definition of rationality and reduces all motives of action to instrumental cost/benefit analysis. Religion is analyzed in terms of rational actors that seek to

maximize their utility and the impact this has on the production of various religious goods and services - this model starts to inform more and more research of religion in Eastern Europe as well. According to this economical paradigm of religion, secularization is the outcome of the monopolization of the religious markets, a process that is reversible when religious de-regulation occurs and when religious pluralization is institutionalized. As we have seen in this section, RCTR argues that in those societies where there are more religions competing with each other for followers there is a positive stimulation of the consumption of religiosity because competition generates higher quality of religious goods and services.

The religious transformations in Eastern Europe are interpreted as the emergence of new type of religious pluralism. But most the post-communist Eastern European countries (Romania including) have a religious market that is dominated by a single religion (in the case of Romania, Orthodox Christianity). RCTR explains the religious revival by pointing out that in Eastern Europe the competition has been not among different religious suppliers, but between world-views. Atheism is seen as a sort of secular religion that is challenged during the post-socialist period by different religious word-views. This leads to a diversification of religious market (religious competition generates a higher quality of religious goods) and later to religious revival.

The "supply-side" theories of religion consider the Eastern-European region as a conglomerate of social spaces where religious world-views are increasingly marketed and where religion and religious leaders dominate the public sphere of life. According to RCTR this shows that secularization has nothing to do with the enfolding of a modernization process, but with the way the "religious market" is organized. By looking at the Romanian case I want to criticize the "supply-side" perspective and the rational choice theory of religion by arguing that the RCTR assumption that within communist societies atheism had the status of a secular religion that replaced traditional religions is wrong (section 3) and by pointing out that pluralism has rather the opposite effect: it generates an erosion of the traditional religious world-view and institutes a new logic of secularization (section 4).

3. Atheism in Eastern Europe: The De-regulation of the Religious Market and the Issue of Pluralism

One of the main issues regarding the application of RCTR's theory of religious pluralism to Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is that most of these countries are dominated by religious monopolies (either Roman Catholic or Orthodox). At the same time the majority of RCTR theorists claim to have identified in CEE a clear pattern of religious revival. The empirical research carried in these countries made them advocate the thesis (which in the mean time has become a common place in the field of religious studies of the CEE region and underlies many programs of research) that after the fall of communism these countries experienced a massive religious revival. The atheist ideology that secularized the entire social system was allegedly replaced by a strong return of religion in both public and private life.

How is the RCTR making sense of this theoretical paradox of the simultaneity of monopoly of the religious market and religious growth? How can it explain the post-communist religious revival of a CEE countries that are to a great extend mono-religious? More than this, most of the CEE countries underwent after the fall of communism an intensive process of religious regulation: the post-communist states have generally supported the establishment of national religions and various ethno-religious ideologies. This, together with religious monopolization of the market, should lead, according to RCTR, to a general secularization (or decrease of religious consumption) and not to a pattern of religious revival.

On the other hand RCTR theorists are puzzled by the fact that religious pluralism (in those countries where this is encountered) does not lead to an increase of religiosity in most of the ex-communist countries. In spite the RCTR theoretical prediction the correlation is negative: the more religious pluralist a country is the more likely a secularization trend can be identified (Froese, 2004:58-59). The same applies to religious regulations of the market. A correlation between various religious freedom indexes and levels of religiosity reveals again a contradicting image: the less religious freedom exists in a country and the stronger the monopoly is, the more likely that in that country a religious revival is taking place (Froese, 2004:58-59). These findings contradict the RCTR of religion regarding the impact religious pluralism has on religious consumption.

An important element for explaining away this theoretical failure is to **re-define atheism as a religious ideology.** By codifying the atheist

philosophy as a secular religion which displays the same structural marks as any other religion, the RCTR emphasizes that the religious monopolization of CEE religious market is only apparent and that at a deeper level a stronger competition exists: that between the atheist and the emerging religious worldview (Froese, 2004:58, 73):

> Nevertheless, I contend that post-communist religious revivals follow predictable patterns when one accounts for two important factors in the religious economy. First, post- Soviet societies contained an inordinate number of atheists and agnostics. This was due to decades of religious repression and continuous attempts to convert the Soviet public to atheism. Therefore, religious competition in post-Soviet society should take into account competition with atheism. Second, post-Soviet countries are implementing their own religious regulations -ones that tend to favor certain religious groups. When one considers the impact of atheism in tandem with these new religious laws, religious growth follows the expectations of supply-side theory. (Froese, 2004:58)

This competition between atheism and emerging religious worldview explains as well, according to RCTR, why usually former communist Catholic countries as Lithuania and Poland are more religious than Orthodox and Muslim countries (Froese, 2004:64).

The Catholic Church was during the communist period an active institution that resisted the communist regimes (Froese, 2005:269). It generated a religious counter-culture that helped coagulate various opponents of the communist regimes. This builds up not only to political resistance, but to religious resistance as well and hence it generated a pluralist culture that amounted to a gradual religious revival. The fact that some ex-communist Catholic countries have developed patterns of religious revivals is due, according to the supply-side model, to the pluralist culture and the structural opposition between a secular and religious world-view (Froese, 2004:64, 71).

In the communist countries where Islam was the religion of the majority no real religious counter-culture could be established that could challenge the atheist ideology because of the over-fragmentation of the Muslim groups (Froese, 2004:65). The same lack of religious resistance could be encountered in Orthodox countries, but this had other reasons, namely the fact that the Orthodox Church had allowed itself to be transformed into a national symbol of the communist regimes (Froese, 2004:65). The Orthodox Churches have been known, according to RCTR, for

collaborating with the communist regimes and lending their support for the establishment of national identities.

This elaborates a theme that has been increasingly advocated in the past years that emphasizes the important role of the Byzantine theological legacy in shaping church – state relationships in communist countries (Gillet, 2001:28). The symphony principle (Gillet, 2001:70) was genuinely embedded in the Orthodox political ideology and acted as the base of continuous collaboration between the church and state representatives. In spite the fact that the atheist propaganda aimed at eradicating outdated religious thinking it never publicly attacked the Orthodox Church; it aimed at transforming it into an important ally (Gillet, 2001:70).

This was done through the establishment of a communist pan-orthodoxy around the Russian Church that aimed at re-constructing the unity of the Byzantine Church and the collaborative effort to halt the Catholic advancement into Orthodox territories (Gillet, 2001:122). In fact what is paramount of the suppression of the Greek-Catholic churches by the communist regimes is the active collaboration of the Orthodox Church in picturing the Greek Catholics as enemies of the nations (Gillet, 2001:191-205). A different religious affiliation meant disloyalty to the nation-state – this could be conceived only by implicitly using a particular religious definition of what it meant to be a member of the national state (Gillet, 2001:175-178

In contrast to the "Catholic imperialism" that doubled the "Capitalist imperialism", the Orthodox Churches were called to be churches of the people that served their country (Gillet 2001:123). The anti-clericalism that have developed in Catholic countries have managed to alienate Western people from the Church; this could not be let happen in Orthodox countries and because of this the Orthodox establishment had to adapt itself to the needs of the people of their respective national countries. The most authentic expression of the will of the people was, according to Gillet, the Communist State, so being a Church of the people implied most of all being a Church of the State (Gillet, 2001:124-125).[1]

RCTR conceptualizes the lack of religious resistance to the communist ideology as one of the most important reasons why Orthodox communist countries have not developed a religious plural system: the absence of religious pluralism explains religious consumption is low in communist Orthodox countries - structurally the religious market was during the communist period not a competitive one (as allegedly was in Catholic Poland).

The post-communist period meant first of all a re-establishment of traditional churches and an alliance between national churches and state structures in almost all Eastern-European countries. Most of the post-communist states introduced religious laws and various other religious regulations that aimed at strengthening the local churches and inhibiting religious pluralism. State subsidies, symbolic presence in national media and state institutions and the involvement of national church representatives in public ceremonies enabled the various national churches to establish a powerful position within the post-communist period and halt any advance of minority religions. The post-communist period in almost each individual country case was synonymous with the emergence of monopolized religious markets (Froese, 2008:155-158). The same monopolization of religious market exists not only in former Eastern European communist countries but in former Soviet republics as well. The Islamic resurgence meant the re-establishment of religiously informed laws that were not very open to other types of religious ideas and practices (Froese, 2008:154).

At the same time RCTR theorists agree with the fact that these countries have underwent a genuine religious revival (Froese, 2008:152) and that precisely the countries that have least religious pluralism and the stronger religious regulation are the ones that have the highest religious values. Paradoxically it is not the pluralization of religious market that generates religious vitality, but the strong monopolization (Froese, 2008:160-161). This contradicts the general rational choice theory of religion and demands an explanation.

The RCTR explanatory device is elaborated through the re-interpretation of atheism as a political ideology that fulfils specific religious functions. The existing religious monopolization is only a surface appearance - in fact, the supply side model claims, at a deeper level we deal with a strong institutionalized challenge to atheism as a world-view (Froese, 2008:160). At a structural level there is not a monopolist situation but rather a (bi) pluralist one: different world-views compete with each other after the fall of the communist regime. On one side there is an atheistic secular world-view and on the other side the re-emergence of a new religious world-view: this generates the pluralistic situation (an important element for RCTR, as we have already seen) need in order explain the religious revival of Eastern-Europe.

The alleged religious revival is due to the dissolution of atheist regulation of the (secular and religious) world-view market and the

increased diversification of religious offers all over Eastern Europe (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:482). The Eastern European case, rational choice theorists of religion claim, acts as a general proof of the theory that secularization is not related to modern and post-modern transformations but to monopolization of religious markets. The post-communist changes led to overall religious revival, simply because various religious agents where free to actively marketize their religious goods (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:483) against a prevailing secular-atheist world-view.

We can see how this re-interpretation of atheism as a secular religion works within the RCTR model by analyzing a few of the studies that theorists subscribing to this paradigm have dedicated to Eastern-European countries. Poland is invoked by a lot of studies as one of the most religious country of Eastern Europe (Froese & Pfaff, 2001). Analyzing the discourse of RCTR regarding Poland represents a good case of how RCTR works when faced with difficulties accommodating empirical findings with general theoretical predictions. Catholicism holds monopoly in Poland just like in the other European countries: in Italy, Spain and France (Cahtolic monopolies) underwent a secularization process as a result of this religious monopolization of the market, as the RCTR theorists are well aware.

The reason why this Catholic monopoly has not led to the same situation in Poland is the fact that during the communist period the Church has allegedly turned from a state-church to a national-church (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:485-486). The difference between the two lays in the degree of autonomy of the church in relationship to the national-state. As we noticed, RCTR claims that in most Orthodox countries churches became allies of the communist regimes and as such they were transformed into state-churches, a status they have tried to maintain during the post-communist period as well.

Catholicism was since long time an important element of national identity (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:487) (but this is the case of most Orthodox Balkan countries as well, which RCTR model fails to acknowledge) and during the communist period it managed to act as the sole major institution of the opposition to the Soviet communist rule (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:488). As such they became national churches (i.e. achieved autonomy from the state).

The Catholic Church was able to act as a platform of people dissatisfied with the communist ideology and culture and developed a strong resistance movement. These institutional developments were instrumental in articulating an anti-communist counter-culture that was at the same time

impregnated by strong religious legitimations. Because of the massiveness of this movement, communists learned how to accommodate it within Polish society without allowing it to become a mainstream movement. This nevertheless created the pre-condition of social and religious pluralism (social pluralism because it generated alternative social and cultural spaces that were not institutionally controlled by communist propaganda bureaucracy) (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:488). Although the competition here is at the level of political ideologies (communism versus Catholic inspired nationalism) the same world-view conflict between atheism and religion is implicitly assumed (Froese & Pfaff, 2001:489).

RCTR claims that the massive Catholic adhesions during the communist period are a consequence of the existence of a vital ideological market that allowed for an open world-view competition. This ideological competition created as well, according to RCTR, the institutional and social means to express this word-view at the level of the entire social system. This explains within RCTR why in Poland in spite of the communist propaganda there was still a very high level of religiosity. The communist atheist monopoly should have led to a forced secularization, but this did not happen because Poland experienced during the communist period a plural religious market.

Various other Eastern-European countries tried to reproduce the Polish model (Froese, 2005). Countries like Hungary, Slovakia and Lithuania (Froese, 2005:269) retain their religious vitality during the post-communist period because religion here managed to generate a national counter-culture as a reaction to the Soviet communist ideology. Interestingly enough all these countries are Catholic and the implicit idea here is that the trans-national bureaucratic structure of this church helped subvert the communist geo-politics. After communism and its atheistic ideology was swept away by the political changes in the early 90's the world-view market has altered considerately, leaving Catholicism as the sole supplier of religious meanings and goods. RCTR claims that this has created a monopoly situation and in very short time (1990-1996, *sic*) has led to a gradual secularization. The new monopoly situation explains within RCTR why in Poland in spite a very high religiosity there is a gradual trend towards secularization.

But RCTR is inconsistent with this claim. Analyzing the difference between secular Czech Republic and devout Slovakia (Froese, 2005), the RCTR theorists claim that sometimes the secularization of a specific Eastern European countries is the lack of continuous fusion between nationalism and religion. If during the communist period this would make sense

because of the alleged generation of a religious counter-culture, during the post-communist period this alliance between a particular religious group and national politics leads to a monopolization of the religious market. It creates the pre-condition of even a fiercer monopolization because it is enforced by the national state. In spite of this fact RCTR theorists claim that this monopolization rather leading to a decrease of religiosity (as the supply-model claims) it leads paradoxically to an increase.

The post-communist separation of Czechoslovakia led to two distinct trajectories of relating Catholicism with the newly emerged nations (Froese, 2005:275-280). In the Czech Republic under the pressure of Jan Hus reform legacy there was a trend of de-legitimating the Catholic Church and keeping it from attaining an important place in the national political scene. In Slovakia on the other side, Catholicism was at the center of the national project and was promoted as the religious ideology that could embody the Slovakian post-communist national project. This fusion of the national project with a religious ideology explains why Slovakia still has a high religiosity compared to the Czech Republic which is one of the most secular countries of Europe (Froese, 2005:270-271). An easier explanation that of differences in modernization processes between the two countries is dropped in favor of a contradicting thesis that a specific instance of religious monopoly (nationalism reinforced by a unique religion) generates higher religious values and not lowers as the general rational choice theory of religion predicts. In the case of Poland the post-communist Catholic monopolization was seen as being the factor of secularization, in the case of Slovakia the same monopolization is seen as leading to a religious revival.

Strong inconsistencies can be noted as well in the analysis of those Eastern European countries that are not religiously monopolized by one church, as is the case of Hungary (Froese, 2001). RCTR predicts that religious pluralization should lead to an increase in religious demand, but in the case of Hungary the opposite is the case. Hungary is a country where both Catholicism and Protestantism (Calvinism and Lutheranism) have a great share of the religious believers; it qualifies as a religious plural country within the RCTR theoretical framework. As most of other communist European countries Hungary experienced a fierce process of atheization that led not only to the implementation of a new ideology but also to harsh religious persecutions (Froese, 2001:252-256). This religious persecution had only a limited impact on Hungarians and in spite the fact that the historical churches accepted to collaborate with the communist

authorities (and did not generate an alternative religious counter-culture as in Poland) the religious values remained high compared to the previous periods (church attendance dropped[2] only slightly (Froese, 2001:254).

The comparison of the 1980 and 1990 world-value survey revealed that the fall of communism led to a slight rise of religious values (Froese, 2001:258, 266) but this is hard to be labeled as a religious revival. It is rather the effect of a general religious euphoria that emerged after the removal of religious oppression and disappearance of the agents of atheization. But the fact that immediately after the fall of communism Hungarians manifest a deep religiosity shows in my opinion that the atheization process could not eliminate the religious structure and religious mentalities but only impede the public manifestation of it.

The most problematic issue is that the Hungarian post-socialist religious revival was only shortly lived and soon an abrupt secularization followed. The fact that religious pluralization has not led to a religious revival, but to secularization is extremely problematic for RCTR. Trying to explain that this is due to the fact that all the historical churches receive subsidies from the government (Froese, 2001:265-267) is not a viable argument because unlike other ex-communist countries, in Hungary there isn't only one church that monopolized the market with the help of the national state but there are several churches (religious minorities included) that were in the same position – state subsidies allocated to all religion should only reinforce religious pluralism, and not weaken it. Additionally, the harsh atheist regulations have not managed to secularize the country as post-socialist pluralism did. The fact that religious values are continuing to drop during the post-communist period and reach values much lower than in the communist atheist period is rather a confirmation of the general secularization theory that links the process of modernization with that of secularization.

The idea that post-communist religious revivals are due to a deep-level religious pluralism is based on the argument that atheism in-itself was a religion. In spite the fact that most ex-communist countries are dominated, as we have seen, by a single national religion that continues to be strongly supported by the state (so that a high level of regulations of the religious market exists), the alleged Eastern European religious revivals are explained using the same RCTR conceptual framework of competition and pluralism. But this is based on a semantic shift of what pluralism means: pluralism in this case refers to a world-view competition

between the religion of atheism and the rebirth of the oppressed traditional religion. This pluralism does not take place as RCTR predicts, between various religions, but between a religiously assumed atheistic world-view and a dominating state religion.

Atheism is re-interpreted by RCTR as a religion mainly because the communist intended to transform it into an ultimate world-view that was meant to replace traditional religions (Froese, 2004:66). As such it attained the status of a religious doctrine that was spread through the secular networks of the State. The communist political party and the ideologization of the educational system were the two most common means of spreading atheism through the masses.

The RCTR theorists think that they are able to establish several similarities between the ideology of atheism and the fundamental structure of religion. First of all RCTR argues that atheism marginalized religious communities by trying to establish secular churches that were meant to take over the main function of traditional churches (Froese, 2008:55). This was done through the creation of mass organizations that had the purpose of systematically generating proselytes within the communist established societies. Allegedly, according to RCTR, this was achieved in an almost religious fashion using newly established factories as parishes where the atheist dogma was preached (Froese, 2008:56).

The resemblance between atheism and religion can been seen, according to RCTR, also by the fact that the communist ideologists managed to replace all religious holidays with secular ones that were molded after a religious holidays and rituals (Froese, 2008:60). This was done either through changes in the secular calendar and the enforcement of special communist events that were meant to obstruct participation in religious services (especially during Christmas and Easter time) or through the creation of secular events that had the same structure as the religious ones only devoid of their traditional meanings (Froese, 2008:61).

RCTR claims that in order to make atheism more appealing to the masses secular rituals where invented that aimed at replacing the traditional religious rituals for baptisms, weddings and funerals. These rituals had a clear religious structure that aimed at establishing a new world-view an integrated moral community based on humanistic and atheistic values (Froese, 2004:66). Communist youth rites of passage were especially designed in order to replace their religious prevailing ones (Froese, 2008:61).

Another important resemblance that RCTR theorists claim to see is the replacement of religious saints and icons with the cult of communist leaders (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin) which had not only the function of political mobilization, but a religious one as well (Froese 2008:63). The images of communist leaders and the political processions are seen as public religious rituals and pilgrimages that have at centerfold human semi-gods that are worshiped by the population like saints (Froese, 2004:43; 2008:64).

The Marxist-Leninist doctrine is more or less conceptualized as a religious doctrine (Froese, 2008:58, 66-67) that penetrates al spheres of life and reinterprets the life-world based on the dialectical materialism principles. The ideological orthodoxy and the brutal forced used to repress all deviations it is seen as resembling the relationship between religious dogmatism and sects: i.e. the communist doctrine was propagated as a new religious dogma.

This analogy between religion and atheist ideology is so strong stated within RCTR that is postulated as functioning as such not only at the level of political discourse (the way indoctrinators perceived their ideology), but being assumed as such by the population as well. The communists managed not only to replace religion with the atheist ideology by transforming it into a secular substitute it managed, according to RCTR, to generate as well religious followers (*sic*):

> […] scientific atheism replicated religious ceremonies, rituals, and produced a new Communist sense of the sacred as an alternative to religion. This simply confused the population, many of whom mistook scientific atheism for a new religion and not an exit from religious belief altogether so that even those few who wanted to believe in the ideals of atheistic communism simply ended up praying to the gods of Lenin and Stalin (Froese, 2004:48)

According to RCTR, atheists were in fact strong religious believers! Another important feature of the equation of the atheist ideology with religion is the Marxist utopia of an end of History and the establishment of a Messianic society where equality, the proletarian control of all means of production and the re-distribution of surplus-value could establish a classless society and where conflict and exploitation will cease. In essence this political ideology resembles, according to RCTR, very much the

Christian eschatology and addresses the religious hope of a new humanity and the expectation of abolishment of all evil and suffering.

RCTR considers that atheism was successful during the communist period ,Froese 2004:59; Froese, 2008:144; Froese and Pfaff, 2005:414-417) because it generated a high number of religious unaffiliated people and it impeded the mechanisms of religious socialization (Froese, 2008:147). In fact RCTR postulates that religious monopolies were established after the fall of communism precisely because the long-lasting atheist repression created a genuine "religious vacuum" (Froese, 2008:162).

Sometimes the successfulness of this religious ideology is ambiguous assumed within the RCTR and is portrayed as failing at the end of communism because it was an unsuccessful top-to bottom imposed world-view that was not propagated in a truly scientific manner (Froese, 2004b:46-48). Other times is seen as failing precisely because it was very successful and it led to the monopolization of the world-view market (within RCTR monopolization and regulation always leads to failure of the supplied religious world-view):

> Many of these problems stem from the fact that scientific atheism was an ideology imposed on a population from official channels. Communists did not attempt to engage the hearts and minds of would-be converts but expected individuals to simply bend to patently superficial belief […] In this, scientific atheism closely resembles the weakness and impotence of monopoly religion that rely on political favoritism for subsistence and become apathetic to the needs of their congregations. (Froese, 2004f:48)

The idea here is that because atheism as an ideology had the status of an exclusive belief system (Froese, 2008:65) it consequently had only a limited impact on the masses because it was assumed as an sacred world-view that had to be imposed in a fundamentalist manner in every-day life (Froese, 2008:66). Communist states, according to RCTR, resemble religious fundamentalist states that established regulated and monopolized religious markets.

The internal structure of the atheist ideology has within the RCTR a complete religious meaning. This resemblance is not assumed as being merely metaphorical; within RCTR atheism is perceived as being a genuine religion:

> Within this context, the symbols, rituals, and moral codes produced by Communist Party elites appear ironic. But in trying to destroy religion, Marxist-Leninists discovered an unforeseen obstacle – religious demand. In trying to unravel the mystery of religious persistence, Communist Party officials recognized the powerful allure of ritual activity and charismatic authority, which they hoped to bend to their own ends. In pursuit of secularization, the Communist Party ended up creating a sacred church, homily, and liturgy of its very own (Froese, 2008:65)

Religious demand does never disappear and this is the case within an atheist state as well (Froese, 2008:142). This is consistent with RCTR theoretical axioms. Atheism could halt religious supply and regulate churches, but could never eradicate the demand for religion. In doing this RCTR claims that atheism had to become a religion in order to supply this demand, and so was de facto transformed into a secular religion.

The main reason for the equivalence between religion and atheism is that this is the only way the religious transformations all over Eastern Europe can be explained theoretically by RCT. Religious growth can take place within RCTR only if there are various religious competitors available on the religious market i.e. the social system enables religious pluralism. The post-communist societies are in fact religiously monopolized and regulated by the state – by reinterpreting atheism as a religious ideology this allows to RCTR to maintain its theoretical framework in analyzing the religious developments in Eastern Europe. We can see here very clearly the way a specific assumed epistemology of religion and secularization constitutes its object of research and forces data to fit its model.

In what follows I would like to challenge this functionalist definition of religion and the equation of atheist ideology with religion. My argument is that atheism represented a forced instrumental control of the worldview that was dictated from top to bottom through the existing official networks. It was imposed on the Romanian population by force (sometimes through religious persecutions and imprisonment) and acted as the official language that codified a radical separation of State and Church. The assumption of RCTR that this form of political secularism through forced atheization of the population was successful in terms of secularizing the life-world is gratuitous. In spite of the persecutions and strong regulations imposed on the religious system, religion never actually disappeared from the private sphere of life.

Looking at various sociological studies that try to monitor the impact of the atheist ideology on Soviet population, Martin (1978) argues that the level of atheization was very low in those regions that had a low educational capital, were not part of the state imposed industrialization and urbanization process and had few Party members (Martin, 1978: 209-244). This enables us to see the specific top-to-bottom strategy that the Communist Party employed and the strong link with the bureaucratic network the atheist ideology had. Rather then being a process that generated a wide acceptance of a secular atheistic world-view it was more an official political ideology that tried to impose itself dogmatically and acted as an official language of the Party.

The two main environments that were instrumental for the Communist Party in order to implement atheism were the work environment (emerging factories and industries) and education. Out of this, the educational system was most critical because it enabled communists to control the formation of ultimate values and socialization process of the entire future generations of Romanians. In what follows I would like to take a look at this and at the communist studies of that period that were preoccupied with the implementation of Atheism in Romanian society and show why the strategy employed by the communists was incapable of achieving its aims.

At the heart of instrumentalizing the educational establishments lies a strategy to overcome the Marxist contradiction between theory and praxis regarding religion. Marxism claims to be the expression of rigorous social science and as such it conceives itself as totally opposite to ideological reification of reality through religion (Berar, 1980:122). The dialectical materialist worldview needs to be strongly rooted in the lives of teenagers so that it can ground the ethical imperatives that follow from the communist revolution and the practical requirements that are a pre-requisite of any industrialized society (Berar, 1980:126). Although the superiority of the dialectical-materialism is beyond any doubt and although it has been theoretically justified as the highest form of philosophy it stills need to be transformed into a practical reality (Berar, 1980:126): the new superior human is "*at the same time an ideal and a developing reality*" (Berar, 1980:121). This is why although theoretically religion has been made ineffective by the advent of the empowered proletarian forces (through the seizing of the means of the production that generated during the pre-communist phase the religious alienation) and by the institutionalization of the only true world-view (dialectical materialism) its disappearance

had to be achieved practically, through state coordinated interventions in the life-world of the communist society.[3]

The secular educational system was an important device that has been developed in order to overcome this contradiction between theory and praxis. The educational establishments were transformed into the most important sites of atheist education and disciplination of teenagers so that they could develop a communist ethic and a dialectical-materialist worldview. The ultimate scope of this atheist educational project was a moral outcome: that of an every-day ethics based on a materialist world-view (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:399).

The development of communist ethics would assure the construction of a just and free society that is realized through productive labor: this is why work should be an opportunity to affirm the essence of personality (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:400) and to serve as a reminder of the dialectical-materialist world-view. The communist youth would engage in different labor activities that would prepare them for adult life, but this would always have a philosophical twist: that of acculturating them into adult atheist and communist member of the new society.

The communist authorities developed for this reason the Communist Youth Union that would have to assure the perpetuation of the atheist education (Spiridon, 2005: 257) and the dialectical-materialist world-view that they have promoted in the curricula of the secular education system. One of the main reason for this was the need for a better ideological control of the free time of teen-agers and of their entertainment spaces (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:400). For the communist authorities this time was perceived as a valuable "capital" that was not always invested the right way by their parents, so the communist ideologists were struggling to find ways of taking a share of this "capital" in order to organize different activities that would contribute to the generation of a scientific-atheist worldview (Dunstan, 1993:167-171).

The ideological control of free time of young people was also aiming to make sure that they do not use their free time to engage in religious activities that were organized at the same days of public holidays (Sundays) or expose themselves to "*mystical practices of different religions and religious sects* (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:401)". This shows the externality of the atheization process and how this was implanted through the governmentalization of time, institutionalization and control of socialization mechanisms.

The educational system was very important for the communist authorities because here they could easily exercise the nude forms of political secularism in order to re-convert a rural religiosity into an urban workforce that was realizing its authenticity through productive work and a socialist ethic. The school as an institution was part of a vast educational strategy that was meant to "*continuously improve the political ideology*" (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:393) by encircling categories of society into "practical" institutional frames that would easily allow for a conversion to the dialectical-materialist world-view. This way they developed the controlled social spaces that would permit *"to address them with ever new messages, rich in content, through specific means: press, radio, television programs, cinematography and through the greatest numbers of theaters, museums, libraries, clubs, cultural houses, cultural institutions that Romania ever knew* (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:393)".

The school and the university was the most focalized and powerful environment to discipline children and teenagers into developed members of the communist society. The ideologization of the educational system was the solution to this and it became an important instrument of atheization in the hands of the communist regime:

> Our educative system, that has as a foundation the educative force of the entire society and the strength of the normative activities of its opinion, contains a multitude of ways and a network with a variety and area of reach, unprecedented in the history of learning and education of our nation (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:393).

In terms of educational content the atheist project should develop in two steps: first, it should focus on the primary notions of a scientific view of the world and elaborate the basic "scientific notions" needed for a materialistic understanding of life; second, the late study of philosophy should enable the student to acquire the "*categories and fundamental principles of the dialectical-materialist philosophy*" (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972: 396) that would allow them to have a critical perspective on social and religious realities.

It is only when these two levels of education are connected on a profound level that atheistic worldviews are developed and the genuine rejection of religions can be generated in the lives of the students. Then why the atheization attempts sometimes fail according the communists intelligentsia? The reason is that the ideological critique of religion that is

not backed up by scientific arguments doesn't have the force to penetrate the religious "mysticism" (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:397). Only when students are brought in touch with science can they develop a genuine world-view that frees them from religious backwardness.

At this point it easily becomes visible that the communist ideologists are aware of the fact that for the past two decades atheism has functioned as an empty ideology and only when this is doubled by the inoculation of scientific perspective on life can they succeed in eradicating religion. We can clearly see here the naivety, scientificism and positivism that underline these communists programs of atheization. It relies on an Enlightenment view of religion codified as an obscure force of humanism that will naturally disappear once exposed to the rigorousity of scientific thinking encouraged by dialectical materialism.[4]

In the specific case of Romania this ideology had a limited impact on the religious mentality of the population and on children that were socialized within rural proletarian families forced to migrate to cities by the industrialization process. This is not the case of all communist countries: in some of them secularization advanced to Western European comparative levels. Eastern Germany (57.41%), Check Republic (55.95%), Bulgaria (53.48%), Slovenia (32.66%) reached and surpassed in the early 90's levels of unbelief similar to some of the western countries such as Sweden (46.04), France (35.13%), Netherlands (33.33%) and Denmark (32.62%). But countries as Romania (5.98%) and Poland (2.44%) remained highly religious only similar to Malta (0.51%) and Ireland (2.40).[5] When asked if they considered themselves religious persons (**Table 1**) we can see that in spite the fact that people in ex-communist countries tend to see themselves as less religious than those in Western European countries, the level of convinced atheists is almost similar (except the two outlier cases: France – 10.58% and East Germany 18.41%).

Table 1. Are you a religious person?

	Religious	**Not Religious**	**Convinced Atheist**
Malta	74.30 %	23.92 %	0.51 %
Ireland	71.50 %	26.60 %	0.60 %
Northern Ireland	70.72 %	27.30 %	0.66 %
Poland	90.02 %	2.55 %	0.92 %
USA	81.29 %	14.57 %	1.20 %

Romania	73.35 %	23.84 %	1.27 %
Austria	71.30 %	14.59 %	1.85 %
Finland	50.00 %	32.82 %	2.21 %
Latvia	34.44 %	26.69 %	2.21 %
Iceland	73.93 %	22.65 %	2.42 %
West Germany	53.50 %	26.89 %	2.43 %
Lithuania	46.50 %	35.30 %	2.60 %
Canada	68.84 %	25.72 %	2.66 %
Norway	45.04 %	46.97 %	2.74 %
Estonia	18.65 %	66.57 %	2.78 %
Italy	80.57 %	11.60 %	3.22 %
Slovakia	69.10 %	16.11 %	3.43 %
Hungary	54.25 %	37.64 %	3.60 %
Portugal	72.91 %	20.68 %	3.97 %
Great Britain	54.99 %	36.66 %	4.11 %
Denmark	67.96 %	21.55 %	4.17 %
Spain	61.51 %	29.20 %	4.25 %
Czech Republic	37.41 %	47.37 %	4.93 %
Netherlands	59.59 %	33.33 %	5.11 %
Sweden	28.46 %	56.06 %	6.49 %
Belgium	61.64 %	20.49 %	6.81 %
Slovenia	60.19 %	15.27 %	6.86 %
Bulgaria	31.82 %	49.23 %	7.16 %
France	48.10 %	36.13 %	10.58 %
East Germany	33.31 %	36.68 %	18.41 %

In the early 90's Romania was by far one of the least secularized country and with one of the least number of convinced atheists from Europe. If we look closer we can see that the Party managed to impose atheism specifically on the younger generations that were socialized within the communist society (**Table 2a**) and that it had a greater impact in the urban area of Romania (**Table 2b**). But is very hard to asses to what degree this levels of unbelief are due to the communist atheization efforts or to enfolding urbanization and industrialization. We can see that in urban areas the level of religious socialization within families is lower

from one generation to the other (**Table 3a and 2b**) but overall this does not necessary lead to less religiosity. Out of the total people that state that they have not been brought up religiously at home 69.3% believe in God (**Table 4a**) and 35.8% declare that they are religious people (**Table 4b**). Still, there is a big percentage of people that were not religiously socialized in their families that tend to not consider themselves religious people (59.1%) that show that the lack of religious socialization is an important factor that accounts for the degree of religiosity (**Table 4b**). What is hard to tell from the data is to what extent the absence of religious socialization was due to atheist propaganda or to an enfolding secularization process. Further future research needs to be done in order to settle this issue, but at a general level it is clear that Romania was in the early 90's a country in which religious socialization in families was still very high in comparison with other Eastern and Western European countries (77 % of respondents declaring that they have received a religious upbringing).

Table 2a. Are you a religious person? (year of birth)

	Born before 1939	**1940-1969**	**1960-1975**
Religious person	85.3%	72.3%	62.1%
Not a religious person	13.3%	24.9%	33.6%
Convinced Atheist	.8%	1.0%	2.0%
Don't know	0.6%	1.8%	2.3%

Table 2b. Are you a religious person? (rural-urban)

	Rural	**Urban**
Religious person	80.0%	65.2%
Not a religious person	17.5%	31.6%
Convinced Atheist	1.2%	1.4%
Don't know	1.3%	1.8%

Table 3a. Were you brought up religiously at home? (rural population)

	Born before 1939	**1940-1969**	**1960-1975**
Yes	96.3%	86.5%	73.1%
No	3.7%	13.5%	26.9%

Table 3b. Were you brought up religiously at home? (urban population)

	Born before 1939	1940-1969	1960-1975
Yes	83.1%	69.0%	49.5%
No	16.9%	31.0%	50.5%

Table 4a. „Belief in God": and „Were you brought up religiously at home?"

	Yes	No
Belief in God	95.1%	69.3%
No belief in God	2.5%	17.7%
Don't know	2.5%	13.0%

Table 4b. „Are you a religious person?" and „Were you brought up religiously at home?

	Rural	Urban
Religious person	84.6%	35.8%
Not a religious person	13.3%	59.1%
Convinced Atheist	.6%	3.5%
Don't know	1.5%	1.6%

In Romania, the specific form of political secularism that the communist authorities advanced managed to generate a societal secularization (separating the State from the Church and generating an political, economical and social system that could function without the legitimization provided by the religious system) but this has not led as well to a individual secularization (the replacement of a religious frame of codifying the practices of the self with an immanent secular one) (Dobbelaere, 2002). This is why right after the fall of communism we can see in Romania a very low level of atheism. To consider atheism a religion, as RCTR does, that managed to replace traditional religion is simply misleading. Even considered as a secular world-view, atheism in the early 90's had little currency within the Romanian society and there was little or no competition among world-views, as RCTR claims. After the fall of communism, atheist secularism lost its force and legitimacy in regulating the religious discourse and practices of the self. This made way for the possibility of a re-enchantment process and a religious structuring of every-day life on one hand, but my argument is that at the same time this

has lead to a new logic of secularization: after a short religious euphoria post-socialism has lead to the institutionalization of new secular narratives of self-identity.

4. Pluralism, religion and secularization in post-communist Romania

In the past two decades the secularization theory has been strongly criticized and denounced by sociological and anthropological research alike. Under the heading of multiple-modernities these studies have tried to show that secularization is not the byproduct of a modernization process (understood as social differentiation, rationalization and pluralization of world-views), but is rather the result of specific cultural factors that are peculiar to Western European countries. Peter Berger for example, a sociologist that in the 70's and 80's has put forward one of the most comprehensive phenomenological theories of secularization has retracted in recent years most of his theses and regards now secularism as weak concept that can be traced back to specific cultural features of Western Europe. Peter Berger and Grace Davie (2008) argue that secularism is embedded in the structures of European Union and that it is related to specific institutional factors and not to structural features of modernization.

Most of the present-day criticism of secularization theory draws on empirical data that comes from two different socio-cultural areas. The first one is North America, where these studies point out that one of the most post-modernized countries of the world is at the same time a very religious society. This is so not because of the neo-conservative religious right that has controlled the political American scene in the past decade, but because of the high church attendance rates, diversification of new religious movements and most of all the explosion of the Evangelical communities. This allegedly shows that modernity does not have to bring forth secularism as has happened in Western Europe.

The second socio-cultural area on which these criticisms rely is Eastern Europe. Here these studies point out that after several decades of state organized secularism, ideological atheism and marginalization of religious life, Eastern Europe is undergoing now a strong religious revival. There is an increasing alliance between religion and politics and massive religious attendance across Eastern Europe. This shows in their opinion that there is an alternative modernization route that does not have to follow the secular path dependency of Western Europe. In these studies there are always two

countries that are mentioned as being strongly religious: Catholic Poland and Orthodox Romania.

Romania is an important case that can help us test these theories. Just like most other Eastern European countries, Romania is dominated by a single religion and so according to RCTR this represents a case of religious monopoly. In spite of this, RCTR argues, as we have seen in the previous section, that in the countries of Eastern Europe a religious revival followed because post-communism brought forth not so much a competition between different religions, but between a secular atheist world-view and a re-born religious world-view. Atheism is re-interpreted as a secular religion that imposed secular holidays and rituals and acted at a popular level as a genuine religion. This allows RCTR to postulate that the post-communist Eastern European religious revival has been the outcome of a religious competition.

In previous papers (Gog, 2007) I have tried to show that in the new post-socialist world, under the pressure of pluralization of life-worlds several tendencies towards secularization can be noticed: de-Christianization of religious beliefs (the post-communist generations increasingly give up the believe in Christian eschatological narratives such as the belief in heaven, hell and life-after-death in favor of diffuse and impersonal religious ideas), de-institutionalization of religious experience (low church attendance rates and the de-legitimation of the involvement of the Church in political, social, and familial issues) and most of all de-moralization of the practical sphere of life (the decoupling of religion from ethical matters such as sexual identities and the refusal to internalize the social norms advocated by the Church). In the previous section I have argued that atheism cannot be interpreted as a religious ideology and that it had a limited impact on the Romanian society. In what follows I would like to show how in Romania, regions that are more plural in terms of religiosity are usually more secular than the regions that have a monopolized "religious market". This way I would like to focus on the RCTR claim that pluralism generates higher religiosity.

I am using in the analysis the four historical regions of Romania: Transylvania (that includes as well the adjacent regions of Banat, Crisana and Maramures), Moldova, Dobrogea and Muntenia (Old Kingdom), plus the metropolis of Bucharest that has to be analyzed as a separate case (due to the fact that here the entire population is living an urbanized area and both in terms of education and economical income it scores higher then the mean values of the rest of the countries). With the help of the Herfindahl index we can measure the degree of religious monopolization

of these region and establish were the "religious market" is more vital and so more competitive, in order to test the RCTR predictions.[6]

What we can see from **Table 5** is that by far the region that has a "religious market" that is least monopolized by one single religion is Transylvania. This was predictable since this region was always marked by a great degree of religious and ethnic diversity. According to RCTR this should be the area that should be the most religious, but in fact the data show a completely different picture.

Table 5. Herfindahl index (the degree of religious monopoly)

Transylvania	Muntenia	Moldova	Dobrogea	Bucuresti
0.49	0.91	0.89	0.93	0.89

When we take a look at the main religious beliefs we can notice that Transylvania has the lowest religious degree of religious values: both general religious values and specific Christian ones (**Table 6**). The belief in hell and in heaven, two important religious ideas for the Christian eschatology are the most eroded in Transylvania (63.9%, 69.8%) compared to Muntenia for example (77.7%, 80.0%) or Moldova (76.4%, 79.4%). The values are only comparable to Bucharest (68.4%, 70.2%), where although the pluralisation index is low there is the highest level of modernization in terms of urban population, industrialization, educational capital, etc. This is the case not only of specific Christian beliefs, but also of general religious beliefs such as the belief in God and moral culpability (understood as a religious concept - sin) and non-Christian ones such as the belief in reincarnation. This Oriental belief is usually spread in urban cultures: in Bucharest 34.8% believe in it, while in Transylvania only 26.5% (the lowest).

Table 6. General and specific religious beliefs

	Transylvania	Muntenia	Moldova	Dobrogea	Bucuresti
Belief in God	95.8%	96.9%	96.9%	98.0%	94.2%
Belief in hell	63.9%	77.7%	76.4%	62.5%	68.4%
Belief in heaven	69.8%	80.0%	79.4%	70.0%	70.2%
Belief in sin	89.1%	93.8%	92.9%	98.0%	77.1%
Belief in reincarnation	26.5%	26.0%	26.2%	37.1%	34.8%

The low values of general and religious beliefs are consistent with the way people perceive themselves. 83.1% of Transylvanians declare that they consider themselves religious people in comparison with 87.6% in Muntenia, 88.9% in Moldova and 68.9% in Bucharest. The same can be noticed when it comes to de degree of comfort and strength from religion that people declare they have (**Table 7**). Transylvania ranks again lower that the other historical regions (except Bucharest).

Table 7. Religious self-evaluations

	Transylvania	Muntenia	Moldova	Dobrogea	Bucuresti
Are you a religious person?	83.1%	87.6%	88.9%	92.0%	68.9%
Comfort and strength from religion	85.7%	88.6%	89.8%	83.0%	77.6%

The only variables where this is not the case is that of the perception of the divine being and church attendance (**Table 8 and 9**). When it comes to the way Transylvanians that believe in God (lower that in the other historical regions) perceive their object o faith, they affirm the traditional idea of a personal divine being (44.8%) and not of an abstract spirit or life-force (38.3%) in comparison with Moldova (39.3%, 41.7%) or Bucharest (23.1%, 68.5%). The same can be said about church attendance. People from Transylvania are still attached to institutional expression of religiosity and go to church a bit more often that people from other regions. In comparison with Moldova (which has a very high index of religious monopoly) though, the differences are almost insignificant.

Table 8. Church attendance and church functions

	Transylvania	Muntenia	Moldova	Dobrogea	Bucuresti
Church attendance	57.87	30.72	55.43	50	30.56
Church and morality	78.8%	83.1%	85.2%	82.4%	68.6%
Church and family	77.0%	79.4%	84.6%	86.3%	61.9%
Church and social problems	51.9%	51.2%	56.8%	69.6%	38.5%

Table 9. Religion and Politics

	Transylvania	Muntenia	Moldova	Dobrogea	Bucuresti
Politicians and God	47.66	53.62	58.61	55.32	44.95
Religion and public office	63.90	63.40	69.27	70.46	58.33
Religious leaders should not influence voting	78.80	72.91	80.33	87.23	79.63
Religious leaders should not influence government decisions	76.75	74.087	81.81	91.11	74.07

But the level of church attendance has only a limited predictive value: when we analyze the way people relate to the church and the way they legitimize their distinct functions (the involvement in moral, familial and social issues) we can see again that Transylvania is the region most secularized (after Bucharest). The tendency to limit the involvement of the Church (**Table 9**) to strictly spiritual issues and to decline its competency to matters related to morality, family, society and politics is higher in Transylvania than in the other regions). Although Transylvanians go often to church, they think less of the Church as a total institution that has to provide the legitimizing narratives of the other spheres of life (moral, familial, social). This is consistent also with the Church-State and religion-politics separation: Transylvanians are generally against the idea that politicians should be only people that believe in God and that persons that hold public offices should be religious. There is also a high degree of support (but not the highest) for the idea that religious leaders should not influence voting or government decisions.

Conclusion

In the previous pages I have argued that the rational choice theory of religion that informs most of the current research in the field of sociology of religion has several epistemological and methodological

limits. The reduction of all social action (including the religious one) to maximization of subjective utility and cost / benefit optimization represent an economicist reductionism which has its genealogy in an ethnocentric definition of rationality.

I have showed that the rational choice theory of religion is inconsistent and inadequate when it is applied to Eastern Europe in general and Romania in particular and that the main conceptual devices used in order to argue the existence of a vigorous religious revival are not paying dividends. The establishment of a democratic society and the advancement of an Europeanization process have generated new types of social spaces and narratives of identities, but most of all it created the structural conditions for the emergence of a genuine social and religious pluralism. The communist institutionalized control of every-day life and the monopolization of social reality had a strong impact on practices of the self and on the development of cultural means of subjectivization. The ideologization of every-day life-world prevented the creation of a plural society because this was considered subversive and threatening to the communist social order.

In the previous pages I have elaborated on various theoretical frameworks that allow us to capture the impact pluralism has on religious identities. The structures of religious practices and beliefs cease being taken-for-granted (Berger, 1990) and have to be articulated in an environment where the institutionalization of various modes of identities generated by the pluralization of life-worlds are challenging the traditional religious establishments. I have developed several arguments to show that the RCTR approach is not accurate and then in Romania and other Eastern European countries we can identify the emergence of a post-communist secular culture. The RCTR line of reasoning is not sociological accurate and that this rooted a) in the way atheism is conceptualized as a religious world-view (this leads to the failure to see that this secular ideologies were top-to-bottom state organized attempts to secularized the society that had only a limited impact on the religious mentalities) and b) in the way religiosity is conceptualized (this leads to the failure to see the big structural changes that are taking place at the level of the new Europeanized young generations and the increasingly secularization trend that Romania is experiencing).

The RCTR argument that the communist atheization process was a successful one and that this was reversed by the post-socialist emergence of a religious market means to overestimate the power of secularism and

the impact that the atheist ideologization had on every-day religious mentalities. I have showed that in Romania atheism was only an official ideological worldview that was expressed through the bureaucratic networks of the Communist Party and that this strategy of secularizing the society was a failure. My argument is that atheism in spite of its political secularism failed in achieving a wide secularization of the society, but post-socialist pluralism managed to do just that.

NOTES

1 This type of discourse represents in my opinion a specific instance of Balkanization (Todorova) of Eastern-Christianity that sees in it a political power that is most of all concerned with the affirmation of a "Byzantine" religious control of state structures. I regard this approach as an over-simplification and Orientalisation (Said) of the Orthodox religion.

2 In this case church attendance is not a good indicator of religiosity. During the Communist period public manifestations of religiosities were inhibited through the official atheist ideology, all religious data regarding participation have to be read with a grain of salt.

3 As one of the Romanian atheist ideologist phrase it: "*without any doubt, the most advanced philosophy does not impose itself freely to the consciousnesses, including those [consciousnesses] of teenagers that have a highly psychical sensibility. The philosophical worldview has to be scientifically and ethically argued and proven. In order to* ***influence*** *the behavior of individual, philosophy has to be* ***not only understood, but accepted****: not only* ***theoretically assimilated but lived*** *as well"* (Berar, 1980:128)."

4 An example of how this positivist form of atheism was informing social sciences from Romania at that time can be seen in the way arguments from psychology were employed against religion. An important tool used for the spread of atheism was the construction of child psychology narratives and the illustration of the irremediable damages done to a child by a religious upbringing. For example: through religious education the child's spiritual and moral development is blocked (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:387); it inoculates fear and deep anxiety towards the social environment because of the idea of divine punishment (Stefanescu and Stanciu, 1972:388); it generates a family space where love and affection is missing (388); is not stimulating their eagerness to learn (398); and leads to socialization problems and distrust toward other children that do not share their religious values: this means that later on in life they will not be capable of integrating themselves into a community where working is the main value of the Communist horizontal society (389). The new communist psychology could not be much clearer in depicting the irremediable consequences that religion has on a child's psyche and its future development; this discourse was amplified by the implicit claim that the infallible modern science could demonstrate these consequences and illustrate beyond any doubt that religion was holding humanity back

5 The data is provided by European Values Survey 1990-1993. The numbers in this paragraph indicate the percentage of people that have declared that they do not believe in God.

6 The data used in this analysis are taken from the European Values Survey 1999/2000. The Herfindahl index has been computed based on the data from the EVS sample for Romania and has used also the percentage of population that declared it had no religion (this overlaps to a certain extent with people that declare themselves atheists.)

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