

Cradle, Manger, Granary

Carving the Body from the Nation's Sacred Flesh

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Abstract

The contemporary landscape of Eastern Europe comprises social and ontological projects that reinterpret local traditions and histories while challenging imported modernities. This paper explores the New Jerusalem movement, an apocalyptic Romanian Orthodox revitalization movement characterized by a complex synthesis of Orthodox asceticism and messianic nationalism, which is socially and spiritually assisted in its journey by the dramatic expressions of two gifted visual artists, Victoria and Marian Zidaru. Seeing discipline and transcendence of self as acts of freedom grounded in an Orthodox understanding of the person, this work addresses New Jerusalem movement's distinctive engagement with reformulating a common ground and purpose for self and nation.

Introduction

[1] The transformation of the self is an ethical and political action that is also a fundamental practice of freedom. The representational economy of the religious movement “The New Jerusalem” (in Romanian: *Noul Ierusalim*), which I will discuss in this paper, must be viewed in relation to Orthodox understandings of personhood, and with an eye for their connections with historical, cultural, and current sociopolitical events and interconnections. Scholars of Romanian post-socialism have hitherto given inadequate consideration to the significance and role of the Orthodox religious tradition and personhood in local processes of post-socialist transformations. I suggest that Orthodox Christian orientations and modes of experience are rich sources of representations, bodily engagements, and epistemologies for the (trans)formation and social actualization of post-socialist Romanian persons.

[2] While I was carrying out my fieldwork in Romania in 1997-1998, I had the extraordinary opportunity to attend an art exhibit in Bucharest by Marian and Victoria Zidaru, comprising works of sculpture, drawings, icons, and mixed media installations of a distinctive Orthodox Christian inspiration (Figure 1). Aside from having participated in international art events (Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Brazil, being among the countries where the artists have shown their works), Marian Zidaru has won various international awards and fellowships. Together, the couple has made their art into a powerful missionary act.



Figure 1: *The Courtyard of the Mother of God* 1987

[3] In addition to being the creators of striking social and spiritual artworks, which they sometimes display on mountain-tops, among trees, and amidst other natural landscapes, Marian and Victoria Zidaru are the most visible figures of a revivalist, apocalyptic, charismatic Orthodox Christian movement that sees itself as today's Israel and holds Romania to be the site of the spiritual renewal of humanity through the Word of God. The earthly source of the New Jerusalem movement was a woman known as Saint Virginia (1923-1980), or diminutively St. Verginica, a devoutly religious seer who lived in the town of Pucioasa, near Târgoviște, a small historic city located two hours away from Bucharest.

The Calling of Virginia: Renewal of Tradition Through Prophecy

[4] The following discussion of Virginia's life and prophecies is based upon an elaborate account of her experience and communications, published under the title of *Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu în România* (Noul Ierusalim). The members of The New Jerusalem movement believe that between her first prophecy in 1955 and her passing in 1980 St. Virginia was the Apocalyptic "Trump(et) of God" (*Trâmbița lui Dumnezeu*), the vessel of the "Word of God" (*Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu*) into the world, announcing the mission of the Romanian people in God's plan of spiritual recovery of his world (Noul Ierusalim). Virginia is said to have remained a virgin all of her life, even though, in order to avoid persecution, she was married at 37 to a 22-year-old man, who was called to be her guardian. In 1966, her husband, Nicolae Stoica, was arrested and investigated for six months by Romanian Securitate forces for the accusation of gathering people together with Virginia, creating unrest, and inciting hate against the laws of the country and the communist regime. He was later condemned to 6 years in prison for which he served only one. Stoica describes that wherever he accompanied Virginia, their paths were filled with extraordinary fragrances and Christians who were ill or distraught were healed, blessed, encouraged, and counseled by her (Noul Ierusalim: 26, 55). Other first-hand accounts speak of her having healed epilepsy, bringing a dead child back to life, and having accurate premonitions of deaths and performing many other extraordinary acts (Noul Ierusalim: 11-62).

[5] Unfortunately, Stoica's liberation was not the end of their difficulties with the authorities. After leaving the prison, he continued to be pursued by the secret police and harassed. His wife's virginity was examined and confirmed by doctors, and as a result, Stoica was pressured to leave her. Threatened with jail and beatings, Stoica left Virginia in 1973, married another woman and had children with her, but has confessed to great remorse and regret for having left the woman he had sworn to accompany and protect. Virginia continued to be sought out and guarded by Christians in secrecy, as the watch and persecutions of the Securitate continued, going as far as hospitalization and torture (Noul Ierusalim: 22, 26, 55).

[6] Testimonies of her life and words describe miraculous visions and experiences of healing beginning in her childhood and continuing throughout her life. When Virginia was a child, her family was very poor. She almost died at age one, and her father passed away when she was four. As a child, she took the village cattle out to graze in order to support her family. The sour apples of a wild apple tree tasted sweet to her. One day, as she was praying tearfully for the health of her sick mother, Virginia encountered luminous apparitions of the Virgin Mary, God the Father, and, on the third day, Jesus Christ. Her and her family's lives were thereafter filled with grace (Noul Ierusalim: 11-13).

[7] Her most major life transformation was becoming a vessel for the Word of God, which took place in 1955, at the age of 32, after Virginia had fasted on blessed bread and water for forty days. Those close to her feared that she would not survive the fast. On the Saturday before Easter, she

had another religious vision, which was followed by an experience of being inhabited by the Spirit of God. Jesus Christ began speaking with her voice as she fell into a light and serene sleep, and those in her presence were all able to hear his words (Noul Ierusalim: 13-14).

[8] St. Virginia's long, detailed communications and prophecies came forth as personal addresses by God to his people, in preparation for his second coming, which was to be very close at hand. The Word of God (*Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu*) would flow in extended, conversational, and personal form from Virginia's mouth. The Word prophesied that the second coming was near and Romania was the country of the new Jerusalem, where great divine fulfillments would soon take place. The earliest recorded prophetic words were spoken on April 30, 1955:

. . . Peace to you! Christ is risen! Christ is risen! I am the Lord Jesus Christ, not in body, but in Spirit. I have descended with Spirit upon earth to gather Myself a people and to speak the sacraments and secrets for this time. I am the Word of God and I have come to speak on earth, to prepare the way for My second apparition as it is written in My Book. I am not this body, this is a trump(et) from which I am trumpeting in this time, to give tidings over you of what will be in the days that are coming . . . (Noul Ierusalim: 63).

[9] The texts of her prophecies, comprising thousands of pages, along with the testimonies and visions of her apprentices and followers were published in 1995 as the seven hundred-page volume *Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu în România* (Noul Ierusalim). After St. Virginia's death in 1980, the Word of God continued to come forth through her sister, and after her sister's death, through other apprentices and followers. Beginning during her life and continuing after her death, a small but steadily growing number of Orthodox Christians have come to believe in her instrumental role as a carrier of God's last message to his people and have experienced the desire to transform themselves physically and spiritually to fulfill God's plan.

Living the Word: Sacrifice, Transformation, and Missionary Art

[10] As a result of their encounter with the Word of God and the followers of St. Virginia, the lives and works of Victoria and Marian Zidaru have become vibrant expressions of their total engagement with this apocalyptic revitalization movement. Their national and international recognition as artists (particularly Marian's) has made possible construction of the prophesied 33 cupola Church of New Jerusalem in 1992, and has brought about increasing recognition and spurred growth of the ascetic community of "new Israel." It is interesting to note here that the still-living exiled king of Romania, Michael I (*Regele Mihai*), is spoken of as a founder (*ctitor*) by name of the new place of worship, in the ancient Romanian tradition that newly built churches were connected with a king's name or that of another famous national figure who contributed to the construction. Michael I is referred to as God's anointed King Michael, and his name appears on the front page of the book *Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu* (Noul Ierusalim). Unfortunately, I do not have any other data regarding the king's direct involvement with the building of the New Jerusalem church, if any.

[11] Despite powerful associations with national and Orthodox traditions, the official Orthodox Church of Romania has not endorsed the New Jerusalem movement nor acknowledged the authenticity of the phenomena taking place at Pucioasa. The members of the clergy and the monastic community who have been involved with the movement have been pressured to discredit it, accused of heresy, and threatened with excommunication. That is not surprising considering that the Word of God as manifested through St. Virginia and her followers has accused the contemporary Church of having strayed from the path of truth and holiness. Moreover, the Word

demands from its followers to live a life of strict ascetic discipline that much surpasses what the Orthodox Church expects of its flock in terms of fasting and chastity.

[12] Throughout Orthodoxy, periodic ritual fasting is considered essential for opening oneself up to the work of the Spirit and for making fruitful the power of prayer, for Orthodox Christianity “regard[s] the human person as a unity of soul and body” (Ware 1993: 300). The traditions of Orthodox asceticism and monasticism go back to the Desert Fathers of Egypt (300 C.E.), whose lives and wisdom are still considered a cornerstone of Orthodox spirituality. Besides fasting, prayer, and the participation in Church Sacraments, however, the members of the New Jerusalem emphasize a more severe asceticism on an on-going basis than what is traditionally expected of Orthodox believers by the Church, in effect making their way of living a new and unofficial (some would say heretical) form of monasticism. According to the Word of God (Noul Ierusalim: 50, 56, 57, 63-242), the new people of Israel must renounce meat-eating (other than fish) and alcoholic drinks (other than wine made from grapes), eat without oil and wine on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (except on days exempted by Church traditions), observe “bodily cleanliness” (physical purity or chastity) even for those who are married, and dress simply in “traditional Christian” costume, in accordance with Scripture. The Faithful must partake of the Sacraments of confession and communion as often as possible, and must abide by the ancient canons of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Noul Ierusalim: 50, 56-62). Yet, despite its undeniable rooting in Orthodox heritage and experience, the New Jerusalem movement stands apart from it because of its distinctive visionary ethos and its stringent ascetic character, aspects which pose some overt challenges to the authority and centrality of the Orthodox establishment and its norms of popular religiosity.

[13] Physical and spiritual purity are sought in the present life in order to re-create the Edenic purity from before the fall, thus preparing believers for the imminent arrival of the new kingdom of God as prophesied by “the chosen vessel of the final days,” St. Virginia. The dark spirits of worldliness and laxity that permeate today’s world can only be overcome through asceticism, fasting, and living prayer. To know God, according to the New Jerusalem, is nothing other than living God within oneself, in all expanse and according to Truth (Noul Ierusalim). Only those keeping this covenant of purity and observance can enter the newly built church of the New Jerusalem, as bound by a curse cast by the priest Irineu, who inaugurated this place of worship. The new church is alternately referred to as a church, a temple, and a monastery (Noul Ierusalim: 320-21).

[14] According to the New Jerusalem movement, contemporary time is the time to separate the wheat from the impurities, a time for a cleansing of the earth in order to scatter the “darkness of these times”; thus, the wheat is one’s life and its days, and the impurities in the wheat are said to be symbolic of sin (Noul Ierusalim: 95, 492). One has just a handful of wheat and it is heavily mixed with foreign matter these days, whereas in the times of the ancestors they did not allow for sin to stay nestled in their hearts. In St. Virginia’s words, the ancestors had prophets to help wake them, but to the People of God, God himself has now come to speak through the Holy Spirit. It is significant that when God’s Word spoke through Virginia’s mouth it always addressed listeners collectively as: My People, People of Mine, People of God, Israel of Today, My Sons, or My Children (Noul Ierusalim: 173-74).

[15] In homage to “the ancestors” and to an idealized, pre-communist Romanian ethos, members of the New Jerusalem dress



Figure 2: Heavenly Clothing

in traditional peasant costumes, and I have been told that they weave the cloth themselves. The men usually wear big white shirts, dark pants, wool vests, and full beards. The women wear long cotton and linen garments (usually white), vests, and head wrappings (Figure 2). Their style of dress is said to resemble that of the legendary Dacians, the indigenous inhabitants of the Romanian territories prior to Roman conquest, who have been much glorified and manipulated in the interests of nationalist rhetoric, both before and after the communist era. Unarguably, the act of molding one's body into the form of prominent cultural ideals (both within and without) through assiduous discipline and self-scrutiny constitutes a decisive social and spiritual act of engagement, as well as an act of transcendence. Through such techniques of the self, the members of the New Jerusalem conflate self and nation, past and present, obedience and critique of cultural traditions and modern aspirations.



Figure 3: *The Archangels*, 1997

[16] The human person was made in the image of God, Orthodox Christianity asserts. However, achieving the fullest likeness of God requires work upon the self, growth, and transformation. While striving to harmonize with God's will through asceticism and communion, these "people of new Israel" are also cultivating the likeness of a national and ancestral ideal of personhood. By their account, the glory and liberation of the individual from consumptive appetites and the shackles of history is inseparable from the glory and liberation of the nation, and from the fulfillment of the Romanian people's role as a people of Truth and a vessel of God's return into his world.



Figure 4: *Indoor Installation at the Simeza Galleries*, 1992

[17] The year 1955, when the Word of God made itself manifest through the voice of St. Virginia is a year of blessing for the Romanian people, according to the New Jerusalem movement. The country (Romania) is referred to as the Country of Brilliance, the New Jerusalem, the New Canaan, and the New Eden (Noul Ierusalim: 347). According to Virginia's prophecies, in choosing among peoples, God selected the one who had been the most humiliated, abused by those in power, exploited, threatened, invaded, tortured, sold and bought in every war, and yet a model of likeness for a hospitable people, with which others from almost any other ethnic group have been able to join and live (Noul Ierusalim: 65). God chose the Romanian people to be an example of Universal union into a single people with a rightful and sacred faith. The members of the New Jerusalem and their religious community believe that the



Figure 5: *The Angel of the Garden*, 2003

Romanian people has been chosen to be an *Altar* of exemplary life placed in the service of *Universal* human salvation.

[18] The art of the Zidarus reflects these visions, reinterpretations, and revitalizations of Romanian national identity not only in its symbolic content, but also in structural form and choice of materials. Large aerodynamic wings, resembling airplane propellers, wooden crosses ranging from book-size to human-size to monumental, often curved and twisted like growing branches, images of an eye repeated like reflections of a kaleidoscope (reminiscent of Escher), long hand-written scrolls of the Word of God, and the contemporary contour map of Romania appear again and again in the works of the Zidarus (Figures 3, 4, 5). Their preferred materials are wood, linen, straw, bronze, and sometimes other metals. Alongside the sculptural works and installations there are also drawings and paintings, performance pieces, and icons. In many of these, the Word, the Cross, and the Eye are prominently represented (Figure 6).

[19] The Carpathian mountain peak *Omul* (which means “the man”) in the Bucegi Plateau has been the site of outdoor exhibits by Zidaru, events that integrate art and landscape in profoundly moving and dynamic conversations (Figure 7). *Omul* is a large mountain rock in the shape of a man’s head, believed by many to have had an important religious function in ancient times and to be a place of great natural and spiritual energy. Marian Zidaru created rivers of crosses on the mountainside and crowned the tops of rocks with crosses and wings. In other green, wooded spaces, he has made equally striking and flowing arrangements with long cloth scrolls imprinted with St. Virginia’s words, varieties of crosses, roughly carved out of wood, and rocks with words written on them, sometimes just “Word” (*Cuvântul*) or the “Word of God” (*Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu*).

[20] The map of Romania and its metamorphoses in Zidaru’s artistic and theological vision has been for me a most striking and mystifying visual discourse on self and nation. Dozens and dozens of variations on the map of Romania appear in Marian Zidaru’s art shows (Figures 8, 9). One exhibit was a large wooden contour of Romania, filled with straw like a nest, and containing a smaller, solid, golden Romania in the center. Another object was a solid shape of Romania covered with images of the Romanian monarchy. Another was a Romania made of rough wooden boards with white stones placed all over and words written on

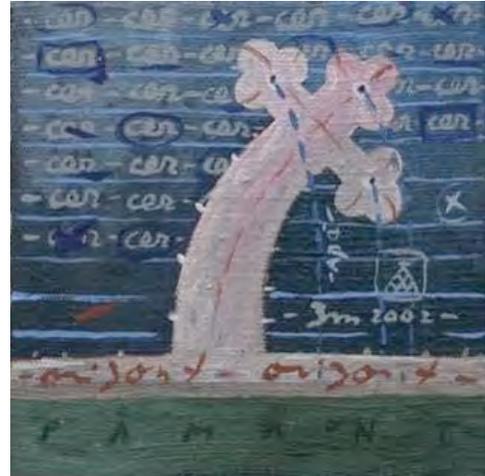


Figure 6: *Crying Cross*, 2003



Figure 7: *The Cleansing of Romania 4*, 1994



Figure 8: *King Michael's Suitcase*, 1995

the stones. A number of assemblage/installation objects also centered around the shape of Romania; one had many Romania forms, in a variety of materials and textures, lined up along a long strip of white cloth, like offerings of food for funeral commemorations and religious festivals; one Romania had a chalice on top, another had crosses, another had candles, becoming reminiscent of the traditional wheat grain pudding known as *colivă* which is central to all Orthodox death rituals. The nation is embodied as cradle, manger, and granary of the Word of God and as the historical, physical, and spiritual grounds for the most profound self-transformation.



Figure 9: King Michael's Suitcase (detail), 1995

Healing, Selfhood, and the Journey of Post-Socialism in Romania

[21] The powerful emergence of religious and healing movements since the fall of the Ceaușescu dictatorship in 1989 represents a political struggle to reconfigure notions of self, body, healing, truth, and authority apart from a centralized, monolithic source of authority. The healing which people seek through new (alternative) therapies or religious practices is an integral part of the effort to re-define selves and bodies in the absence of the dictatorial authority of the communist regime. Furthermore, the restoration of balance aimed at by these healing practices is analogous to and symbolic of the repair desired to take place in Romanian society. I would like to argue that for Romanians, history itself is felt as a wound, which has to be transfigured through the bodies and souls of individual persons.

[22] In one of his essays, Gabriel Liiceanu, a leading Romanian historian and writer, describes Communism as a terrible disease that afflicted a portion of humanity, which then asked itself while still capable of doing so: “Why me, why us, Lord?” Liiceanu states that, like syphilis, Communism is a “disease of seduction” – “sneaking in under the promise of voluptuousness and poison that hides in the over-ripe apple” (69). He wonders whether those who brought it to its victims knew that they were the carriers of a disease, that the paradise they were promising was deceitful, that after them there would be “hell, hell on earth” (69). “Communism is a disease of the imagination,” states Liiceanu, “and it is our imagination taking revenge on us” (69). Like the writer Gabriel Liiceanu, Romanians from a variety of social and educational backgrounds frequently speak about the communist legacy and the present hardships and inequities in terms of a diseased, abnormal social order and a sickened population, which has forgotten how to function apart from the crooked system that shaped people for over four decades.

[23] Romanian national identity is defined by deep-seated and fundamental contradictions, such as “we are European” and “we are distrustful of Europe,” “we are an ancient cradle of Christianity” and “we are threatened by (Western) Christianity,” “we are a fertile cultural borderland between East and West,” but “our Easternness makes us passive, manipulative, and backwards,” “we are a resilient and humorous people” but “we are lazy and inefficient,” and so on. Through discursive as well as physical means such as those exemplified by the New Jerusalem movement, people challenge and subvert communist legacies, capitalist consumption practices, as well as modernist assumptions about persons and social relations, endeavoring to come to terms with past and present dependencies and inequities, and to (re)define their places in a transforming social order. Practices of self-fashioning are elemental to the attainment of freedom from a particular ontological perspective.

From the point of view of the participants involved, such spiritually-informed approaches hold a greater promise of liberty and social fulfillment than established western forms of civil activism and their associated pursuit of Western funding and recognition. These practices of the self, “an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being” (Foucault 1997: 282), are continuous with an understanding of personhood from a Orthodox Christian perspective, which is profoundly different from the modernist/cartesian understanding of persons and relationships.

[24] In observing and analyzing post-socialist healing and the discursive universes of new spiritual movements, I recognized that they situated themselves culturally as narratives of Romanian selfhood and noted their historical continuities with past and present formulations of Romanian national identity, which is in turn tightly bound to the history of the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church (see Pope). It is important to recall the Romanian Orthodox Church has always claimed an organic and primordial connection to “the Romanian soul,” adherence to Orthodox traditions and community representing a central site of resistance to the expansionist and imperialist aims of both Ottomans and Austro-Hungarians. Even though the alliance between the Romanian Orthodox Church as an institution and the communist state has gone a long way to discredit its representatives and institutional aims during the past fifty years, it did not prevent a religious resurgence from taking place after the collapse of communism, nor did it prevent Orthodox Church leaders from continuing officially to claim the title of “national church,” actively seeking government support from Romania’s post-socialist government, and actively opposing proselytization by other Christian religious sects, such as new protestant denominations and Jehovah’s Witness (Pope 2001). The centrality of Orthodox symbolism, ritual elements, and techniques of the body in millenarian and alternative healing groups and new religious movements can be partially attributed to the authoritarian ethos of the institution of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its historical prominence in official formulations of Romanian identity, and at the same time to the experiential and practical role of Orthodox traditions in the popular expressions of Romanian cultural identity and national consciousness.

[25] A key aspect of the communist agenda for progress was to transform citizens into proper workers and docile bodies, as well as to enforce a uniformity of thoughts and practices, which was particularly effective in the area of state-controlled health care. Foucault has well established the centrality of the body as an object of domination and a key site for the dialectic of power and knowledge, speaking of the descriptive act of medical science as “a seizure of being,” an active way of shaping perception and creating knowledge (1994). Post-1989 medical pluralism re-claimed the symbolic domains of the self, body, and healing, which had been thoroughly regulated and politicized under the socialist regime. The loss of the social structure and coherence that had been forcibly provided by the communist organization also led to a widespread sense of false values, disorder and anomie, and the necessity for re-configuring social expectations, interactions, and relationships. These struggles are representative of the creative, interpretive, and self-constructing efforts of post-socialist Romanian persons, trying to elaborate new projects of meaning and value amidst multiple narratives of one’s place in the Balkans, Europe, and the world. A common thread between these varied approaches to personal and social transformation is the centrality of Orthodox Christian symbolism (particularly the trinity), and its distinctive attitudes and formulations of personhood.

[26] The diversification of religious and healing movements is among many things an act of “privatization” of the symbolic domains of the body and the self, which had become completely controlled by the political apparatus of socialism prior to December 1989. This re-appropriation of

the symbolic and experiential domain of the body and its potentials for transformation is significant as a step in the creation of a “civil society” and the re-creation of identities from the bottom up. However, the democratic ideal of a civil society assumes implicitly the legitimacy of Western conceptions of persons and freedom, the relevance and applicability of which many earlier scholars are not sufficiently self-conscious about in the Romanian context.

Freedom, Fulfillment, and Re-Valuing Orthodox Personhood

[27] Discredited and silenced modes of experience and relating resurfaced after 1989 at the fore of individual and social life, clothed metaphorically in discourses of healing, naturalness, religious revival, conspiracy theory, nationalism, and others. In the words of two young medical doctors I met in 1998, while they were involved with an alternative healing movement called *ELTA Universitate*, the selfishness of cancer cells became a trope for the drain on the community’s life force by communist institutions that branched off like metastases throughout the Romanian social body. In my research of healing and in conversations with hundreds of Romanians, I observed that negative thoughts and the proximity of impure others (acquaintances as well as strangers), like one’s own feelings of greed, envy, resentment, or anger, are believed to manifest themselves as malfunctions of body, spirit, or community relations.

[28] In their efforts to bring about a transformation of selves and Romanian society into pure vessels for communication and unification with the Divinity, the members of the New Jerusalem movement cannot simply be said to passively engage in prescribed behaviors according to traditional canons of religiosity. Their work upon the self, while often in the form of ritual observance, constitutes an array of distinctive and personal efforts at self-transformation and self-effacement and a creative re-interpretation of historical and religious traditions. However, it is important to recognize that according to Orthodox tradition (St. Maximos the Confessor), *theosis* is not simply a human project, but a process of synergy, whereby the human will is brought into harmony with the will of God. Then, God communes with rather than supersedes the personal will. As communicated to me by Ana Tuica, a collaborator of Marian and Victoria Zidaru, the human self has to be *slain* slowly and gradually to make room for the *Divine Self*.

[29] Healing related behaviors cut across the boundaries of prescribed and individual expressions. As Saba Mahmood deftly shows in her discussion of women and Islamic ritual, “rule-governed behavior cannot be read simply as a social imposition that constrains the self, but rather (under certain conditions) as the means by which the self is realized,” an analysis that impacts “how anthropologists might think about the politics of individual freedom” (829). Mahmood points out that structured practices centered upon the body can serve as a means for cultivating the self, which points to a close connection between rule-governed action and routine conduct (832).

[30] Like the mosque participants in Mahmood’s study of women’s religious training, New Jerusalem participants view their bodily practices as inculcating virtue and transforming one’s disposition and character, and as being avenues to both self-fulfillment and social fulfillment. As Mahmood also points out, the process of attaining embodied dispositions through self-directed action poses a challenge to Bourdieu’s socioeconomic determinism and the designation of *habitus* as unconscious and imitative, while pointing to his neglect of the process whereby *habitus* is acquired (836-38).

[31] In agreement with Foucault (1997), I contend that the “games of truth” engaged through these religious and healing practices and discourses are expressions of “the care for the self as a practice of freedom,” a fundamental step towards self-realization and social empowerment. Such practices of “self-formation” through asceticism and observance bespeak an ontology and ethics that is distinct

from current Western understandings of autonomy and freedom, which many social scientists take for granted in their evaluations of Romanian individuals and their relationship to the communist legacy. In viewing Romanian subjects as embedded in a “dependent” and “patriarchal” mentality and struggling with the “public” aspects of freedom and political action, many scholars speak from a modernist, cartesian, un-Orthodox view of social action and personhood; they measure the “success” of liberation from the embodied, cognitive, and ideological hegemony of communism according to (their own) Western conceptions of self, freedom, and sociopolitical engagement.

[32] According to Orthodox Christian doctrine, God created the *totality* of the human being in his image, the body as well as the mind. Therefore, human bodies participate in salvation together with the human soul. The embodiment of Christ saved humankind as a whole, in both soul and body, thus making the flesh an endless *source of sanctification* (Ware 1993: 67). Furthermore, one does not sanctify only oneself, but also the surrounding world. In the person of ascetics and contemplatives, all the rest of Creation becomes Holy Spirit, basking in the presence of God.

[33] The same understanding of personhood and the human body is also the basis of the Orthodox doctrine of icons. In the person of Christ, the triune God became human. Icons represent the human side of Christ and act as a reminder of the Incarnation and an instrument for meditation and transcendence. John Chirban argues that according to Christian epistemology there is no opposition between reason and spiritual reality, and views both idealism, spiritualism, and empiricism as limiting, “locked into the realms of ideas or matter” (9). The Orthodox Tradition upholds a synthetic, psychosomatic view of the person. While they valued reason, the Fathers of the Church viewed knowledge as more than intellectual: “It is moral, affective, experiential, ontological, and in agreement with nature” (Chirban: 9).

[34] The link between religion and healing runs very deeply in the world of Orthodox Christianity. Christ himself was a healer, and participation in acts of healing is seen as aligning one’s life with Christ (Chirban: 3). In early Christianity and the Byzantine Empire, people commonly sought healing through contact with men and women who were considered holy. Healing was also reported through praying, touching the relics or the coffin of a saint, anointing, holy water, spending the night in a church (“incubation”), as well as burning small cloth fragments from a saint’s clothing and breathing in the scent (Chirban: 9). One group of twenty Byzantine saints, known as the Holy Unmercenary Doctors or the Unmercenaries, was comprised of eighteen physicians and three priests (one of the priests being also a physician), who healed the sick without accepting any form of payment, preaching and living the love of God (Hronas). Churches in honor of these saints continue to exist throughout Greece and chapels commemorating them are found in most hospitals. The Holy Unmercenaries are viewed as protectors of physicians, nurses, and patients (Hronas).

[35] A view of healing based in the Orthodox tradition is intricately twined with the Orthodox understanding of personhood, which is, in turn, based on Eastern Christian understandings of the Trinitarian nature of the One God. The view of the human person as “an icon of God, a finite expression of God’s infinite self expression . . . is the foundation, the polestar, of all Orthodox Christian anthropology,” writes Timothy Ware (1996 :2). From an Orthodox perspective, “Human beings cannot be understood apart from divine being, for the divine being is the determining element in our humanity” (Ware 1996: 2). The incarnation and the resurrection both affirm the unity of logos with the physical world and the essential unity of soul and body of the human person.

[36] The interpersonal nature of humanness is made more visible in the Greek language, where *atomon* designates the individual as a unit and connotes separation, whereas *prosopon* denotes communion (Ware 1996: 4). St. Makarios the Egyptian is said to have asked a pagan priest’s skull

what it was like in hell, to be told that it is a place where people are fixed back to back rather than face to face (Ware 1996: 5, referring to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*). Ware further suggests that more than being simply in the image of God, human beings have the potential to be in God's likeness, meaning that they have inherent and inexhaustible potentialities for growth, transformation, and ultimately *theosis* (Ware 1996: 6-7).

[37] Self-awareness and freedom are the gifts of divine likeness which allow the human being to truly participate in creation as one who offers and makes his or her own unique destiny (Ware 1996: 8-10). It is essential to recall here once again that for the Orthodox person, the body is the fundamental grounds and primary instrument for salvation, self-fashioning, and ultimately deification. The physical body is involved in all the sacraments and it is the site of actualization of the highest human potentials for freedom, a freedom that is achieved through the "care for the self," in Foucault's famous words, and a freedom which requires a commitment to relationship with both the Divine and human others. In the Orthodox tradition, the ultimate fulfillment of this freedom is expressed as the conformity of personal will with the divine will. The model of Christ's fully human yet fully divine nature represents the ground for human *theosis*, an act of grace that one can prepare for through practices of discipline, *ascesis*, and self-cultivation.

Conclusion

[38] Understanding the processes of transition and issues of national identity in Eastern Europe and the Balkans demands an appreciation for the historical and cultural underpinnings of personhood and the self of a particular place and time. In the case of Romania, I argue that the local constructions of the self and the transformative value of new movements must be explored in conjunction with the ontological and social implications of Orthodoxy. Despite the long-standing presence and current growth of religious pluralism in Eastern Europe, Orthodox Christian orientations and values continue to be profoundly imbricated in popular Romanian understandings of self, other, and social relationships. Unarguably, as the political and economic landscapes of Eastern Europe change and post-socialism continues to unfold, the nature of "persons" is also changing, and so are the uses of nation, tradition, and spirituality. As reflected in the artistic works of the Zidarus and in the self-transformative discourse of the New Jerusalem movement, certain traditional modes of engagement (which might have been thought obscured with the advent of modernity and capitalism) are being reinterpreted and made new, as people continue their vast-ranging searches for freedom and personal fulfillment in East Europe and the Balkans.

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