Pilgrimage phenomenon in the new context of post-communist Romanian media

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Abstract: Religion in contemporary society is a sensitive and controversial topic, which the mass media in Romania is trying to capture in a specific manner. This article aims to explore one of the most visible and dynamic religious events: the pilgrimage. In the post-communist Romanian society, the pilgrimage has gradually grown in importance and has been practiced by a very large number of believers, turning itself into a mass phenomenon. Twenty years after the fall of communism in Romania, there are two main pilgrimages that dominate the Orthodox religious environment: the pilgrimage to Saint Parascheva of Iasi and the pilgrimage to Saint Dumitru cel Nou, Basarabov in Bucharest. These two pilgrimages are practiced in old sacred centres with a long tradition and with their own unique identity. The objective of this article is focused on how the mass media understands and relates to the religious phenomenon and the way that journalists depict the image of the pilgrimages in the published articles. The study investigates the articles published in newspapers during the period 1990-2010 and frames the information according to the existing interest areas.

Keywords: religion, sacred, pilgrimage, mass-media, post-communist society

eISSN 1775-352X © ESSACHESS
Résumé: La religion dans la société contemporaine est un sujet délicat et controversé que les médias ont tenté de capturer de manière spécifique. Cet article vise à explorer l'un des rituels religieux les plus visibles et dynamiques: le pèlerinage. Dans la société roumaine postcommuniste, le pèlerinage a évolué graduellement en importance et a commencé à être pratiqué par un nombre croissant de croyants se transformant progressivement en un phénomène de masse. Vingt ans après la chute du communisme en Roumanie il y a deux grands pèlerinages orthodoxes qui dominent le paysage: celui de Saint-Paraskeva à Iasi ainsi que celui de Saint Démétri de Basarabov à Bucarest. Ces deux pèlerinages sont pratiqués dans des lieux anciens ayant une longue tradition religieuse et ont une identité propre. Le but de cet ouvrage est de suivre la façon dont les medias comprennent le phénomène religieux et comment ils en reflètent l'image ainsi que celle des pèlerinages dans les articles publiés par les journalistes. L’étude examine les articles publiés dans les medias sur la période allant de 1990 à 2010 et encadre l’information en fonction des zones d’intérêts.

Mots-clés: la religion, le sacre, pèlerinage, les médias, la société postcommuniste

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Introduction

Every year religion succeeds in motivating million of people to start on the journey. Annually aproximatively 240 million people start in pilgrimage to the great cult centers all around the globe. The popularity of the religious phenomenon has made that in the last decades the pilgrimage grew in importance and positively influence areas of varied activities from the economic, political, cultural and religious space.

Without a doubt, mass-mass media succeeds in dynamizing the importance of the religious phenomenon by the mass media exposure that pilgrimages benefit. In the last quarter of a century it has been noticed a more and more powerful connection between religion and mass-media. Ever since the beginning of mass media the researchers in the area have noticed a constant journalists’ preoccupation in presenting scenes from the religious life. The great religious events, spiritual issues, the role and place of the believer in the church space are hot topics brought in the forefront by the journalists. All through the entire XX century and the first decade of the XXI century the mass media succeeds by its qualities to make the
world’s religions and their culture known all around the globe. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the reality in the communist countries has significantly changed each of these would have their own spiritual destiny and identity. In Romania, once with the fall of the communist system the presence of religious subjects in the mass media speech has significantly increased at the same time with the presence of the church’s representatives in the public space. Religion is no longer a taboo issue, and the mass media speech constantly mentions major religious events. Due to the great number of believers, mass-mass media grants special attention to the pilgrimage phenomenon, and this information become the most important news of the day on many mass media channels.

Big pilgrimages and highly advertised by the Romanian mass-media at Iaşi on Saint Pious Paraschiva and in Bucharest on patron of Saint Pious Dimitrie Basarabov.

These important religious events of the orthodox cult are very popular among the believers and attract millions of pilgrims, but they are very little researched by specialists from media.

The article aims to look at these unreasearched areas by studying the pilgrimage phenomenon and analyzing the Romanian religious media.

Some of these areas are strongly researched abroad where there is a significant specialty literature, but in Romania these areas are little investigated. In order to analyze the religious phenomenon issue from the Romanian environment, the proposed case studies and the used examples in the article especially research the mass media and religious realities from this geographic area of orthodox religion. The study targets to analyze how journalists understand the religious phenomenon and reflect the pilgrim’s image in the mass media speech. The research is based on articles published in the written mass media and numerous electronic sources posted on the internet between 1999-2010.

1. Theoretical context of the pilgrimage issue

1.1. Dynamics of the Christian pilgrimages

Pilgrimage is a strong pastoral instrument succeeding in motivating believers having the power to attract attention and send Christian messages. Pilgrimages are capable of gathering and generate around them a religious revigoration complex action offering the pilgrimage place an unique identity. In the heart of believers pilgrimages take a special place, and this is no news. Pilgrimage from the beginning of the Christian church has been used as a pastoral instrument, and in the last centuries the church has used the pilgrimage force to counterbalance the detractors’
pressures displayed by the century trends, illuminist, rational speeches or the atheist way of thinking (Haynes, 2009, p. 148). We can find a recent example in the Russian Church which after the Iron Curtain has come down has used the pilgrimage force and the habit to worship Virgin Mary to regain its position as a spiritual leader, in order to stop the century trend manifested by the communist regime (Magry, 2008, p.15).

In the 60’, Catholic Church has understood it needed to modernize the church institution and reframe it, but sceptically looked at the popular religious forms by refusing and ignoring them. Worshipping the Saints and pilgrimages were considered old religious practices and have been suspended. Researchers from various culture areas have started studying the pilgrimage phenomenon and have succeeded in proposing a number of debates on the pilgrimage issue. (Magry, 2008, p.16). This way, specialists found that by following the pilgrimage structure these have convergent and not convergent points, but there are elements present in all pilgrimages: they have a dynamic component-travelling, they have a mass character-pilgrims, the existing of a centre - the sacred place; the ritual practiced in the sacred place; spiritual mutation; return to the secular space (Coman, 2008, p.197).

1.2. Characteristics of Christian pilgrimages

Pilgrimages have been ordered by the researchers in accordance to certain specific criteria. There are pilgrimages which can be taken all through the year without a specific date, but there are pilgrimages which take place on a set date, a Saint’s day or in occasion of some event. Geographically speaking the length of the route may vary: there can be pilgrimages on small distances of a few kilometres or pilgrimages on very large distances of hundreds or even thousands of kilometres. On a social axis pilgrimages can be practiced in group or by a single pilgrim. Specialists consider that on the sacral axis there are two types of pilgrimages: sacred and secular. These are catalogued as being sacred pilgrimages, journeys taken on religious traditional purposes, and secular pilgrimages being those with rituals analogical to the sacred ones which are practiced by the tourists (Raj & Morpeth, 2007, p.58).

Another criterion of analysis is the risk assumed by practicing the ritual: certainty or uncertainty. The pilgrimage practiced in an archaic way by walking on foot implicitly involves the pilgrim’s exposure to high risks all through the route. To the opposite pole there is the modern pilgrimage offering to the believer a maximum security degree because the journey’s risk is managed by specialty institutions (Coman, 2008, p.195).

Christian pilgrimages, consider anthropologist Victor Turner can be ordered into four types of pilgrimages: prototypical pilgrimages, archaic pilgrimages, medieval
The medieval pilgrimage is the best known and most appreciated type of pilgrimage and has started being practiced between the years 500 and 1400. Medieval pilgrimages such as the ones from Compostela from Spain, Assisi in Italy, Częstochowa in Poland are very well known and popular firstly due to the very rich traditions and literature. The last type is the modern pilgrimage, Turner says about it that this must be understood as belonging to the post medieval period. The modern pilgrimage started being practiced from the XIXth century and is based on the believers’ religious effervescence and devotion. The motive power that lays on the foundation of the modern pilgrimage is a vision or a divine appearance mobilizing big masses of people who believe that miracles really do happen. These events benefit from the modern communication support and imply a powerful mediatisation of the religious phenomenon (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 17).

Turner starting from the theories issued by Van Gennep builds a personal theoretical frame for the pilgrimage phenomenon understood as a passage ritual (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 19). Turner considers that pilgrimage is not a phenomenon based on social structure because in its structure the social position and hierarchies are suspended. That is why Turner considers pilgrimage to be an “anti structural” phenomenon because, he says, within the pilgrims’ community there are no hierarchical structures, and people relate spontaneously and directly. Thus Turner expresses the opinion that pilgrimages are based on big initiation rituals which are destined to young people and which, although seem not to have an interior order, they do imply certain structural obligations. The liminal state of pilgrimage eliminate the pilgrim’s normal social statute and this lives a social equality and brotherhood feeling within the group of pilgrims. Turner names this group experience as the “communitas” state. Pilgrims live the communits experience and undertake a deep transformation process of the self and at the end of the teaching route their statute is changed.
2. Structure of the Romanian post-communist religious space

2.1. Religion and the post-communist context

The collapse of the communist system has represented an explosion of the religious phenomenon presence in the mass media speech. Religion is no longer a closed subject, and the press, censured in the past, today, constantly present religious events. After the fall of communism, the religious phenomenon in Romania has taken a proportion without precedent, numerous churches have been built, cathedrals, monasteries, hermitages, roadside crucifixes. Believers who in the past were reluctant in confessing their belief were able to express themselves freely and to participate to divine services and pilgrimages. The church in its turn has widely opened its gated and has organized religious celebrations publicizing them and inviting the believers to participate to important events of Christianity.

Many of these events, in the past hidden and quietly accepted by the communist regime, became days of rest and national vacations: Christmas, Eastern, Whitsuntide or Saint Mary. The boost of the religious phenomenon is also manifested by the presence of a large number of believers to the ritual events and pilgrimages.

2.2. The issue of pilgrimage in the post-communist society

In the communist period all pilgrimages were strictly forbidden, but, despite of all the regime’s constraints, the ritual was discretely practiced by a small number of believers. The fall of communism has meant to the Romanians an unchaining of forces and for the believers, practicing the faith without fear.

In Romania to be a believer and to be able to come to church without fear has been a right that was hard to gain. The religious fervour overwhelming all communist countries after the fall of the regime has meant a feeling of freedom. The courage of declaring oneself a Christian and to be able to practice your belief were synonyms to the power of detaching oneself from the communist past and to the feeling of freedom.

In the election campaigns often well-versed politicians keep using the credibility of the church and invite it to stay closed to almost all events they organize. Many of the politicians who served in the old regime have used religion to discolour their identity. Religion is for these a step to advance to the social ladder. That is why in proximity to election campaigns politicians come in the middle of believers to be seen and to receive votes. Pilgrimage is a most significant event to the politicians due to the big number of believers and to its mass media exposure. There are in Romania a series of pilgrimages which have become by the presence of numerous pilgrims events followed year by year by the media. Romanian pilgrimages with
most visibility are: the Pilgrimage to Saint Parascheva from Iasi, the Pilgrimage to Saint Dumitru from the Romanian Patriarchate and the Pilgrimage in occasion of Saint Mary at Nicula. In addition to these big pilgrimages there are a series of pilgrimages with a local impact which can become at any time big centres of pilgrimage.

3. Representative pilgrimages in the Romanian space

3.1. The pilgrimage to Saint Pious Parascheva from Iasi

The pilgrimage from Saint Parascheva is one of the long tradition pilgrimages and is considered as the biggest and most representative centre of pilgrimage in Romania. An impressive number of believers come every year during the dedication day- approximately a million, a million and a half pilgrims and all these pilgrims are driven by the desire of a personal wonder.

The power of the pilgrimage centre fascinates the believers by the miracles that Divinity can realize in this space. The initial miracle reverberates in numerous other miracles which occur all the time and which increase the fame of the pilgrimage centre by attracting a crowd of believers wanting to be around the Divinity. Each centre has a particular characteristic, a unique imprint by the way that Divinity revealed itself.

Divinity, also, actively manifests via the saving acts that succeed in mastering the forces of nature to the use of humankind. By prayers believers succeed in solving their problems, to heal, to prosper, to have peace or a fulfilled life. Most Saints worshipped in this way are therapist Saints. And they are invoked not only to heal people, but also to breed cattle and protect crops (Coman, 2008, p.198). Saint Pious Parascheva by the wonders she made to the use of humankind is subscribed among therapist Saints. Miracles, to which numerous priests and believers have participated in, have increased the fame of the pilgrimage centre from Iasi transforming it into an institution and being recognized in the orthodox space.

In 1641 in the month of June the relics of Saint Parascheva have been brought to Iasi, these were offered to the ruler Vasile Lupu as a sign of thank you for his work in financially help the Orthodox Church.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as well as the Christian-orthodox people from the Balkans were forced to pay taxes to the great Ottoman Empire and, in addition to that, there is a constant pressure on the Christians to pass to Mohammedanism. In that period many churches were transformed into mosques, and the expenses ornaments from the interior stolen. The relics of the Saints were
not touched by the robbers for fear that the divine forces will avenge by crippling them. Many relics from the space occupied by the Ottomans, due to the desire to protect them, were transported to the few churches remained Christians. That was also the case of the relics of Saint Parascheva transported from Belgrade to Constantinople and then given as a present to ruler Vasile Lupu who would take them to Iasi in the Church Three Hierarchs. Due to the miracles she made all through the hundreds of years since the coffin containing the saint relics is in Iasi, Saint Parascheva has become a spiritual patron and protector of Moldavia.

On October 14th at Iasi a double event occurs – the dedication day of Saint Parascheva and Iasi Day. Saint Parascheva is also the protector of the city and that is why in her honour the local administration organizes a series of shows. The religious event has evolved during the last twenty years into two separate celebrations. As the religious event was growing in importance and the number of pilgrims has implicitly grown, from practical and economic reasons, the number of holidays has also grown. Now, one can speak of two distinct events, a sacred one and a profane one: a week of pilgrimage to the relics and two holiday weeks for Iasi Days.

Of course, in these events in addition to the profoundly religious side there is a mercantile side as well promptly noticed by the media. This mercantile dimension is built from a complex mechanism stimulating both events, on one hand the pilgrims, being human beings with certain needs: food, accommodation, transportation, security and on the other hand the hosts: organizers obtaining material advantages from the big number of clients. City hall in its turn sells street spaces to the small traders who in their turn sell their products to the pilgrims. City hall uses these amounts of money to offer pilgrims food and accommodation, but also to finance Iasi Days.

Pilgrimage is a sure source of win for everyone: the pilgrim meets Divinity; Iasi Metropolitan Church receives gifts in the name of Saint Parscheva and sells many diptychs, prayers to be read by the priest and candles; Iasi City hall rounds its budget; Public transportation administration triples its sales; the Railways supplement the number of trains and wagons; small traders selling in the street have profit; politicians have a rocket launching ramp; hotels and boarding houses no longer have vacancies on a 50 kilometres range; beggars and pick-pockets have also their profit; Iasi people benefit from free shows and fireworks; singers from all over the country have contracts to Iasi Celebrations; there are also exhibitions on display, contests and shows; and the journalists have a priceless source to get inspiration from. A mixed crowd, balancing on the threshold of the two worlds – sacred and secular.
3.2. The pilgrimage from Bucharest to the Romanian Patriarchate

To the end of October the Romanian Orthodox Church organizes festivals for the two Saints: Dimitrie, The Great Martyr Saint Dumitru celebrated on October 26 and the New Pious Saint Dimitrie celebrated on October 27. The name of the two saints and the close festival date creates an ambiguous identity image. The Saint Martyr Dumitru is on the escutcheon of the city and is implicitly the political thus secular symbol of the city. While the relics of Saint Martyr Dimitrie, the protector of the Capital, is in the Church of the Romanian Patriarchate. Also, the fact that the Saints are simultaneously mentioned on occasion of the pilgrimage to which is added the fact that the festival starts approximately one week before the day of 26 and is extended to one day or even two after the festival. All these touches and overlapping of information, events and rituals increase the confusion and will not be resolved because since the very beginning there was an intended proximity. Electing the date of the new Saint Dimitrie one day before the other Saint, is not by chance. Especially that this choice cannot be justified, no one knows the Saint’s death date. Also, on July 13th, 1744, the moment when the relics of Saint Pious Dimitrie arrive to the Capital the worshipping of those relics did not have vast proportions. During this period, the cult of Saint Pious Dimitrie was not so recognized and close as one of a loved and worshipped saint as Saint Pious Dimitrie; Saint Pious Dimitrie was, by attraction an increase of fame for the new saint. It wasn’t until 1973 that the Saint is officially proclaimed the protector of Bucharest and, only in 1955 the cult is generalized by the Orthodox Romanian Church with a festival on October 27.

On October 26 the Great Pious Saint Dumitru is celebrated, he is popularly named Saint Dumitru and it is believed that he is the brother of Saint Dumitru. The celebration is held by not working and helps to the one that celebrates it to be protected from all kinds of diseases and hits (Pamfile, 2006, p. 187).

Saint Dumitru or as he is called by the people Samedru marks an important calendar date in the life of Romanian shepherds, it is the moment when herds come back home. Actually, in the Romanian shepherds’ life there are two dates with exceptional importance, October 26 and April 23rd, Samedru and Sangeorz. The two, actually, represent two important agrarian gods, both protectors and patrons of the shepherds. Each of them is responsible for half a year, for six months rules Sangeorz and for the rest of six months rules Samedru. This type of division of time in two great seasons is typical of the pastoral populations dealing with breeding. There is a clear distinction between the pastoral New Year and the agrarian New Year, the first starts in the fall and is in close connection to the animal life cycle and fertilization of herd and the second, the agrarian New Year, starts in the spring and is connected to the plants life cycle and cereals germination (Monaghan, 2004, p. 132). The pastoral year is divided into two equal seasons – fertile and infertile: fertile winter between October 26 and April 23rd and the sterile summer between April 23rd and October
26th. Ghinoiu (2006, p. 361) in the book “Romanian celebrations and habits”, thinks that the “hypothesis in accordance to which the grand-Romanian and Dacian population, would have used, as the Celtics, a calendar with a beginning of the year in autumn, honoured the day when Samedru is celebrated today, is verified. This hypothesis is confirmed by the ritual dance of shepherds from Banat, performed only twice a year: when sheep mate, and after six months, to the herd selection or formation”. Thus, October 26 is the celebration of the beginning of the pastoral year, event which overlaps with the celebration of Saint Dumitru from the Christian calendar and April 23rd, the herd selection, overlaps in the Christian calendar to Saint George celebration.

The pilgrimage at the Romanian Patriarchate is a profoundly anchored in the Christian spirituality event, but with deep and forgotten pre-Christian roots. A multiple sides event, composed of sacred elements and of secular elements, containing ancient and modern elements. The complexity of the ramifications over spilling in the symbolism of the event is due first of all to the oldness of the practices included in the Saint’s mythology to be celebrated. Saint Dimitrie is not only a saint to commemorate, but a conglomerate of symbols. It is, in addition to the Christian mythology, a symbolic date has started on the New Dacian Year, it is connected to the significations of the New pastoral Year with correspondence in the Celtic culture, changing completely in time due to the Christian pressure to new events: All Saints Day, Dia de los Muertos and the celebration of Halloween.

Samedru, the event celebrated nowadays, belongs to the pastoral-agrarian culture and is a year end on which shepherds guide. Samedru is a mixture of symbols and rituals from the pre-Christian and Christian period, a unique construction of elements coming from the Dacian, Celtic and Romanian mythology. All these elements build a unique, own identity.

Saint Dumitru in the present, city culture, does not have pastoral connotations, city people don’t feel the cycle of pastoral life and do not make the connection between Dumitru and Samedru. They leave in pilgrimage praying to Saint Dimitrie and do not celebrate the moment by ritual pyre. We speak of two different life ways-shepherds, who feel time by the animal and earth fertility and city people – who do not measure time after the life cycle, they do not pray to rain for plants growths, but they pray not to rain to have lovely weather for picnic and walk in the park.

As only one part of the rural population is dealing with the grazing the number of those who know and celebrate Samedru is relatively small. If we follow the date provided by the Statistic Annual from 2007 in the rural environment lives 44, 9% of Romanian population and in the urban environment 55,1%, and, in accordance with the statistic, the number of people living in mountain areas and deal with traditional grazing is not very high. Still, being such a different and spectacular event by the
fires at midnight, it is appreciated by the media. But the information on Sanmedru
appearing in the mass media have a stating nature and generally, the information
from the local mass media are taken over. The information broadcasted by the mass
media related to Samedru is explained as being a popular habit celebrated on
October 26th and which is adorned with ritual elements and superstitions.

Media, mostly from the country where journalists can observe practiced popular
traditions in the villages, present the Samedru rituals. But the mass media deal these
practices as Christian habits of the shepherds and farmers, rituals story like caught in
a peasant logic. Central mass media by what the mass media from the territory
renders in the villages – habits which are unusual by being spectacular, fires on
hill ridges, fire wheels rolling down, shouts, ritual dances in the middle of the night,
masks etc. To arrange the information journalists often quote bibliographic sources
written by ethnographers.

Journalists, generally, avoid connecting Saint Dumitru and Samedru events to
the pre-Christian rituals and to build the evolution logic in time, mainly because the
information is controversial, but especially the sensitiveness which journalists
consider that the church displays towards the pagan pre-Christian substratum. They
mention the pre-Christian roots, but do not reveal the given information, but rather
provide specific details and verified known information on the events.

In the press report a series of actors and spectators actively participating in the
events are observed and are part of the human mix attending the manifestation.
Thus, the main actors – priests are actors and organizers of the event. It is their
ceremonial and they are present both to the stage by performing the religious
service, as well as among the crowd to make sure that all goes well. The second
important category of actors is the pilgrims who come from all social categories.
Among them, the actors with a high level of theological knowledge – priests, monks,
nuns who came to attend the pilgrimage. The distinct clothing individualizes them
and they often benefit from special treatment by being allowed to pray to the Saint’s
relics without standing in the ordeal of the queue. Politicians skipping the
pilgrimage queue order are not looked at with the same benevolence; there is always
a critique shade and drilling comments regarding this behaviour.

The big mass of pilgrims can be also divided into two categories: those who
choose to pray to the relics and those who are intimidated by the size of the queue.
The latter give up on praying to the relics and prefer to listen to the service, to take
holy water or to light a candle. The pilgrims who wish to kiss the relics stand in
the queue with endurance and they spend hours or even days waiting so that they can
touch for a few seconds the saint relics. These fervent pilgrims are under the close
supervision of another actors category, the non-participating actors to the pilgrimage
but which are involved in an activity connected to the event. The non-participating
actors are: policemen, doctors, nurses, volunteers or traders. All these spend the entire week on the Patriarchate Hill, as spectators to this event. Mass media makes sure to relate their presence and actions in very much detail. The policemen’ activity and their interaction to the crowd of people; the doctors and the pilgrims’ health issues; the trader and their “fabulous” profits. There is also a category of actors attracted by the crowd of people to perform illegal activities: they steal, they sell without authorization or they beg. About these, Bucharest mass media mentions little or nothing.

And not least, a character which is habitual to all stories on Romanian pilgrimages: “forcemeat rolls in cabbage”. A source of national price the forcemeat rolls in cabbage distributed on occasion of ritual funeral feast is the main actor of festivals. The hungry pilgrims rush to the food plates creating scuffles. The rush for food, the crowd, the smoking, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, listening to “manele” on the cell phones, the gossiping of neighbours and many others are part of the stereotypes that journalists use when relating in a drilling manner about the pilgrims’ flaws. The stereotypes are built of contradictory images – the behaviour of the ideal pilgrim and the behaviour of the normal person. It is being reproached to the pilgrims: the inappropriate behaviour in front of the relics, the fact that they do not respect nor love their kind, that they do not turn the other cheek, that they are not humble enough in front of the holy ones. We cannot compare the exemplary life of the Saints with the feelings of ordinary people. The life of Saints are exemplary models of exemplary people, of which it has never been written how they lived day by day e neither the “demons” they fought with or the series of sins they committed. The biological is eliminated from the equation and only the romanced story is left.

Saint Dimitrie pilgrimage from the Patriarchate is a strictly religious event, the pre-Christian layers, the stories round the two Saints are deeply hidden. The only fact that is difficult to clarify is the identity construction of the pilgrimage which includes the bicephalous image of the two and which, in an inspired way is obliterated, in the last years, by the presence of several relics brought for worshipping. We’ll probably be able in time to follow a new turn of the event from the Patriarchate due to the necessity to mark the boundaries of the two Saints and to create a new more stable image. What is very interesting in the case of Bucharest is the fact that although the city’s patron is Saint Martyr Dimitrie and there is a major event, the pilgrimage, this does not reverberate into the politic. The city hall does not celebrate its patron by concerts, parades or fireworks, but rather considers as an important event the first documentary certification of Bucharest on September 20th, 1459, in a document issued by Vlad Tepes. Bucharest is from this point of view unusual for Romania, being the only big city which doesn’t celebrate its spiritual patron by secular celebrations.
Conclusions

In the mediated public space, it is rarely spoken about God and sacred, but even then with a hindered smile. The religious favourite subjects published in the mass media are baptisms, weddings and funerals, the morality of people, the abortion theme, divorces, and marriages between persons of the same sex or euthanasia. On these subjects the prelates are questioned about the mass media and they are invited to answer as being authorities in the matter and having an expertise right. Although the clerics would like to talk about poverty, smouldering conflicts and wars futility or other major issues affecting the globe’s population, these are constrained to talk on petty subjects of personal nature. For these reasons priests often refuse to speak in public, but they have this behaviour also for fear that their speech would be misinterpreted, and their message distorted (Smith, 2008, p.14). The assertions cannot be generalized, but one can notice a contradictory relation of the believers towards the church: on one hand it can be stated that there is a lack of interest from the population regarding the church’s rituals and practices, and on the other hand one would find that people have a high level of confidence in the moral and spiritual values represented by the church.

From all religious rituals pilgrimage overtakes the rigid barrier between sacred hierophany and believer and does it in a direct manner without the intermediary implication of the priests. The pilgrim starts by himself in a direct dialog with the divinity and arrives at the end of the journey a transfigured man. Journalists who need to relate on pilgrimages are often placed in a delicate situation. The texture of pilgrimage is varied it combines “religious beliefs, mythological figures and stories, ritual unities (sacrifices, magical acts, components of passing rituals, celebration elements and even of carnival), reminiscences and constructs of folk and cultured literature.” (Coman, 2008, p.196). Regarding the complexity of the pilgrimage phenomenon we understand the reason for which the journalist is surprised by this information avalanche from so many diverse social spaces. From the diversity of elements building the pilgrimage: the departure, the journey, the pilgrims, the sacred place, the ritual practiced in the sacred place, the dialog with the divinity, leaving of the sacred place and the return, the journalist, generally, selects visible and percussive forms. Journalists try to find answers to all questions: Why do believers come to pilgrimage? Which is the force determining them to leave their house? Which are the pilgrims’ expectations? Why do they stand in huge queues to pray for a few seconds ? Do pilgrims manage to solve the problems they came for ?

The confessions picked by the journalists want to render the purpose of the pilgrimage, the material motivation and the spiritual motivation, the key element to the entire event. As a result of the research in the articles published in the mass media between 1999-2010, we have found that events can be bound to several areas of interest: religion, politics, and economy. Between these areas of interest there can
be drawn lines, but it must be mentioned that between some of these categories, democracy is purely theoretical, and represent and effort of binding the study. Some of these major categories overlap due to the different view angles from the mass media upon the event.

The best depicted category is the religious one which is built out of two other sub-categories: sacred and secular. The sacred category contains theological references, binding of the ritual, historical information and specifications, while the secular frame approaches traditions and habits specific to the event and which are connected to the saint worshipped image. The secular component belongs to the folklore and includes information on practices not officially recognized by the church, although they are tolerated, but in time it has been noticed that some of these traditions and habits are embraced, validated and afterwards practiced by the church.

In certain pilgrimages, central mass media takes over what the mass media in the territory renders in villages, habits which are unusual by their being spectacular, fires on hill ridges, fire wheels rolling down, shouts, ritual dances in the middle of the night, masks etc. To arrange the information journalists often quote bibliographic sources written by ethnographers.

An entirely particular category is the festival offered to the pilgrims. This is hard to identify because it swings in the mass media presentations between the sacred and secular space. Journalists often present the festival as a big election charity offered by the local authorities and by the church to the people. By changing the category angle and looking at the behaviour of the pilgrims who receive food we can see a constant image the pilgrims’ violence. Invariably journalists present the pilgrims pressing forward towards the plates with forcemeat rolls in cabbage and at the glasses of wine, and these violent outbursts are labelled as inadequate. The pilgrims are accused that they “forget the holy ones” and that they behave in an unchristian manner.

Another perspective looks at the organization of the event and here there are multiple categories and connections between the church – the administration – the economy. By categorizing the church, mass media looks at the pilgrims and their needs to be protected, to rest, to feed and the way in which the church and charitable organizations succeed in helping the believers. By categorizing the administration – mass media looks at the way in which the authority and the local community together with various religions succeed in mobilizing themselves in order to offer to the pilgrims and all persons present the necessary conditions so that the event take place without incidents. Mass media sub-categorizes: the city hall, the police, the hospitals, Red Cross, volunteers, public transportation, Railways travellers all around the country, etc. By categorizing the economy – mass media looks at the mercantile side of the event and underlines, maliciously, the incompatibility between religion and profit. Thus, the church and the profit from the pilgrims is commented
deprecatingly and it is analyzed: the price of diptychs and prayers to be read by the priest, candles, holy medals and everything the church sells. The way how the local authority understand to profit from the event by organizing various parallel activities which bring profit. The third category strictly concentrates on the economic component and follows the economic mechanism behind these cultural events which makes that every year these events survive. Journalists explain they way how local authorities succeed in collecting money from the small traders and how all these events are financed.

The relationship between church and politics represents the fourth category. Media follows with interest every year the presence of politicians at the pilgrimage and comments the reasons why these decided to come to the pilgrimage. Politicians choose to participate in the event with the desire to borrow a part of the credibility image provided by the church among the voters’ mass. Many of the politicians attending the pilgrimage do not have religious beliefs, they only try to attract the public’s sympathy. This is one of the reasons why sometimes the journalists’ tone is a malicious one. Media often accuses the politicians practicing this type of campaign as being persons with a doubtful character using the credibility of the church for election calculations. An incident which is often related and which usually takes place around the elections is “cheating the queue”. Because politicians do not have time, they do not stand in the queue, they cross themselves to the relics without having gone through the pilgrimage ordeal. Journalists mention with special maliciousness resentful impressions and expressions of the pilgrims who have spent hours waiting and who feel frustrated.

The textures of these categories is justified by the diversity of opinions and of the mass-media’s habit to bound the events and wrap them in a concise form which vibrates in the public consciousness. That is why, mass-media has the reflex of categorizing, for example, the religion and everything divinity means by two distinct perspectives: sacred and secular, that is, theology and tradition. Generally, by using the categories each journalist connects to the knowledge of the readers and to their habit of reception.

In the press relating one can see a series of actors and spectators actively participating to the event and who are part of the human conglomerate present at the manifestations. Thus, the main actors-priest are actors and organizers of the event. It is their ceremonial and they are present as well as on the stage performing the religious services and through the crowd by making sure that all goes well. The second important category of actors is the pilgrims, who come from all social layers. Among them there are the actors with a high level of theological knowledge – priests, monks, nuns who came to attend the pilgrimage. The distinct clothing individualizes them and they often benefit from special treatment by being allowed to pray to the Saint’s relics without standing in the ordeal of the queue. Politicians
skipping the pilgrimage queue order are not looked at with the same benevolence, there is always a critique shade and drilling comments regarding this behaviour.

The big mass of pilgrims can be also divided into two categories: those who choose to pray to the relics and those who are intimidated by the size of the queue. The latter give up on praying to the relics and prefer to listen to the service, to take holy water or to light a candle. The pilgrims who wish to kiss the relics stand in the queue with endurance and they spend hours or even days waiting so that they can touch for a few seconds the saint relics. These fervent pilgrims are under the close supervision of another actors category, the non-participating actors to the pilgrimage but which are involved in an activity connected to the event. The non-participating actors are: policemen, doctors, nurses, volunteers or traders. All these spend the entire week on the Patriarchate Hill, as spectators to this event. Mass-media makes sure to relate their presence and actions in very much detail. The policemen’ activity and their interaction to the crowd of people; the doctors and the pilgrims’ health issues; the trader and their “fabulous” profits. There is also a category of actors attracted by the crowd of people to perform illegal activities: they steal, they sell without authorization or they beg. About these, mass media mentions little or nothing compared to other characters.

The pilgrims’ categories described by the mass-media are neither varied nor particularly spectacular, but intriguing are the main actors: pilgrims. Media is amazed and perplexed by their motivation, determination, by their suffering, belief, patience they display, but especially by the large number of believers participating in the pilgrimages.

At the same time there is a media circle, the more mass-media relates about this pilgrimage the more the number of people who find out about this event is higher and in the soul of many spectators increases the desire to participate as well to such a journey. The pilgrimage is considered a democratic ritual, without limitation of age, gender, class or religion, anyone who wants to practice it is welcome. The spiritual experience lived by the pilgrim during the journey, to the sacred place and through the dialog with the divinity it leaves traces in his conscious. The pilgrim returns home loaded with memories and respected by the community for his determination he proved.

References


