

Re-thinking the Concept of Re-enchantment in Central-Eastern Europe

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During my time as a bachelor student in Italy in the mid-2000s, one of the reference handbooks on the sociology of religion was a text which is, or probably was, considered a classic in the Italian milieu: *L'eclissi del sacro nella civiltà industriale* ("The Eclipse of the Sacred in the Industrial Civilization"¹). The book was administered to some of us even before we had heard of Max Weber, although it set out from a Weberian perspective. For Weber, secularisation, which stemmed primarily from processes of rationalisation, intellectualisation, and technicisation typical of modern times, was twofold: it mostly occurred in discreet societies and religious systems, rather than as a universal trend. Nevertheless, the idea of a universal trend of secularisation is also present in his thought, albeit secondarily, and it can be distilled from several of his works². It is this second acceptance that has somewhat shifted to become the main one in modern scholarship.

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- 1 Sabino Acquaviva, *L'eclissi del sacro nella civiltà industriale*, Milan: Comunità 1969.
- 2 Michael W. Hughey, "The idea of secularization in the works of Max Weber: A theoretical outline", *Qualitative Sociology* 2, 1979, 85-111.



Building on Weber's conclusions, the main argument of the aforementioned classic Italian book postulated the inevitable secularisation, or the final and fatal "decline" of the "sacred" in industrial societies (for which the author used the term "paganisation", which in the intellectual context of Italy in the 1950s and 1960s stood as a synonym for de-christianisation). The definitive divorce that modernity had brought and sponsored between the political and the religious spheres, along with rationalisation and the rise of consumer culture and its corollary, individualism (or the other way round, if one prefers) were therein interpreted as forceful empirical evidence of the inevitable abandonment of religion as such. This apparently inevitable "de-religionisation", conversely, has never actually happened – or not yet at least, or not in the forms that had been foreseen in that and other classical works about secularisation.

Secularisation, Post-secularism, and Re-enchantment (in Central-Eastern Europe)

Acquaviva's book and its now quite outdated approach was of course only one of the possible declensions of the Weberian paradigm of secularisation. Later, I discovered other approaches, although mostly also constructed from and developing on Weber's seminal ideas³. I also realised that despite the many lamentations about the decline of the sacred from the horizon of the modern world, industrial societies have in fact been experiencing a complex, multifaceted *transformation* of religious sentiments, beliefs, and practices, rather than a simple, linear let alone abrupt *eclipse*⁴.

The latter observation is actually also in line with what Weber himself thought: "Secularization is not an abstract world process following its own inherent logic independent of specific socio-historical situations and influences. In the context of Weber's thought, it would be absurd to regard secularisation (or any other of his concepts) as a demiurge of history"⁵. Nevertheless, it is likewise evident that "conventional" or "institutional" or "traditional" forms of religiosity, especially Christian denominations, were and are losing social adherence in the industrialised world. Indeed, pious and devotional practices have been incessantly declining in most of Europe, as the widespread phenomenon of empty churches iconically evokes. The causes of this transformation, of which the desertion, with

3 Olivier Tschannen, *Les théories de la sécularisation*, Geneva: Librairie Droz 1992.

4 "Indeed it may help to examine secularization as a process that occurs by stages instead of a sudden tumble into a godless void", Jay Demerath III, "The Rise of 'Cultural Religion' in European Christianity: Learning from Poland, Northern Ireland, and Sweden", *Social Compass* 47/1, 2000, 127-139: 137.

5 M. W. Hughey, "The Idea of Secularization...": 89.

very few exceptions, of Christian temples is perhaps the most visible aspect, are diverse: radical shifts in morality and systems of values (especially concerning the body, the self, the family, and gender relations); the incapacity of the clergy to meet the complex and mostly unprecedented existential needs of the new generations; the definitive laicisation of the State and disappearance of religion from the political arena (again with a few significant exceptions); the emergence of a religious market, where religions are but another “good” to choose amongst and consume⁶; and ethnic and cultural *métissages*, among other phenomena and processes. All of these causes, and others, have made the social and religious panorama of Europe not simplistically “in decline”, but rather much more changing, multiform, and diverse than in the past, that is to say before modernisation, industrialisation, and subsequent post-industrialism. The cluster of these recent changes could be thought of as yet another example of late modern “accelerated social change”, as anthropologist Thomas Eriksen has written⁷.

Davie and Hervieu-Léger have concluded that it is indeed inevitable to notice, in the late modern era, “the growing incapacity of the great religious systems to keep together, under their control, the different dimensions (identitarian, cultural, ethical, and emotional) of the individual and collective religious experience”⁸.

The conceptual dichotomy, or rather diarchy, at the basis of the “religious ferment vs religious decline” paradigm in the analysis of modern (and even more so late or post-modern) societies has characterised if not hegemonised for decades the scholarly debate in fields such as the sociology and anthropology of religion. Parallely, other theories and concepts have emerged that attempt to account for and explain this transformation without falling into the “religious ferment vs religious decline” conceptual trap. Some have interpreted the emergence of new religious forms without

6 François Gauthier – Tuomas Martikainen, *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*, Farnham: Ashgate 2013.

7 Thomas H. Eriksen, *Overheating: An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*, Chicago (IL): Chicago University Press 2016.

8 “L’incapacité croissante des grands systèmes religieux à faire tenir ensemble sous leur contrôle les différentes dimensions – identitaire, culturelle, éthique et émotionnelle – de l’expérience religieuse individuelle et collective”, Grace Davie – Danièle Hervieu-Léger (eds.), *Identités religieuses en Europe*, Paris: La Découverte 1996, 3. Similar opinions are expressed by several other authors in several other works, e.g., Nicola Gasbarro, “L’implosione delle grandi religioni”, *Prometeo* 116, 2013, 18-29; Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Religions of the Earth from Druids and Witches to Heathens and Ecofeminists*, New York (NY): New York University Press 2011; Peter J. Margry, “European Religious Fragmentation and the Rise of Civil Religion”, in: Ullrich Kockel – Máiréad N. Craith – Jonas Frykman (eds.), *Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2012, 275-294.

disproving the idea of a general pattern of religious decline⁹. Likewise, without challenging the secularisation paradigm itself, Peter Berger complemented it by offering a conceptualisation of desecularisation, in order to account for the parallel flourishing of individual religiosity as well as the regained importance of religion in the contemporary world¹⁰.

From different theoretical and epistemological standpoints, several other thinkers have grown sceptical of sharp dichotomies or unilinear processes concerning the role and fate of religion in modern and late modern times. Egil Asprem is one of those who have wondered whether or not we should consider the modern world as disenchanting¹¹, while François Gauthier has chosen to assess religious life in the neoliberal, globalised world in terms of its coherence with the market-oriented, capitalistic *Weltanschauung*¹². For Gauthier, institutionalised religions during the 19th century developed a form of mutual reinforcement, or even veritable symbiosis, with national states, during the long historical process of their inception and formation. However, because of the great transformation brought about by neoliberalism during the late 20th century, they now co-exist, they have to, with the one all-encompassing entity that has taken over nation-states and any other social and political formation that existed before our times: the new Leviathan, the Market¹³. Other thinkers have instead never ceased to believe that the world has ever, actually, been disenchanting: for them, it has always been enchanted, one way or another¹⁴.

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- 9 Grace Davie, “Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?”, *Social Compass* 37/4, 1990, 455-469; Steve Bruce, “An Empirical Critique of Re-Sacralisation”, *Analyse and Kritik* 39/1, 2017, 145-162. G. Davie – D. Hervieu-Léger (eds.), *Identités religieuses...* is another work that openly challenges the secularisation paradigm on the grounds of European examples. Nevertheless, the authors do not deny the existence of trajectories of secularisation, especially with respect to the disaffection with “traditionally” European forms of religiosity (Protestantism, Catholicism) in the richer and more industrialised parts of the continent.
- 10 Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center 1999. For an assessment and recapitulation of the rich scholarship on this subject by Berger, see Dylan Reaves, “Peter Berger and the Rise and Fall of the Theory of Secularization”, *Denison Journal of Religion* 11, 2012, 11-18.
- 11 Egil Asprem, “Aren’t we Living in a Disenchanted World?”, in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff – Peter Forshaw – Marco Pasi (eds.), *Hermes Explains. Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2019, 13-20.
- 12 François Gauthier, *Religion, Modernity, Globalisation: Nation-State to Market*, London – New York (NY): Routledge 2020.
- 13 Gauthier has also applied his interpretative framework to central-eastern Europe, recently, developing interesting conclusions: François Gauthier, “Religious Change in Orthodox-majority Eastern Europe: From Nation-State to Global-Market”, *Theory and Society* 51/2, 2021, 177-210.
- 14 Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, And the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press 2017; Christopher Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and*

Another trend that has become widespread, if not majoritarian, recently, in the social sciences of religion, one that tries to escape the conceptual cage of the secularisation paradigm, is the thinking about the current situation, or *Zeitgeist*, or epoch, in terms of “post-secular”. The array of “neo-” and “post-” “isms” is not scarce at all, and has been multiplying as multiple have become the political, social, economic, and religious configurations, movements, and philosophies in the late modern globalised world. The notion of post-secularism has certainly the merit of striving to build a conceptual scope in which contemporary social realities, their profound changes, and their entanglements with the sphere of religion are analysed in their complexity. In so doing, such a re-thinking allows for the transformation of the “religious ferment vs religious decline” dichotomy into a multi-faceted and articulated phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the simplistic dilemma of “either more religion or less religion”¹⁵.

For some, both the idea of post-secularism and the religious social practices that the term aspires to refer to are but a reaction to the “post-modern condition”¹⁶. Such a condition is here conceived as one made of rampant individualism, the loss of social meaning, the fragmentation of lifestyles and identities, and the weakening or even disintegration of the religious, philosophical, and political “grand narratives” that had brought and kept the masses together during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century¹⁷.

However one may think that things stand with the post-secular, the concept itself cannot but confirm the idea of secularisation (implicitly and logically). It does so, nonetheless, while questioning the idea of a linear pattern of religious disappearance as well as questioning its conceptual

Occulture, (The Re-Enchantment of the West 1), Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark 2005; Marshall Sahlins, “Interview with Marshall Sahlins”, *Anthropological Theory* 8/3, 2008, 319-328; Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World*, Princeton (NJ) – Oxford: Princeton University Press 2014.

15 Publications on post-secularism have multiplied in the last dozen years; I have drawn on Peter Nynäs – Mika Lassander – Terhi Utriainen, *Post-Secular Society*, London – New York (NY): Routledge 2012; and Umut Parmaksız, “Making Sense of the Postsecular”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 21/1, 2018, 98-116. The second one explores the theme of post-secularism from different methodological angles than those to which historians, sociologists, and anthropologists are mostly used to: the author moves in fact from the perspectives of political theory, social theology, and the philosophy of religion towards the understanding of, as he writes, “three different critical themes: (1) disenchantment and loss of community / meaning; (2) the impossibility of absolute secularity; and (3) the exclusion of religion from the public sphere”. *Ibid.*, 101.

16 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford: Blackwell 1990.

17 This argument and the authors theorising and upholding it are discussed in U. Parmaksız, “Making Sense...”.

opposite, de-secularisation. In other words, it builds upon the idea of a Western world that is not, as has already been argued, merely *less* religious, but *differently* religious¹⁸.

The several different paradigms briefly presented in the last few paragraphs differ in many a way, methodologically, theoretically, and also epistemologically. However, they are probably all consistent with the following statement: secularisation might well be an actually-happening process, but we have never lived and will never live in a wholly-secularised society. This is, again, to add yet another word in favour of Weber's genius, in line with what he himself thought: "Weber would never assume the partial or total elimination of religion to be the teleological end of some abstract secularizing process"¹⁹. A brief summary of what is happening could be that the general tendency in the industrialised world, or at least in what is commonly understood as the "West", seems to be the following: recent decades have witnessed a progressive detachment from traditional forms of religiosities, which are manifestly more and more incapable of responding to the existential needs of late (or post-) modern Westerners. This detachment has been going hand in hand, only apparently paradoxically, with a simultaneous and specular increase of alternative religions and spiritualities, which are, contrariwise, more in line with processes such as marketisation, individualisation, identity politics, authenticity-seeking, ritual creativity, and other quintessentially late (or post-) modern phenomena. It is as if the modern person had moved from being born into a religion, to losing one's religion, to finally choosing one's religion²⁰.

Another methodological stratagem to escape the impasse is to follow Weber's first approach to the question of religion in modern times: to avoid grand theories and broad generalisations, and to circumscribe and contextualise the analysis. How secularised is religion x, locality y, or nation z? How secularised is economic class x, age class y, or rural areas vis-à-vis urban ones, in a given country or region? This application of a "restrained" version of the secularisation theory, as opposed to the "general" one, while bearing its ripest fruits in historical analysis – like those Weber himself reaped thanks to / in / with his masterpiece, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*²¹ – is more problematic when applied to the study of

18 C. Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities...*

19 M. W. Hughey, "The Idea of Secularization...", 89-90.

20 "The dominant feature of contemporary religiosity and spirituality in the post-traditional world is that religious belief and behaviour is now much more freely chosen by individuals", Jeppe S. Jensen, *What is Religion?*, London – New York (NY): Routledge 2014, 162.

21 Max Weber, "Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus", in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1920/1921 (1904/1905), 17-206.

contemporary societies. When Weber lived and worked, globalisation was brewing, its social and technological conditions just in an embryonic stage, or a stage of infancy. In fact, until a few decades ago, globalisation was still in the making, and somewhere in the West still existing only potentially: a trend, rather than a well-established and deeply-rooted reality. Today, it characterises the existential daily condition of all Westerners and Europeans. Just like any other sphere of social life²², such as economy, technology, politics, and media, so has religion, too, been isolated and “disembedded” from the other spheres²³, which is one of the causes and consequences of modernity in general. In turn, this “disembeddedness” has resulted in greater differentiation within the sphere of religious life, as sociologist José Casanova has famously claimed²⁴.

Religion is therefore now but one of the components influencing the interconnected, “fluid”, globalised world of the late modern period. Whatever theory of secularisation (or post-secularism) that self-confines and provincialises itself for the sake of an idealistic pursuit of “contextualisation” is doomed to be flawed, and fallacious: comparison, in whatever form, is the blood of social sciences, all the more so in times of globalisation, cultural massification, and the “indigenisation of modernity”²⁵. Nothing can, in the 21st century, resist the gravitational attraction of globalisation, and if outright cultural islands have never existed in the history of human societies, that is especially true in the contemporary world. This of course is no denial of the importance of “local” and “vernacular” religiosities in the West today, quite the contrary²⁶; but they must be understood both within their own logic and within the broader logic of globalisa-

22 And here the work on Weber on the concept of the sphere is, again, of paramount importance: Sylvia Terpe, “Max Weber’s ‘Spheres of Life’. A Tool for Micro-Sociological Analysis”, *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers 179*, Halle (Saale): Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology 2016.

23 Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*, Boston (MA): Beacon 1944.

24 Nevertheless, Casanova has also claimed that “European modernity leads to secularization but not necessarily to religious pluralization. Globalization leads to religious pluralization but not necessarily to secularization”, José Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification*, [online monograph], <<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/global-religious-and-secular-dynamics-the-modern-system-of-classification>>, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs 2019. Casanova’s work spans over half a century and is too articulated and complex to be presented in a few lines. However, he has recently promised to offer a “last word” (in his own words) about modernity and secularisation in a recent open-source text, which epitomises and complements his rich scholarship. *Ibid.*

25 Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*, New York (NY): Zone Books 2000.

26 I have myself devoted a portion of my scholarship to that: e.g., A. Testa, “‘Fertility’ and the Carnival 1...”, and Alessandro Testa, “‘Fertility’ and the Carnival 2: Popular

tion. They cannot be but “glocal”, now more than ever²⁷. At least this is the *sociological* conclusion, based on both empirical study in the field and armchair reading, that a historian and anthropologist like myself can offer about the current state of things.

In the very brief intellectual and historical account of theories of secularisation and post-secularism that precedes, the Weberian notion of the “disenchantment of the world” (“*Entzauberung der Welt*”) holds a special place. In a manner of speaking, whatever we are talking about, myself in this article, or dozens of other scholars with their hundreds of studies about these clusters of problems, it all began with Weber and his *Entzauberung*. In fact, “disenchantment” is a foundational concept in the paradigm of secularisation, and its story probably need not be repeated or stressed enough here²⁸.

Being somewhat intuitively and inherently “anti-Weberian”, *re-enchantment* is a concept that, with a few occasional exceptions and one notable one²⁹, began to be used coherently and analytically only in the 1990s³⁰, then gained traction in the early 2000s³¹, before becoming widely used and well-established in the scholarship³². Nevertheless, it wasn’t

Frazerism and the Reconfiguration of Tradition in Europe Today”, *Folklore* 128/2, 2017, 111-132.

- 27 In his recent *Religion, Modernity, Globalisation*, François Gauthier, interestingly, chooses not to problematise the third term in his title: not only because it has been abundantly (over)theorised in the past (because the same can be said of “religion” and “modernity” as well), but, I believe, especially because globalisation seems to be now such a self-evident reality. It seems as if there were a sort of tacit or implicit agreement among some social scientists according to which globalisation is not anymore a hypothetical dimension to speculate about, or a theoretical notion that needs further problematisation, but an empirical given in need of interpretation.
- 28 For this constitution and legacy see any handbook of the sociology of religion, but also Richard Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium”, *Max Weber Studies* 1/1, 2000, 11-32; or rather and especially the excellent article by M. W. Hughey, “The Idea of Secularization...”, which systematised this Weberian matter in a manner Weber himself never did.
- 29 Maurice Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press 1981.
- 30 Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology”, in: Jeremy Coote (ed.), *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, 40-63; R. Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment...”.
- 31 See notably, among others, C. Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities...*
- 32 See, among many others, Alessandro Testa, “The Re-Enchantment of Europe: ‘Traditional’ Carnivals and the Belief in Propitiatory Magic (Two Ethnographic Cases from Italy and Czechia)”, in: Tatiana Minniyakhmetova – Kamila Velkoborská (eds.), *Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year: Magic in Rituals and Rituals in Magic*, Innsbruck – Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press 2015, 100-109; A. Testa, “‘Fertility’ and the Carnival 1...”; Cyril Isnart – Alessandro Testa (eds.), “Re-enchantment, Ritualization, Heritage-making: Processes

until so long ago that it was mobilised for the analysis of the transformations in the sphere of religion, religiosity, and spirituality in the post-communist world. It is precisely in this latter connotation, or rather application, that it has been at the centre of the international research project “The Re-enchantment of Central-Eastern Europe”, that I led between 2020 and 2022. The project focused on new, renewed, alternative, and “heritagised” forms of religion and spirituality, especially in Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary (these countries, although different from each other, are nevertheless associated by, among other things, a common recent past under real socialism regimes and the following transition to democracy), but with a rather strong comparative focus stretching to other former-communist regions and countries as well. Therefore, the concept, either in the rather basic sense of “understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable”³³ or in more sophisticated formulations, has been circulating for some time in the vast galaxy of the academic study of late modern religion, although before said project came into being it had seldom, if ever, been applied systematically to post-socialist Europe³⁴. I will return to the concept of “re-enchantment” in the third and final section of this article.

Thinking about re-enchantment cannot therefore be but a re-thinking, all the more so if mobilising this concept for a better understanding of such a super-diverse area as former-socialist Europe, which stretches from the shores of the Baltic to the Mediterranean islands in the south, cutting through a good third of what is today commonly understood as “Europe”.

Reconfiguring Tradition in Europe”, *Ethnologia Europaea*, (monographic issue), 50/1, 2020.

33 R. Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment...”, 29.

34 My own take on post-socialism has been extensively articulated in Alessandro Testa, “Problemi e prospettive della ricerca demo-etno-antropologica su memoria sociale, (n)ostalgia, ritualità pubblica e patrimonio culturale immateriale nell’Europa post-socialista”, *Lares* 82/2, 2016, 237-276, and shall not be repeated here. It must be said, though, that a shift has occurred in the last few years. For some time now, there has been a tendency to be sceptical about the validity of qualifications such as “post-communist”, “post-socialist”, and the like (see, e.g. Martin Müller, “Goodbye, Postsocialism!”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 71/4, 2019, 533-550); some have gone as far as to suggest that their heuristic value should be consigned to the dustbin or to an academic *cabinet de curiosités*. I do agree that the concept is slowly becoming somewhat obsolete, as the transformations of the transition “proper” become entrenched deeply in the social fabric of post-communist societies, and the social reality to which these terms refer fades away, giving way to new, often unprecedented configurations. I also think, however, that we should beware of disposing of said term altogether: suffice it to take a look at what is currently (2022) happening in Ukraine to consider whether or not we are still, indeed, living in the final phase of a long, viscous, and for some tragic post-socialist transition.

In conclusion to this first section, I deem it appropriate to “disclose” how and why curiosity for all this arose in my mind, and how the main or rather basic research question at work behind and beneath my project came into being – for this article is also one of its final results, at any rate. The problem it addresses is the following: if secularisation (or however else we might want to call the main trend affecting religion during modernity) in Europe did happen, in some form, over the 19th and especially 20th centuries, then the quintessentially 20th century phenomenon of socialist state atheism promoted by the communist regimes can be thought of as a particular and in a manner of speaking “enhanced” variation of it. State atheism was never a “spontaneous” (i.e. bottom-up) popular implementation of the propositions postulated in written form by Marx or Lenin, for there is no doubt that the masses, under early communist rule, remained predominantly religious. State atheism was instead a reflexive, planned, top-down form of social engineering aimed at creating the conditions for modernising the masses and inculcating not only a materialistic and secular vision of history (in accordance with the principles of dialectical materialism), the world, and the place of workers in it, but also principles of intellectual rationality and the respect for state apparatuses and bureaucracy (all indubitable constitutional components of secularisation and stimuli of disenchantment, as already stressed by Weber himself). If this was true, what impact did socialist state atheism have on religious life both at the level of general collective patterns and at that of individual experiences? And when state atheism dissolved along with the communist governments that had endorsed it, what kind of “reaction” (of more or less spontaneous re-enchantment) was triggered in contrast with the former situation (of more or less forced disenchantment)? And if this reaction did happen, as seems to be easily ascertainable, what forms did it take, or rather, has it been taking, in the past thirty and more years? In other words, if it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to quantify, ascertain, or even simply assess the actual influence and penetration of communist policies towards religion in the social life of people living under real socialism³⁵, at least the task can be narrowed down to one of observing and interpreting the nature and forms of religious phenomena that have emerged and developed for more than thirty years now. The new phenomena, however, also result, inevitably, from that experience: i.e. they may also exist as conscious and intentional

35 Although the task has been attempted, e.g. in Tim Müller – Anja Neundorf, “The Role of the State in the Repression and Revival of Religiosity in Central Eastern Europe”, *Social Forces* 91/2, 2012, 559-582.

social refusal of, reaction to, continuity with, or consolidation of the former communist policies³⁶.

The Empirical Matter: a Few Examples

I have now briefly outlined the main questions at the basis of my research endeavour. These questions, however, engender others, and have also led me to identify a set of actual religious (but also “pseudo-religious”) phenomena that I have eventually focused on in the past few years. When the project was originally written and submitted between 2018 and 2019, scholarly literature about renewed religious ferment in post-socialist Europe was already solidly established: several important works had been long-published that dealt with the “post-socialist religious question”³⁷, especially from the perspective of an “anthropology of religion after socialism”³⁸, itself within the broader field of the “anthropology of post-socialist Europe”³⁹ which began to be explored shortly after the beginning of the transition⁴⁰. Today, this body of writings makes up an established scholarly canon in the academic study of religion, also from a variety of other methodological standpoints (history, sociology, political sciences⁴¹). I had actually been reviewing the literature from 2012 (and started my first research project in the “anthropology of religion after socialism” in 2013), and had commented on a substantial part of it by 2016⁴². I had, however,

36 Needless to stress that some of these questions had already been posed before. What I am attempting to do is to answer differently, and especially to use the so far less widely used notion of “re-enchantment” to formulate my answers.

37 Chris Hann (ed.), *The Post-socialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*, Berlin: LIT 2006.

38 Douglas Rogers, “The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism”, *Religion, State and Society* 33/1, 2005, 5-18.

39 Michał Buchowski, “Anthropology in Postsocialist Europe”, in: Ullrich Kockel – Máiréad N. Craith – Jonas Frykman (eds.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2012, 68-87; Chris Hann – Caroline Humphrey – Katherine Verdery, “Introduction: Postsocialism as a Topic of Anthropological Investigation”, in: Chris Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*, London – New York: Routledge 2002, 3-23; A. Testa, “Problemi e prospettive della ricerca...”.

40 Katherine Verdery, “Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the “Transition””, *American Ethnologist* 18/3, 1991, 419-439.

41 In this article I am intentionally leaving aside the topic of the politics of religion, or political religion, after socialism. The topic is explored in many works, from a variety of angles. A recent discussion is in the Introduction and two other chapters in Tobias Köllner – Alessandro Testa (eds.), *Politics of Religion: Authority, Creativity, Conflicts*, Berlin: LIT 2021.

42 A. Testa, “Problemi e prospettive della ricerca...”. I became seriously interested in post-socialist studies during my 7-month research stay in Estonia in 2012.

also observed a relative but noticeable (and puzzling) lack of interest concerning the type of ritual and religious experience and phenomena that I wanted to investigate⁴³: the invention or revitalisation of public rituals *sub specie religionis*, the re-emergence of magical and “folk” beliefs, and other forms of unofficial religious practices, along with new revivalist forms of traditional, churchd religions, such as Catholicism. The pertinent scholarly literature is still not comparable in number to that devoted to more “classical” subjects in the sociology and anthropology of religion in post-socialist contexts, such as the privatisation and de-privatisation of religious practices, the relations between the Church and the State or between the State and Islam, the role of religion in the construction of the self and in the shaping of collective identities, or ethnic religions in the Far East Eurasian landmass such as Siberian Shamanism⁴⁴. An exception is the topic of New Age, Neopaganism, and a few other new religious move-

43 When it comes to the topic of rituality after socialism, mine wasn't simply a sensation: shortly before my first observations and field surveys in 2013 (when I moved to Czechia for the first time), two experts in the field were writing the following: “Relatively little attention has been given to the topic of changing ritual cycles during postsocialism. This is so despite the importance given by the socialist regimes themselves to the ritual calendar, and to the establishment of new ritual cycles as part of the process of building socialism”, Jennifer Cash, “Capitalism, Nationalism and Religious Revival: Transformations of the Ritual Cycle in Postsocialist Moldova”, *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 29/2, 2011, 181-203: 181; and: “compared to other topics, ritual has been neglected in postsocialist research”, Gerald Creed, *Masquerade and Postsocialism: Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria*, Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2011, 12. And yet perhaps the first article on the matter (specifically about the Polish May Day public ritual) was published immediately after the fall of the Polish regime: Zdislaw Mach, “Continuity and Change in Political Ritual: May Day in Poland”, in: Jeremy Boissevain (ed.) *Revitalizing European Rituals*, London – New York (NY): Routledge 1992, 46-61. But this was rather an exception. Things however started changing soon after those cited lines were written: more studies appeared, e.g., Mateja Habinc, “Les fêtes calendaires pendant et après le socialisme”, *Ethnologie française* 42/2, 2012, 291-299; and Kristin Kuutma, “The Politics of Contested Representation: UNESCO and the Masterpieces of Intangible Cultural Heritage”, in: Dorothee Hemme – Markus Tauschek – Regina Bendix (eds.), *Prädikat “HERITAGE”: Wertschöpfungen aus kulturellen Ressourcen*, Berlin: LIT 2013, 177-196. They have changed significantly ever since.

44 Works about these classical topics appeared especially in the 1990s and the 2000s: Chris Hann, “Problems with the (De)Privatization of Religion”, *Anthropology Today* 16/6, 2000, 14-20; C. Hann (ed.), *The Post-socialist Religious Question...;* Chris Hann (ed.), *Religion, Identity, Postsocialism*, Halle (Saale): Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology 2010; Morten A. Pedersen, *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press 2011; Tatiana Z. Podolinská, “Introduction: Religion in Post-secular and Post-communist Europe – Trends, Visions and Challenges”, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19/1, 2010, 1-8; D. Rogers, “The Anthropology of Religion...”; Mark D. Steinberg – Catherine Wanner (eds.), *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*, Bloomington (IN): Indiana University Press 2008.

ments (NRMs), which have indeed been more studied, these within the realm of non-institutional or non-traditional religious forms⁴⁵. Today, in comparison with a few years ago, things stand rather differently, as the number and quality of publications on these re-enchanting and re-enchant-ed phenomena have seen a significant increase⁴⁶.

I will now present a few examples, rather than veritable case studies, that have caught my attention of late. In spite of their brevity, these are not mere impressionistic sketches, but neither, of course, do they aspire to any exhaustiveness. In other words, they fulfil the function of exemplifying, and I have chosen to highlight these in particular either because I have

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- 45 Irena Borowik – Grzegorz Babinski (eds.), *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe*, Krakow: NOMOS 1997, is one of the first studies openly addressing the problem of the so-called “New Religious Movements” in central-eastern Europe. On Neo-shamanism and Neopaganism more in particular in the same area, see Kaarina Aitamurto – Scott Simpson (eds.), *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, New York (NY) – London: Routledge 2013; István Povedák – László-Attila Hubbes, “Competitive Pasts. Ethno-paganism as a Placebo-effect for Identity Reconstruction Processes in Hungary and Romania”, *Religiski-filozofiski raksti* 17/1, 2014, 133-152; Adrian Ivakhiv, “Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethic of the Religious Right?”, *Pomegranate* 7/2, 2005, 194-225; Laszlo Kürti, “Neoshamanism, National Identity and the Holy Crown of Hungary”, *Journal of Religion in Europe* 8/2, 2015, 235-260 (but references could very easily be multiplied). Essential works to understand new forms of Paganism and witchcraft in Europe and in the Western world in general are G. Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism...*; Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999; Kathryn Rountree, “Introduction. Context Is Everything: Plurality and Paradox in Contemporary European Paganisms”, in: Kathryn Rountree (ed.), *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses*, New York (NY) – Oxford: Berghahn 2015, 1-23; however, the literature has become extremely vast, certainly ungraspable in its entirety, in the past two decades. On Czechia more in particular, the country in which I specialise (and in which I live), see Kamila Velkoborská, “The Brotherhood of Wolves: From Ásatrú to Primitivism”, in: Kathryn Rountree (ed.), *Contemporary Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Europe: Colonialist and Nationalist Impulses*, New York (NY) – Oxford: Berghahn 2015, 46-69; Matouš Vencálek, *Analýza příčin rostoucí tendence náboženské příslušnosti k současnému pohanství; případová studie situace v České Republice*, [Master thesis, online], <<https://is.muni.cz/th/irr5r/>>, Brno: Masaryk University 2015; and Matouš Vencálek, “Religious, Socio-cultural and Political Worldviews of Contemporary Pagans in the Czech Republic”, *Pomegranate* 19/2, 2017, 233-250.
- 46 Tomáš Bubík – Atko Remmel – David Václavík (eds.), *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-Religion*, London – New York (NY): Routledge 2021; J. Cash, “Capitalism, Nationalism and Religious Revival...”; G. Creed, *Masquerade and Postsocialism...*; Niko Toš, “(De)secularisation or (re)confessionalisation processes in Europe”, *Teorija in Praksa* 50/1, 2013, 172-204; along with several other texts cited in the previous paragraphs and previous footnotes, just to mention those I have consulted, but the literature is now richer.

observed and/or studied them myself, or because they have been studied by researchers close to me, and have therefore been the object of study and discussion among us. These few, strikingly interesting facts and figures from certain Eastern and central-eastern European countries have been chosen to demonstrate some interesting “re-enchanting” and “re-enchant-ed” trends. They have also been chosen because they show a particularly profound rupture with the former period under communist regimes, as well as, in several cases, with the first years of the transition. Their presentation is kept very brief, and while they will be discussed as examples of a broader trend, they have either already been analysed in a series of studies, which are cited, or they will be analysed in studies to come (for instance, my own Czech case study, which is hereby presented very briefly, is the object of a publication that is still in the making⁴⁷).

- Certain religious minorities *stricto sensu* (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims, Hindus, and others) often prefer to remain discreet about their creeds, or actually even to “domesticate”⁴⁸ or “privatise” them⁴⁹, just like they did during the communist rule – or at most they prefer to engage only in restrained proselytism. Conversely, people practising new religious movements such as Neopaganism and Neo-shamanism are more and more vocal and willing to talk about their beliefs and practices, as is easily observable and ethnographically recordable. Pagan groups and groupuscules, for instance, have been consistently on the rise over the last couple of decades across the whole of post-socialist Europe (but with a particular verve and a higher order of magnitude in countries like Estonia and Hungary), also appropriating niches and spans in the public sphere and claiming more visibility.
- More and more people in the middle and upper-middle classes such as entrepreneurs and managers, in Czechia and Slovakia, pick up selected beliefs and practices from Eastern spiritualities, yoga, and Buddhism above all⁵⁰. And there was in principle no middle class and no entrepreneurship *stricto sensu* in this area before 1989 (and therefore no middle class and no entrepreneurs practising yoga).

47 Alessandro Testa, “Religious Reconstruction as Re-enchantment: The Troubled Case of Prague’s Marian Column”, *Religion*, forthcoming.

48 Tamara Dragadze, “The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism”, in: Chris Hann (ed.), *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, London: Routledge 1993, 148-156.

49 C. Hann, “Problems...”.

50 Zuzana Bártová, “The Buddhist Style in Consumer Culture: From Aesthetics to Emotional Patterns”, *Journal of Religion in Europe* 14/1-2, 2021, 28-54.

- As Giuseppe Tateo has shown in his research⁵¹, since 1989 more than 10,000 houses of worship have been built in Romania, amongst which are thirty huge cathedrals – for instance, the People’s Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest, one of the biggest Orthodox churches in the world. Russia has shown a similar post-communist pattern. And yet things are more complicated than they appear at first sight looking at these numbers, as I will argue in the next few pages.
- In the last Czech general census (2021), whose results were published very recently⁵², the percentage of people identifying as believers not affiliated to any church or religious denomination (“*věřící, nehlásící se k církvi, náboženské společnosti nebo směru*”), i.e. “spiritual” people, or those believing in “something”, are for the first time in the history of the country higher than the percentage of Catholics and actually higher even than the aggregate percentage of followers of all Christian churches⁵³. Christians in Czechia are today a religious minority.
- In spite of the figures reported in the previous point, in 2020 a baroque statue of a Madonna, the Marian Column (*Mariánský sloup*) in Prague’s Old Town Square, was reconstructed, after being pulled down at the end of World War I as an act of reclaimed independence from the Habsburg monarchy. The Statue was in fact associated with the then hegemonic Catholic Church and the German-speaking Catholic rulers (the monument had been erected after the Thirty Years’ War in Prague, in 1650, and there it stood for centuries as a religious and political symbol of the Catholic Reconquista of the Czech Lands in the 17th century). One century after its destruction, the municipality of the capital city of Czechia, which is widely considered one of the most secularised (or “apatheistic”) countries in the West and the entire world, decided to rebuild it. Immediately after the Velvet Revolution and the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, an association was funded, in 1990, for the restoration of the Column: the “Association for the Restoration of the Marian Column in the Old Town Square in Prague” (“*Společnost pro obnovu Mariánského sloupu na Staroměstském náměstí v Praze*”). After thirty years of internal lobbying and political manoeuvres, but also thanks to the influence of associations of Czechs abroad and of course of transna-

51 Giuseppe Tateo, “New Cathedrals in Postsocialist Europe: Turning Chance into Destiny”, in: Tobias Köllner – Alessandro Testa (eds.), *Politics of Religion: Authority, Creativity, Conflicts*, Berlin: LIT 2021, 23-42.

52 Czech Statistical Office, “Census 2021” [online], <<https://www.czso.cz/csu/scitani2021>>, [24 January 2023].

53 Czech Statistical Office, “Census 2021: Religious Belief” [online], <<https://www.czso.cz/csu/scitani2021/religious-beliefs>>, [24 January 2023].

tional Catholic denominations, the goal was finally achieved, and the Column was restored, as said, in 2020⁵⁴.

- Moving from Catholic revival to quite a different religious phenomenon, if not its opposite, recent studies have shown the slow but steady emergence of a particular type of NRMs, the so-called “invented religions”, which were studied and theorised particularly by Carole Cusack⁵⁵, among which are those based on pop culture, such as Jediism and Matrixism. Though it is difficult to quantify the impact and general social facets of this trend, quantitative data do exist, e.g. for the Czech case, where “a total of 15,070 people declared Jediism as their ‘religion’ on the census form”⁵⁶.

A few preliminary observations: What do these facts have in common? At first, one might say, they do show the magnitude of de-secularisation (or indeed “re-enchantment”) that seems to be at work in those societies. This might or might not be true, and I shall return to this predicament. Less impulsively, taking a closer look at them, they seem to exemplify appropriately the already mentioned post-secular conundrum, showing rather different, at times opposite, or even contradictory tendencies. Once again, the incapacity to delineate a clear, linear trend seems indeed to be the mark of religious life patterns in post-secular times: ferment and decline, revival and refusal, emergence and collapse, all mixed up together in the same geo-political macro-area and even within the same country, the same city, the same class of people. A lot of temples and *lieux* of worship have been built in Romania in the past decade, but what about religious attendance and practice? The Catholic revival exemplified by the re-erection of the Marian Column in Prague seems to point to a restoration of the Catholic faith in the public sphere in Czechia, so why do the statistics point to the exact opposite? (Incidentally, the Czech figures from the last census seem to confirm what Ksenia Northmore-Ball and Geoffrey Evans wrote

54 The restoration of the Marian Column has sparked a public controversy, also echoed by innumerable conversations in the private sphere, where friends, colleagues, and family members find themselves in agreement, or disagreement, about its restoration. Even though it has entailed a few episodes of vandalism (among which was a clumsy attempt at destruction by fire, in Autumn 2020), the monument has actually been the object of a spontaneous and rather vivid form of popular devotion, which I have been recording and studying since its inception, mostly but not exclusively performed by pious Czech Catholics.

55 Carole Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith*, New York (NY) – London: Routledge 2010.

56 Dušan Lužný, “Invented Religions and the Conceptualization of Religion in a Highly Secular Society: The Jedi religion and the Church of Beer in the Czech context”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24/5, 2021, 1160-1179: 1161; the author refers to a figure taken from the already mentioned Czech general census, 2021.

in 2016: namely that Catholic communities suffered more than Orthodox churches under socialism, at least in some countries, and that therefore it was more difficult to restore religious practice during the transition: for those authors, state atheism did succeed to some extent in accelerating the secularisation of European late modern societies, with perhaps only one rule-confirming exception, Poland⁵⁷).

As for the invented religions such as Jediism or the Czech “Church of Beer” (sic⁵⁸), as has already been noticed, the ontological, definitional, and theoretical implications of this emergence are still far from being understood fully. These cases have actually caused many a methodological headache for theoretical religionists in the past few years. The general trend now is to interpret this phenomenon as a proof of the de-transcendentalisation or de-spiritualisation of religion in post-secular societies (or its “desacralisation”⁵⁹; in other words, as examples of “irreligious religions”, or “religion without religion”⁶⁰). This trend should therefore probably not be considered here as a typical form of secularisation, nor as a typical form of re-enchantment, for those phenomena would contradict some constitutional conceptual foundations upon which both those categories are built. Devoid of a better qualification, they can however be considered as typically globalised and “liquid” post-secular “religionesque” phenomena.

An important critical observation that must be put forth here, which substantiates the idea of re-enchantment as a social dimension that, as said, is supposed to have been caused by a major socio-cultural and politico-economic rupture, even though the social transformation it triggered was to develop afterwards slowly and gradually, is that these phenomena (or at least those among them that can be considered as “re-enchanting”) were either non-existent or invisible or statistically and socially irrelevant before 1989 in those countries.

1989-1991 were years of rupture and tectonic social transformation. What is indubitable is that “religious fluctuations” have existed in the macro-area of post-socialist Europe ever since; some of these fluctuations have indeed been captured by statistical surveys, both national ones or independent ones, such as the oft-quoted comprehensive PEW enquiry

57 Ksenia Northmore-Ball – Geoffrey Evans, “Secularization Versus Religious Revival in Eastern Europe: Church Institutional Resilience, State Repression and Divergent Paths”, *Social Science Research* 57, 2016, 31-48.

58 D. Lužný, “Invented Religions...”.

59 As in Danila Visca, “Che fine hanno fatto i nuovi movimenti religiosi?”, *Prometeo* 116, 2013, 30-37.

60 As in Luigi Berzano, *The Fourth Secularisation: Autonomy of Individual Lifestyles*, New York (NY): Routledge 2019.

published in 2017⁶¹, or national censuses (for example, the above-mentioned Czech census in 2021). It is needless to stress that, as all anthropologists and other scholars applying qualitative methods of research know very well, statistics tell only part of the story, and that they need to be interpreted just like any other piece of data and evidence.

Whatever the methodological angle from which we look at those facts and figures, and many others that could have been chosen alternatively and presented here, they suggest that a profound transformation has been happening in the last three decades in central-eastern Europe. On the one hand, we will perhaps never be able to fully grasp, quantify, or understand precisely the impact of state atheism in the processes of secularisation, disenchantment, and irreligiosity between the late forties and the late eighties of the last century. However, on the other hand, it is now more and more clear that religious freedom, democracy, and especially that holistic ideology called “neoclassical economics”, a veritable capitalistic cosmology⁶², which has replaced centralised economy and state socialism in the former Eastern Bloc, have all had a profound impact on religious life and its collective as well as individual expressions. Nevertheless, we are still a considerable distance from seeing the ultimate effects of this impact (although it should be said that the idea itself of “ultimate effects” is a teleological one, if not theological). What is already certain is that neoliberalism and its corollary, consumerist culture, has for more than thirty years been taking its toll on traditional, community-oriented, church-based forms of believing and belonging. Consequentially, the individualisation of religion⁶³ is accelerating. Individualisation is today maybe the most visible and profoundly rooted aspect in the religious life of the West; as Umut Parmaksız has recently remarked, summarising the conclusions of a cohort of sociologists working between the 1960s and the 1990s: “religion has moved towards a less organized and more individualistic form”⁶⁴. Similarly, Peter Berger had claimed in the 1990s that “secularization on

61 Pew Research Center, “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”, [online], <<https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>>, 10 May 2017 [24 January 2023].

62 Marshall Sahlins, “The Sadness of Sweetness: The Native Anthropology of Western Cosmology”, *Current Anthropology* 37/3, 1996, 395-428.

63 Anette Wilke, “Individualisation of Religion”, *International Social Science Journal* 64/213-214, 2013, 263-277.

64 U. Parmaksız, “Making Sense...”, 202. And more: “Secular modernity [...] has not only made it possible for non-religious sources of meaning to flourish, it has also preserved a space for traditional religious narratives of meaning to survive and develop in their own way. It has enabled individuals to be authoritative in their search for meaning, creatively experimenting with eclectic and patchy forms of spirituality to the scorn of many traditionalists”, U. Parmaksız, “Making Sense...”, 104.

the social level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness”⁶⁵.

This acceleration towards individualisation has been boosted and sustained also by the concomitant development of digital culture and the dominion of the internet over the lives of the inhabitants of the (post-)industrialised world (the internet is indeed one of the main factors of accelerated social change in our times). It is in fact perhaps not superfluous to highlight here that this other tectonic socio-cultural transformation, the advent of the internet era globally has overlapped almost exactly with the post-socialist transition (i.e., during the 1990s, mostly). In other words, in these countries the transition from socialism and a centralised economy to liberal democracy and the free market has also taken the shape of a transition between the pre-digital and the digital age. Again, no small transformation.

So far, the questions concerning these interesting phenomena have been about how “re-enchanted” they are, or rather what degree of “re-enchantment” they exhibit in a given society; the specular question is: how “*actually* secularised” or “how agnostic or atheist” a given society, by contrast, is, and how representative this fact is vis-à-vis the broader context of former-socialist Europe. This problem has also been explicitly addressed in several recent studies. I am familiar, for instance, with the literature about Czechia which, as already explained, is in many respects a significant, if singular, case study; Czechia is particularly interesting perhaps not in spite of but because of posing several methodological problems for the study of the (ir)religious social fabric of the country⁶⁶.

Re-enchantment: *Réprise*

But what about re-enchantment itself, *au juste*? Let’s take one or two steps back, first.

An argument anticipated and discussed at the beginning of this article is that since the 1970s and 1980s the paradigm of secularisation and its foundational hypothesis, Weberian disenchantment, began to be criticised

65 P. L. Berger, *The Desecularization...*, 3.

66 T. Bubík – A. Rimmel – D. Václavík, *Freethought and Atheism...*; Zdeněk R. Nešpor, “Attitudes towards Religion(s) in a ‘Non-believing’ Czech Republic”, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19/1, 2010, 68-84; Olga Nešporová – Zdeněk R. Nešpor, “Religion: A Unresolved Problem for the Modern Czech Nation”, *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 45/6, 2009, 1215-1237; David Václavík, “Deepening Secularization? How to Read Official Statistics. A Case of the Czech Republic”, *Diskus* 16/2, 2014, 22-30; Roman Vido – David Václavík – Antonín Paleček, “Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?”, in: Roberto Cipriani – Franco Garelli (eds.), *Sociology of Atheism*, Leiden: Brill 2016, 201-232.

and put under scrutiny in several fields of the humanities and social sciences. In the last two or three decades they have sometimes and by some been rejected altogether. The list of scholars that have abandoned them is long, coming as they do from different disciplinary traditions and on the basis of different sets of theoretical considerations, from Jason Josephson-Storm to Egil Asprem, from François Gauthier to Marshall Sahlins, who, in a late interview, affirmed that the disenchantment of the world is but an intellectual myth of the West, and that “what actually happened was the enchantment of western society by the world”⁶⁷. But if the world has never actually been disenchanted, or if it was during a certain period but is no longer, how has this state of things come about? One explicatory paradigm, which is also a grand historical narrative, wants it that the Enlightenment and the fall of the *Ancien Régime* led to the withdrawal of the State from religious matters, and the definitive separation between Church and State, as well as the consequential establishment of religious freedom and pluralism (or rather the establishment of a situation of religious hierarchical pluralisms). This process was neither linear nor abrupt, if we set aside the sudden convulsions of the French Revolution of course (the “rupture” *par excellence*, in the socio-political history of the West), because the different churches and Christian denominations in Europe continued to be extremely influential, and organic, along with the State, to the exercise of power and the control of the masses throughout the “long 19th century”⁶⁸. This actually occurred during the even longer process of the emergence and crystallisation of the nation-states⁶⁹. The Soviet Revolution brought a first halt to this process, followed by the establishment of real socialism in central-eastern Europe as well after World War II. Communism, as we know, did not really care about religious tolerance or freedom or pluralism: instead, it theorised and implemented, to a degree of magnitude and success, state atheism. Of course, state atheism itself was neither a coherent system of ideas and practices nor a linear stream of social policies, for its modes and degrees of theorisation and implementation varied greatly according to temporal and spatial contexts: for example, it was ferociously persecutive in the Soviet Union during the 1940s or in Albania during the 1950s, but rather soft and even overtly tolerant in Poland during the 1980s. Such diversity could even be found under the same dictator (notorious is the case of Stalin’s radically and tragically changing attitudes and policies towards religion between the 1930s and 1950s), whereas such diversity in agnatology, repression, discouragement, and prohibition, as well as in rela-

67 M. Sahlins, “Interview...”, 326.

68 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, New York (NY): Charles Scribner’s Sons 1975.

69 F. Gauthier, *Religion, Modernity, Globalisation....*

tions between the Party and different churches, groups, and denominations varied significantly and sometimes dramatically in different countries. In short, it is quite difficult to generalise about state atheism in one single country, let alone in the entire Eastern Bloc and for several decades. However, that state atheism existed (and exists), in spite of its varieties and variations, as a pan-communist goal and as a means to adhere to Marx's original formulation and prescription about religion, keep social control, and exercise power, is a hard historical fact.

After several years of growing crisis, real socialism and its state atheism rather abruptly precipitated and collapsed between 1989 and 1991 in most of the Eastern Bloc. The changes in the legal systems but especially in social habits and in the "mentality" typical of the so-called transition during the first decade of the post-socialist area, the 1990s, allowed for the unprecedented public presence of religion. This, in turn, sustained further transformations. For example, previously marginalised or invisible religious or spiritual traditions saw an opportunity to regain lost ground, or indeed to start spreading for the first time in history. Some of these movements or traditions were mentioned in the previous section. In several central and eastern European countries, the 1990s and 2000s also saw a revival of religious institutions along with a growing and generalised diversification and pluralisation of religious life – and it is still a matter of discussion among scholars whether or not to include "alternative spiritualities" in this religious *assemblage*. The de-domestication of religious practices and the return of ritual forms of devotion in the public sphere also happened in those years. At the same time, just like in the never-socialist West, religion was being defined and identified less according to its relationship with the State or with actual communities and more in its rapport with the individual and with the powerful tool individuals have, in late modern times, to shape their self and fulfil their needs, not only material: the free market. It is fair to conclude, thirty years after the fall of communism in Europe, that this cluster of interconnected transformations has occurred quite consistently and, all things considered, macroscopically, in spite of local flavours and particularities, sometimes striking still, of the different national, regional, and vernacular contexts that have expressed them.

In my project and in this article, I have chosen to focus on the concept of re-enchantment and to see how and why it could help us to identify and understand some of the most recent transformations that have been briefly outlined. However, in truth, an efflorescence of new concepts has blossomed to account for these transformations and connected ones, roughly in the past thirty years, sometimes before even, and not necessarily in conjunction with the problem of post-socialist transition, and actually

sometimes regardless of it. Nevertheless, these concepts are indeed useful as analytical tools to interpret the transformations in central-eastern Europe, even when they were not coined to address specifically this macro-area. Their semantic, definitional, and ontological scopes sometimes overlap quite manifestly, which suggests a certain conceptual convergence among scholars who, over the years, were observing and studying different facts and that in the end came up with different terms to name similar or identical things. Amongst them (I will cite just one representative work discussing the theoretical range and scope of each of these concepts), I would like to mention: post-secularism⁷⁰, de-secularisation⁷¹, re-sacralisation⁷², re-consecration⁷³, spirituality⁷⁴, alternative spirituality⁷⁵, secular spirituality⁷⁶, the spiritual but not religious⁷⁷, civil religion⁷⁸, cultural religion⁷⁹, implicit religion⁸⁰, vicarious religion⁸¹, invented religion⁸², religion without religion⁸³, humanism and humanist rituality⁸⁴, de-sacralised religion⁸⁵, believing without belonging⁸⁶, and belonging without believing⁸⁷ – a veritable conceptual and terminological maze.

The concept of re-enchantment is precisely one of those that “blossomed” in the past few decades. My original understanding of it has been complemented and enriched by the regular exchanges held on the matter with the other members of the previously mentioned ERC CZ research

70 P. Nynäs – M. Lassander – T. Utraiainen, *Post-Secular Society...*

71 P. L. Berger, *The Desecularization...*

72 S. Bruce, “An Empirical Critique...”

73 Giuseppe Tateo, *The People’s Salvation Cathedral and the Church-Building Industry in Postsocialist Romania*, Oxford: Berghahn 2020.

74 Boaz Huss, “Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and its Challenge to the Religious and the Secular”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29/1, 2014, 47-60.

75 C. Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities...*

76 Robert Fuller, *Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*, New York (NY): Oxford University Press 2001.

77 Nancy T. Ammerman, “Spiritual but Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52/2, 2013, 258-278.

78 P. J. Margry, “European Religious Fragmentation...”

79 J. Demerath III, “The Rise of ‘Cultural Religion’...”

80 Edward I. Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*, Kampen: Kok Pharos 1997.

81 Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, Los Angeles (CA) – London: Sage 2007.

82 C. Cusack, *Invented Religions...*

83 L. Berzano, *The Fourth Secularisation...*

84 Agata Rejowska, “Humanist Weddings in Poland: The Various Motivations of Couples”, *Sociology of Religion* 82/3, 2021, 281-304.

85 D. Visca, “Che fine hanno fatto...”

86 G. Davie, “Believing without Belonging...”

87 Roberto Marchisio – Maurizio Pisati, “Belonging without Believing: Catholics in Contemporary Italy”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 4/2, 1999, 236-255.

group, Agata Ładykowska, Zuzana Bártová, István Povedák, and Viola Teisenhoffer, with whom I had frequent discussions and speculations about this thorny matter between 2020 and 2022⁸⁸. In what has become my understanding over the years, “re-enchantment” is a concept that points to the symbolic act, usually based on cultural and religious bricolage, of charging something (an object, a practice, a representation, a relation) with a magical or spiritual or transcendental or uncanny dimension, regardless of whether or not this act of charging (and its empirically observable result) is emically perceived as re-enchanting, or as incorporating only one or more of those dimensions. It is a concept that aspires to define and describe not only the emergence or re-emergence of religious phenomena that are less structured and less formalised than “official” religions and the Christian Churches, but also their ongoing transformation. Unlike in its original formulation, I think that it can also be applied to certain new devotional forms characterising “traditional” Christian denominations, which are historically dominant in Europe (in central-eastern as well as elsewhere in Europe). In fact, even though “re-enchantment” might suggest a process of “returning” or “re-making”, its actual applicability, in the context of central-eastern Europe, aspires to encompass concomitant processes of social continuity, discontinuity, and overlaps, as well as slower transformations in religious life. After all, “[t]he strongest continuity may consist in the logic of cultural change”⁸⁹.

In the end, if on the one hand “re-enchantment” is not necessarily more accurate or semantically crystallised than those terms that were mentioned two paragraphs above, it is on the other more malleable and adaptable to further theorisation. The conceptual advantages of the idea of “re-enchantment” are several: a) it is less semantically and ontologically stratified than concepts such as secularisation, or the sacred; b) it evokes but also defies the idea of a unilinear trend of secularisation in Europe (and this holds true whether or not one embraces the utter dismissal of the idea of secularisation, as some previously-mentioned thinkers openly do); c) it evokes a

88 The research group is currently preparing a themed issue, which has been preliminarily accepted for publication in the journal *Religion*, about the re-enchantment of central-eastern Europe, an issue where abundant ethnographic evidence and many case studies from former-socialist Europe will be presented and analysed. The entire issue will be more empirically-oriented than this article, which is contrarily rather theoretical and historiographical. It is, however, my firm belief that theory without evidence is mere speculation, evidence without theory mere impressionism, and that it is thanks to the entanglement and interplay between these two methodological dimensions that we can try to offer a better understanding and more convincing explanations of the religious transformations occurring in central-eastern Europe, as well as in Europe and the globalised world at large.

89 M. Sahlins, *Culture in Practice...*, 41.

process of active re-acquisition of something that in previous times (during communism in the case of post-socialist Europe) was “lost” or forgotten, or waited in latency, or was actively discouraged or even prohibited; d) coming from a French word that means “to charm” (with the magical or supernatural connotation that the term still has in several European languages), a word which in turn comes from the Latin verb *incantare* (meaning “to chant magical spells” and “to bewitch”), “re-enchantment” is an ideal candidate to refer to beliefs and practices that are related to magical practices, such as those so common in new religious movements such as Neopaganism and Neo-shamanism. These religious groups and movements have gained strong social traction since the early years of the transition, i.e., since religious pluralism and freedom were no longer repressed by the Communist State, but protected and guaranteed by the Liberal State.

Thinking and re-thinking these issues with the help of the concept of “re-enchantment” is an intellectual exercise that enhances the search for, and seeks a better understanding of, new and alternative forms of religion and religiosity in contexts where institutionalised or long-established religious structures have historically shaped and provided continuity to religious life forms (Catholicism being the best example in Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and especially in Poland⁹⁰). What these forms are or might be empirically, and, how they may be categorised and typologised are other questions that need to be answered. I did try to answer them, preliminarily, in the original version of my project (2019)⁹¹, which enabled this research to be carried out and this paper to be written, and actually even during my first writings about re-enchantment (2015-2016). I maintain that the typology or taxonomy I created for the project can still be valid today, although it does need adjustments and integrations based on the work that has been done to date. Originally (2015-2017), I identified four different types, which have grown to seven recently (2020-2022). Here they follow:

- 1) “Vernacular” elements understood as the re-appropriation of popular beliefs and practices that had existed, or are believed to have existed, before modernisation (this type is understandably especially common in rural areas)⁹².

90 Agnieszka Pasięka, *Hierarchy and Pluralism: Living Religious Difference in Catholic Poland*, New York (NY): Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

91 A. Testa, *The Re-Enchantment...*

92 For the notion of “vernacular religion” as used here, see Leonard N. Primiano, “Vernacular Religion and the Search for the Method in Religious Folklife”, *Western Folklore* 54/1, 1995, 37-56; Marion Bowman – Ulo Valk (eds.), *Vernacular Religion*

- 2) Magical practices explicitly or implicitly referring to native older practices and not necessarily linked to – but not discounting either – New Age, Neopaganism, or Modern Witchcraft. The latter forms have actually become quite widespread and popular in the last few decades also in central-eastern Europe, although in different shapes than in Western Europe and in North America⁹³.
- 3) New forms of civic rituality, social memory, and/or the fruition of cultural heritage, which bear religious characteristics or references to the superhuman or supernatural⁹⁴, but which are not necessarily considered religious by the social agents themselves. In this category I also subsume certain forms of “pseudo-religious” (or “religionesque” or “religionoid”) usages of intangible culture heritage⁹⁵, or also religious cultural heritage proper⁹⁶. This category also comprises recently invented practices such as humanistic rituals⁹⁷, commemorative or celebratory politico-religious ceremonies, and other facts that, if not religious per se, can be associated with the idea of “cultural religion”, or “belonging without believing” (or “secularised religion”, as Weber would have said).
- 4) The now almost trivial idea of being “spiritual but not religious”, that is to say: oftentimes unstructured and unarticulated yet ethnographically recordable statements about “being spiritual”, or believing in a not-necessarily-defined “god”, or believing in “something”, but without following any church, identifying with any specific denomination, or being part of any organised religious group. Certain types of Westernised

in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief, London – New York (NY): Routledge 2012; and A. Testa, “Fertility and the Carnival 1...”.

- 93 Esotericism, partly connected with this second type, but also with the fifth one, does not make it into this typology for a number of theoretical and methodological reasons.
- 94 “Superhuman” and “supernatural” are, obviously, Western categories. The supernatural vs natural distinction makes sense in the modern, Western, Weberian “dis-encharnted” world, for in the world at large, which is populated by different cosmologies, things may stand differently (and differently they stood also in Europe, in the past). All anthropologists and historians of religion know or should know this. As Marshall Sahlins concluded in his last work before his death, epitomising similar conclusions from a cohort of a dozen fellow anthropologists throughout the history of the discipline, “in an enchanted universe, the natural/supernatural distinction becomes meaningless”, Marshall Sahlins, *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe: An Anthropology of Most of Humanity*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press 2022, 36.
- 95 For example, the cases described in A. Testa, “‘Fertility’ and the Carnival 1...”, or in Clara Saraiva – Francesca de Luca, “Pride and Conflict: UNESCO and Druids in Southwest Europe”, in: Tobias Köllner – Alessandro Testa (eds.), *Politics of Religion: Authority, Creativity, Conflicts*, Berlin: LIT 2021, 151-184.
- 96 Cyril Isnart – Nathalie Cerezales (eds.), *The Religious Heritage Complex: Legacy, Conservation, and Christianity*, London: Bloomsbury 2021.
- 97 A. Rejowska, “Humanist Weddings in Poland...”.

- Buddhism⁹⁸ and beliefs and practices based on Yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which are today massively spread throughout Europe, could also fall into this category.
- 5) Some religious or religionesque experiences connected with the so-called “invented religions”⁹⁹, which are mostly borrowed from late modern popular culture or the “occulture”¹⁰⁰, or based on an overt parody of religion¹⁰¹.
 - 6) Cultural memory not necessarily connected with the idea or practice of heritage (as in the third type) but acquiring pseudo-religious or spiritual traits in terms of post-socialist “(n)ostalgia”¹⁰², fatalistic or metaphysical interpretations of the past¹⁰³, or the imagination of the future in utopian or “eschatological” ways¹⁰⁴.
 - 7) New forms of religious revival concerning traditional religious denominations, especially Catholicism, but showing some unprecedented or singular characteristics. This revival is in certain contexts very visible, sometimes in striking or curious devotional popular forms (cases of these have been observed and recorded in all the previously mentioned central-eastern European countries, including – the reader will remember the example of the Marian Column in Prague – in largely atheistic or apatheistic Czechia).

These types might overlap in specific cases, which actually seems to occur often. For instance, vernacular religiosity and magic are both constitutional elements of the cultural complex I have named “popular

98 Z. Bártová, “The Buddhist Style in Consumer Culture...”.

99 C. Cusack, *Invented Religions...*

100 C. Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities...*

101 D. Lužný, “Invented Religions...”.

102 Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, New York (NY) – London: Routledge 2013, 99-106; Maria Todorova – Zsuzsa Gille, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, Oxford: Berghahn 2010; A. Testa, “Problemi e prospettive della ricerca...”.

103 S. Macdonald, *Memorylands...*, XII-XIV, 122-145; Christoph Reinprecht, “Social Memory in the Transformational Process of East-Central Europe”, *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 12/2, 1994, 3-20; Peter Niedermüller, “History, Past, and the Post-Socialist Nation”, *Ethnologia Europaea* 28/2, 1998, 169-182.

104 Melissa Caldwell, “Eschatologies of Welfare: Rethinking Religious Revivalism and Postsocialist Transformation in Post-Soviet Russia”, 21st International Conference of Europeanists, 14-16 March 2014, Washington, D.C., USA. Some of these utopian or eschatological ways have been presented and analysed during the international conference “Religious Utopias”, Humboldt University, 16-18 March 2023, Berlin, Germany.

Frazerism¹⁰⁵, which is also closely connected with heritage-making processes¹⁰⁶.

Concluding Remarks

In recent times, many younger central-eastern Europeans have developed or are developing an urge for religious soothing, for more-than-material existential answers, and for metaphysical introspection. This is empirically (ethnographically) ascertainable. They live in a liquid reality whose moral compass they often consider broken or badly functioning, and in which they struggle to find meaning. Many of them cannot fulfil these urges by talking with priests and pastors and going to churches, all acts that had formerly accompanied the existence of their ancestors and communities and towns and countries for decades and centuries, way before the advent of communism. Many resort therefore to re-enchanted representations and practices today, because such phenomena are capable of providing answers insofar as they are capable of producing meaning; moreover, they are available in the religious market, and can respond to the ever-growing quest for customised authenticity and individualised forms of expression.

As the power of religion, magic, and other enchanted realities is today not only to be found in the usual rituals, cultural memory patterns, and moral frameworks, but has also been transferred to objects, feelings, lifestyles, and practices of authenticity-seeking¹⁰⁷, as well as into features of pop culture¹⁰⁸, I believe that the previously-outlined typology of enchanted

105 “Popular Frazerism” refers to the effects of an operation of “cultural bricolage” and the symbolic manipulation and circulation of a popularised version of Frazer’s theses on European agrarian festivities and folk rituals, particularly those concerning the notion of ritually-fostered fertility, agrarian magic, the supposed pagan origins of some popular European festivities and rituals, i.e., their being supposedly a “survival” of ancient rituals, at times believed to be of unfathomable antiquity. Phenomena that can be considered as examples of this cultural complex often evoke superhuman agents or agency. Popular Frazerism is theorised on the basis of a number of case studies in A. Testa, “Fertility and the Carnival 2...”, and in Alessandro Testa, “Intertwining Processes of Reconfiguring Tradition: Three European Case Studies”, in: Cyril Isnart – Alessandro Testa (eds.), “Re-enchantment, Ritualization, Heritage-making: Processes Reconfiguring Tradition in Europe”, *Ethnologia Europaea* 50/1, 2020 (monographic issue), 20–38.

106 A. Testa, “Problemi e prospettive della ricerca...”; A. Testa, “Intertwining Processes...”.

107 Or even to the internet itself, as is shown in Christopher Helland, “Digital Religion”, in: David Yamane (ed.), *Handbook of Religion and Society*, Cham: Springer 2016, 177-196.

108 C. Cusack, *Invented Religions...*; D. Lužný, “Invented religions...”; Alessandro Testa, “Religions in Videogames. Historical and Anthropological Observations”, *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 5, 2014, 249-278.



and enchanting forms can constitute a fruitful conceptual map not only for current research, such as that which the project team and I have been carrying out in the last three years, but also for future investigations.

To conclude, while I realise that the latter section of this article has taken somewhat the tone of a programmatic essay, this was necessary because, as I already put forward in the previous pages, I am convinced that thinking about these phenomena in light of the concept of “re-enchantment” and thinking about the concept of “re-enchantment” on the basis of these phenomena can be a fruitful interpretative exercise to better understand contemporary religious (or pseudo-religious) changes in central-eastern Europe.

**SUMMARY****Re-thinking the Concept of Re-enchantment in Central-Eastern Europe**

This article discusses four different concepts: disenchantment, secularisation, post-secularism, and re-enchantment, analysing their theoretical entanglements and problematising their applicability to recent and contemporary social realities in formerly socialist Europe. It also offers a conceptual tuning of re-enchantment in particular, basing it on both empirical evidence as well as on readings from the now rather rich scholarly literature that operationalises this concept. A typology is also presented that illustrates a variety of re-enchanted social phenomena that populate the religious and spiritual horizons of late modern central-eastern Europe.

Keywords: re-enchantment; disenchantment; post-socialism; secularisation; post-secularism; central-eastern Europe

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