

Article

Questioning the Secularization Theleology: Zalmoxianism and the Re-Enchantment of the World

Cristine Palaga

Sociology Department, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Babes-Bolyai University,
400604 Cluj-Napoca, Romania; palagacristine@gmail.com

Abstract: Starting off by categorizing the specific means through which modernity manifests itself in the field of religion and utilizing an ethnography-based methodological strategy, the following paper documents the emergence of Zalmoxianism, a contemporary replica of the religion of the Dacians, which are considered the ancestors of Romanians; they used to inhabit areas around the Carpathians and the Lower Danube before the Roman Conquest (106 A.D.). While subscribing to the theoretical precepts meant to surpass the sociological prejudice according to which modernity exhausts a religiously transcendent view on the world, this paper closely analyzes the conceptual deconstruction of secularization as a total phenomenon while at the same time isolating the social actor as a non-secularized segment.

Keywords: high modernity; counter-secularization; (neo)paganism; invisible religion; multi-situated ethnography; Zalmoxianism



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1. Introduction

Motto: “Why is this phenomenon, so hastily called “the return of religions”, so difficult to think? Why is it so surprising? Why does it particularly astonish those who believed naively that an alternative opposed Religion, on the one hand, and on the other, Reason, Enlightenment, Science, Criticism, as though the one could not but put an end to the other?” Jacques Derrida (2003, p. 11).

In high modernity (Giddens 1991), we are witnessing a failure of traditional religiosity, which becomes incapable of providing meaning to both individual and social existence. As people's lives and structures of significance are more and more separated from the legitimizing authority of institutional religion, new individualistic religious counter-movements emerge.

Religious pluralism constitutes an indicator of secularization, some sociologist of religion would argue (Dobbelaere 1981; Wilson 1981; Gog 2007a; Pickel 2017), but this very trend of secularization holds within itself the potential of generating an opposite phenomenon. In a context in which systems of individualistic religious significance that are able to “re-enchant” the world are empirically observable, I hypothesize that these systems have the potential to generate a counter-secular trend, thus dismantling the thesis of an irreversible secularization that is capable of encapsulating the entire social sphere (on micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels).

An empirical instance that allows an analysis on the means through which new variants of a religious imaginary emerge and proliferate within societies labeled as profoundly secular is (Neo)paganism, which generally designates (1) modern reconstitutions of classic or ancient paganism (Roman, Greek, Egyptian etc.), (2) ethnic paganism (Slavic, Celtic, Gaeto-Dacian, African cults to the Orixás, American shamanism, Melanesian rituals etc.), and (3) the popular pre-Christian European religions (Strmiska 2005; Magliocco 2015; Berger 2019; Weidner Maluf 2019).

Conceived in a counter-secular logic, the purpose of this paper is two-folded: first, I want to theoretically debunk the teleology of the societal secularization process, according

to which not only will religion lose its social relevance, but individuals themselves would not need to create or negotiate transcendental/spiritual/religious worldviews, as they will be completely disenchanted, relying solely on rationality and evidence-based behavioral strategies. Individuals, even more so than before, as society becomes highly individualistic and alienating (Johnson 2008), need to find some sort of significance to their lives, to feel that they are part of something greater than the contingent order of things. But to understand these new dynamics of “patchwork religion” (Wuthnow 1998), or “invisible religion” (Luckmann 1963), one needs to first question what changed in society at large, allowing the advent of such individualized spiritual narratives. Before modern times, i.e., before societal secularization, people needed to stick to the unique truth proposed and (sometimes cruelly) reinforced by the institutionalized Christian religion.

The second goal of this paper is to ethnographically document the means through which the social actor of late modernity selects one or several religious motifs, bestowing unto them meaning, substance, habits, rites and rituals, thus creating an “invisible religion” (Luckmann 1967, p. 72)—a personal and intimate system of ultimate significations, which is neither understandable nor accessible in the macro-culture. Zalmoxianism, a neo-Pagan movement aiming at rebuilding the ethnic Romanian religion and spirituality through a process of reconnection to their ancient Dacian and Thracian roots (Palaga 2016; Hubbes and Bakó 2011), constitutes such an invisible religion. I will lay the basis for an ideal type of the Zalmoxian neo-Pagan counterculture, a construct meant to approximate empiric reality by rigorously selecting and structuring scattered religious and cultural elements into a group of communalities.

The methodological toolset is comprised mainly of participative/participant observation, the most important instrument of qualitative research, stabilized through fifteen in-depth interviews with people who profess themselves as being Zalmoxian. At this time, the transcriptions of the interviews will not be shared with a broader audience, as they constitute a corpus of rich data still waiting to be fully exploited from an academic standpoint. Yet, if they will be of particular interest for some scholars within the field of religious studies, partial access can be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Now I will provide some basic information on the demographics of the subjects that were interviewed for this study. The age interval of Zalmoxian adepts is 19 to 54—adults ranging from young to middle-aged. Their nationality is Romanian, without exception, and they hold university degrees (bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, even doctoral or post-doctoral studies) or are enrolled in college studies; they usually have well-paid jobs or at least jobs that assure a decent standard of living, most of them stating that they belong to the “middle-middle class”. The overwhelming majority live in an urban environment, however some of the Zalmoxians I have interviewed have moved or would move to the countryside, in an attempt to become free from the negative experience of the polluted, crowded, meaningless large cities. For many neo-Pagans, the rural environment becomes an area where the self can recover and regenerate”.

The private and individual character of this religious movement has driven me to embark on a plural ethnographical adventure: multi-situated ethnography. My participative observation has closely followed the grounds in which Zalmoxian religiosity manifests itself, through certain stages. Although the research started with long informal conversations, either virtual or face-to-face, without any sort of symbolic significance for the argumentative line of this study, as the subjects became accustomed to my presence, I later gained access to the innermost places of worship. I have also had the opportunity to take part in certain rituals, performed in open air, such as the lighting of the Sacred Fire of Zalmoxis, which I will describe in Section 4, titled “Zalmoxianism and the Reenchantment of the World”.

The textual materialization of the field experience will not reiterate the specificity of a linear ethnographical discourse. Instead, I will undertake an action meant to capture the phenomenon of heteroglossia, of the alternation between various social dialects. For this reason, I will often resort to my subjects’ own words in order to avoid distorting their meaning. The illustration of the voices of those whose culture we aim to understand

becomes possible through what [Marcus \(1994\)](#) calls messy text, a subtle pendulation between thick and thin description ([Geertz 1973](#)).

2. The Disenchantment of the World and the Total Secularization Thesis

In the German cultural space, the phrase “disenchantment of the world” (*Entzauberung der Welt*) has a long intellectual tradition whose origin can be traced back to the proto-romantic “Sturm und Drang” movement. The representatives of “cultural pessimism” (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Arnold, Spengler, Eliot, Toynbee, Heidegger) describe modernity as “completely petrified and mechanized” ([Seidman 1983](#), p. 273), thus deepening the costs of the rationalist, empiricist and universalist ideals of the Enlightenment. Around one century after the disappearance of the aesthetic movement that placed the phrase into circulation, the latter obtains a “definitional status” ([Michel 1997](#), p. 348), thus being explicitly re-stated in Weber’s discourse on the genesis and consequences of modernity.

The world becomes disenchanted when man “no longer has any reason to employ magical means to control or implore the spirits, as the savage used to do, since, for him, such forces were real. Technical and computational means now perform this service” ([Michel 1997](#), p. 350).). The direct consequence of this rationalization is “the outburst of a huge intrinsic tension between religion and all other aspects of life which begin to differentiate themselves from the religious system with the dawn of the “disenchantment of the world” ([Gog 2007b](#), p. 35).

Through the amplified intervention of rationalization, secularization and bureaucracy, modernity excises animism, the magical, spirituality and the all-encompassing meaning that describe the traditional world. Weber pinpoints two causal sources that inevitably lead to the dissolution of the sacred: on the one hand—the rationalization of the religious landscape in Western Europe, culminating with Protestant ethic and the scientific revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries, on the other hand.

A disenchanted world is a secularized world. In a classic study of the sociological theory of secularization, conceptualized through the process by which links to the supernatural, the sacred and the divine dissolve on the social actor’s conscious level, the Belgian sociologist Karel [Dobbelaere \(1981\)](#) performs an analytical compartmentalization, distinguishing between three levels on which the secularization process manifests itself: individual secularization, societal secularization and organizational secularization.

Individual secularization occurs when “the religious authority loses control over the beliefs, practices and moral principles of individual people” ([Dobbelaere 2007](#), p. 139). In practical terms, the degree of individual secularization measures the degree of normative integration in religious bodies ([Dobbelaere 2007](#)).

Organizational secularization becomes a fact when secular ideas abound within the field of religion itself, with a mundane nature developing inside the main orientation of religion (an internal secularization of the Church).

Societal secularization is a term for the process through which secular values replace religious ones: the diminishing importance of clerical principles and values in legitimizing day-to-day life ([Dobbelaere 2007](#)). The presence of societal secularization confirms the Durkheimian intuition, according to which various institutions will develop an increasingly profane character as society becomes increasingly complex and differentiated: all major institutions derive from religion, thus undergoing an adaptive transformation towards an ultimate separation from its influence.

3. The Social Structure Is Secularized, but Not the Individual

I would like to underline that, while the social structure is undoubtedly secularized, the individual eludes this process and the existence of neo-Pagan religious manifestations, among many others, consolidates this hypothesis. There is a causality between the decline of institutional religion and the emergence of various elements pertaining to “invisible religion”. As a direct product of secularization, we are witnessing a dissolution of institutional

sacrality and transcendency which, in turn, generates means of counter-secularization or de-secularization.

“Is it possible for societal and organizational secularization to occur while isolating the individual as an unsecularized segment?”; “Can the social actor remain a religious subject while all other social levels become secularized?”; “Does the emergence of “invisible religion” in the form of (neo)paganism attest to this possibility?”; “Can society be secular on certain levels (institutional, organizational, societal) and not secular on others?” or rather “Can the world be both secular and enchanted?” I claim that the answer to all these questions is “Yes” and, in order, to show the validity of this hypothesis, I have aimed to study the identity of a counter-culture by applying to the concrete area of religious beliefs and ideas a conceptual sublimation of what Marshall [Sahlins \(1999\)](#) defines as the “indigenization of modernity”: the reproduction of global modernity as local diversity.

4. Zalmoxianism and the Reenchantment of the World

In order to provide a textual rendition of my incursion into the Zalmoxian counter-culture’s religious and cultural Weltanschauung, I’ve chosen to fundament an ideal type of what “Zalmoxianism” means. The charting of similarities was performed using the statements of the subjects as well as the vast list of references to occult and historical literature they’ve provided. Zalmoxianism showcases how late modernity is being indigenized by replacing the authoritative religious metanarratives ([Lyotard 1984](#)) with ingenious spiritual anthologies, individual forms of neo-traditional religiosity, in which the practitioner builds new symbolic universes according to his/her own Weltanschauung and new expectations, thus substituting church-related religions on a functional level as well as on the level of a religious imaginary.

The Zalmoxian is a modern “Homo Religiosus” who performs an exercise of chronologic regression in an attempt to reach the primordial wisdom of the Dacians and Getae, which is able to survive the test of time through the transmutations of Zalmoxian laws within the corpus of popular Romanian beliefs—an ample syncretic phenomenon that constitutes “Dacian-Romanian” religiosity. We can reach this authentic spiritual form by “living and feeling Romanian” (A., age 21, student) and “by reading authors who refused the garbage coming from those who were eager for us to align with Rome, attempting to restore Romanian tradition to its former glory” (D., age 30, IT professional).

Zalmoxianism represents a religious movement of unquestionable novelty, therefore most practitioners have been previously socialized either in another religion, or no religion whatsoever. The universal trait that describes the (neo)Pagan imaginary is the often explicit and caustic reaction against either Orthodox or Catholic Christianity. Before becoming initiated in Zalmoxianism, all fifteen subjects I have interviewed had previously been Orthodox. The will to adhere to one or multiple contemporary pagan traditions traces its source to a strong disillusionment towards Christianity. This aversion leads to an abandonment of the “religion of baptism”, followed by the search for a new spiritual perspective that is capable of fulfilling the needs and expectations of the religious actor ([Salomonsen 2002](#), pp. 5, 11).

For most of the interviewed subjects, being Zalmoxian means respect for one’s ancestors, knowing your historical past (in detail!) as well as a desire to be one with nature. Several of these subjects cannot retrace their spiritual initiation journey: Certain Zalmoxians declare: “I don’t know exactly how I came to believe in Zamolxis”, while others speak openly about their disappointment and repulsion towards Christianity, especially related to the behavior of the contemporary clergy, a disappointment seconded by an intense need for spiritual reconfiguration through a “return to the roots, to what was here first” (Ionela, age 23, Accounts Payable), to the “original matrix” (C., 32, cultural anthropologist). “Neozalmoxianism, as a spiritual imaginary, doesn’t need to be founded or induced, but should rather be conceptualized and structured through hermeneutics applied to popular tradition. Any person that is aware of the value of the Romanian spiritual ethos can contribute to such a project.”, states Octavian Sărbătoare, the founding figure of the Zalmoxian

movement in an ample interview titled “The Romanian was born Zalmoxian” (Source: <http://www.vavivov.com>; last accessed on 28 November 2021).

Zalmoxian holidays are often overlayed on popular Romanian holidays (The “Sanziene”, Saint Dumitru, Saint Andrew, Saint Varvara etc.). Visible counter-movements take place every year against Valentine’s Day. Zalmoxians harshly criticise the foreign import of a love holiday “when we have our millennia-old Dragobete” (Lucian, age 21, student). Besides the individual prayers to Zalmoxis that each adept personally performs in a ritual environment (prayer is practiced every time the individual needs “divine counsel”, C1., age 46, Sculptor), the most important ritual manifestation is the lighting of the sacred fire. The ritual celebration scheduling is determined by the cycle of seasons (the summer solstice, the autumn equinox, the winter solstice and the spring equinox, with great emphasis placed on solar holidays that begin with rituals for the purification and renewal of the soul (the 1 July).

I took part in ritual act of lighting the “Pyre of Zalmoxis”, on the popular holiday of Saint Phocas (the 23 July), a saint that must be appeased in order to prevent the crops from withering. The ritual took place in Caras-Severin County in Romania, close to the settlement of Carasova (Caras Keys). The group of Zalmoxians numbered eight people, with myself being the ninth participant. In the early morning, the youngest of the group (age 19) set off to search for large straight pieces of wood, without too many gnarls “so that they may please the god” (M. “the Dacian”, age 32). Throughout the day, each of us had the obligation to meditate on the improvements that we may bring to ourselves, in order to become “better, cleaner, more serene people” (idem). Besides this, the day unfolded like a usual summer day in the open air, close to water: fishing, sunbathing, reading, playing various games. At dusk, after the sun set, the eldest member of the group (C1, age 46) had to light the sacred fire while the other participants held hands and formed a circle around the burning pyre. “The pyre of Zalmoxis must be circled seven times over, for seven are the lives through which we pass before reaching the god” (Simona, age 22, student). Once the circular procession came to an end, each member had to speak a short prayer to Zalmoxis out loud. I have been asked to not record even a fragment of these intimate exhortations. At the closing of the ritual, the group collectively recited a “poem by Octavian Sărbătoare” (ibidem) which I later found online. It can be read below (please note that this is a direct translation from Romanian verse and might not provide accurate renditions of the rhymes and meter that were used in the original version):

“Lord, you know us, we are the people of gods and fae.
With open fire we are here today in front of you.
With open hearts towards you we have much to tell.
The evil within us you will scorch with the wonder flame
We know the god Zamolxe brings us truth.
Old Lord, we promise to follow good deeds!
Our minds are awakened by your wisdom.
To our savior, Zamolxe, we have much to say
Until the sacred fire turns to embers”

(Octavian Sărbătoare, “Marturisire la focul lui Zamolxe/Confession at Zamolxe’s fire”; source: <http://www.citatepedia.ro>, last accessed on 1 December 2021).

Zalmoxians strive to reach one of the two places they deem sacred at least once every year: the Bucegi Mountains (wherein lies Kogaionon, the alleged sacred mountain of the Dacians) and Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa (Gradistea Muncelului, also located in the Carpathians)—the site of the ancient Dacian capital. These places also serve as festival sites for thematic celebrations (spiritual tourism), organized by various associations with active Zalmoxian members. Such an example is the yearly “Zamolxis” camp, an initiation camp on the sacred mountain of the Dacians, marketed as follows: “The spirit of Zamolxis will accompany us on this path of physical purification, the clearing of minds

and ascension of our souls!” (Source: <http://www.angel.org.ro>, last accessed in 21 October 2021). One of the participants in the ritual of the sacred fire described earlier had been “initiated” in the ways of Zalmoxianism while participating in a similar camp gathering.

As far as the manipulation of the human body is concerned, Zalmoxianism prescribes a series of clothing and behavior standards, especially on ceremonial occasions. “[. . .] It is expected for men to wear long beards, but it’s not mandatory since there are people who don’t like that. A woman should also have long hair and be healthy and voluptuous so that she may bring many children into the world [. . .]” (Aurelian, age 27, HR); as far as clothing is concerned, Zalmoxians combine traditional outfits with modern items: “You can wear jeans, since they’re comfortable and accessible and people won’t look at you funny as if you were wearing traditional pants in the city streets, and, as a shirt, you can wear a traditional one or a rustic blouse.” (ibidem)

The younger Zalmoxians usually get dracones tattoos (an ancient Dacian war banner—a wolf’s head on the body of a serpent) in order to “honor the courage and dignity that Dacians used to display in battle” (V. “Dromihetes”, member of the “Immortal Dacia” group). The tattooing of religious symbols as a means of signaling the adherence to a group is a practice that is often found in the adepts of many other pagan movements. Another custom that is often found in Zalmoxianism is the choosing of a pagan surname that is adjoined to the social name which is “given by parents at baptism” (Laura, age 30). Therefore, labels such as “the Dacian”, “the Getae”, “the Zalmoxian”, Dacian names, popular mythological names (“Deceneu”, “Dromihetes”, “Decebal”, “Inia Dinia”, “Cosanzeana”, “Sfanta Vineri” etc.) or nouns that describe natural phenomena and hazards (“Howling”, “Thunder”, “Wind”, “Frost” etc.) often stand along the social actor’s surname and are openly displayed on social media profiles, another common trait with adepts of other neo-Pagan movements, such as Wiccans or Asatru followers (Resner and Tiidenberg 2020). Zalmoxians produce “religious art”: songs, lyrics (bands such as: Ka Gaia An, Ashaena, Bucium, Zamolxis Band), sacred texts praising deities, specialized books as well as video montages available on the Internet and/or various public or private art galleries. Such an example is the “Transcendental Folklore” exhibit by the folk artist Alex “Mos Strechia” Duduc.

The adepts of the pagan cult of Zalmoxis hope that, in the foreseeable future, Zalmoxianism—the native tradition of Daco-Getic mysteries—will have the strength to replace Christianity—a foreign religion imposed by force to the ancestors of the Romanian people. Zalmoxianism proposes the sanctification of the political and religious history of a glorious Dacian” or “Daco-Getic” ethnos. On its foundations, “we must regenerate the present and build our future” (C. “the Getae”, age 33). This logic of continuity, augmented by the protochronistic ideological current (Tomitã 2007, p. 13) ends up reiterating an ethnocentric and xenophobic discourse. The nostalgia for the past, coupled with the pride generated by the exacerbation of the nationalist spirit give birth to “Dacianism” or “Dacomania”. Dacomania is a set of pseudo-scientific theories and nationalistic beliefs and clichés born from a non-critical idealization of the Dacian civilization (Hubbes and Bakó 2011). Both within legionary doctrines and dynastic socialism, Dacianism serves as the founding myth of the Romanian nation-state (Rusu 2014). The ideological foundation of an ideal Dacia traces its origins to the controversial work of Nicolae Densusianu on Prehistoric Dacia. In this work, Densusianu proposes a theory according to which the Dacians are the direct descendants of the Pelasgians, an advanced prehistoric civilization that supposedly inhabited the geographical and cultural area of current day Romania. According to Densusianu, the Pelasgian civilization produces the hypodermal matrix of European civilizations. Extending the theory proposed by Nicolae Densusianu, the protochronistic discourse of contemporary Dacianism is currently articulated around four visionary personalities that play a prophetic role in the rehabilitation of Dacian religiosity: Gheorghe Gavrila Copil (the author of the “Zalmoxian Dacian Testament”), Napoleon Savescu (the founder and main financier of the “Dacia Revival International Society”, an author of numerous articles and books, with the most relevant title in the vein of radical Zalmoxianism being “We are not descended from Rome”), Vladimir Brilinsky (also called “the last of the Dacians”,

journalist, tour guide and activist within the “Dacia Revival International Society”) and Octavian Sarbatoare (the initiator of the movement to recognize Zalmoxianism as an official religion). “Dacia Revival International Society” is a cultural organization founded in New York by doctor Napoleon Savescu, with the declared purpose of organizing and performing cultural activities meant to inform the public on the “true history of the Daco-Romanian people”. According to the theories of Napoleon Savescu, the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people isn’t based on the process of Romanization, since the Dacians were allegedly never assimilated by the Roman Empire from cultural and linguistic points of view. Therefore, modern day Romanians are considered to be exclusive descendants of the Dacians, with the Romanian language being formed on a Dacian basis. (Dr. Napoleon Savescu claims that the language of the ancient Dacians lays at the foundation of Latin). Through the status of the organization, “Dacia Revival International Society” aims to contribute to the preservation of ancient history and language throughout the whole of Romania, the honoring of major figures in Dacian history, the conservation and perpetuation of specific customs that are typical to each of the various regions of the country.

Within Zalmoxianism, the cultivation of the obsession for authentic historiography takes an almost religious form, as a substance for a type of historical fundamentalism. At the opposite end of the vision of the “Dacia Revival International Society” lies the voice of those who are accused of being insufficiently “Dacian”: “I think Napoleon Savescu’s message, together with that of his movement, resembles the Jehovah’s Witnesses to a certain extent . . . scattered concepts put together to create a different imagery”—declares a subject using the Internet nickname “Dada Mamusa”, during a private chat that took place on April 19th 2020. The same person has created a virtual space dedicated to open scientific and methodical debates of all aspects related to the history of the Daco-Getic civilization: “ENDA—The Dacian Encyclopedia”.

Given the nature of the organizations and discourses presented above, we can conclude that Zalmoxianism is not merely a neo-Pagan revival movement founded on a simple and loose religious patch-work. Pagans articulate a strong attachment to local or indigenous traditions and landscapes, constructing paths that reflect local socio-cultural, political, and historical realities. The energies the Zalmoxian movement harnesses are used by various figures to fuel political agendas, revisionist currents, nationalistic and xenophobic socio-political tendencies. The idea of returning to “better times”, when Romania was territorially “bright and full” and the ancestors—morally strong and uncorrupted—has recently gathered traction in the official political spectrum as well, with the notable parliamentary presence of a far-right party (AUR) that preaches these principles as a national political program, mixing a Christian main note with old popular or Dacian undertones.

5. Conclusions, Limitation, Future Avenues

The limits of the paper are, first and foremost, the limits of the employed method. The main materialization of empiric research takes the shape of an ideal type: no matter how rigorous I strove to be while identifying similarities and differences, an ideal type caricaturizes reality, allowing for a Platonist reproduction of certain representations (copies of copies, representations of representations, on the basis of effective behavior).

Cultural interpretation is undoubtedly a direct consequence of any ethnographic research. Under these conditions, it becomes necessary for the anthropologist to develop a certain “ability to describe what they see and hear within the limits of the vision on reality generated by the group” (Fetterman 1989, p. 28). The reality that is observed is invariably run through the filter of the researcher’s own explanatory lenses and the rendition of the other’s perspective becomes a doomed endeavor, since any relation to them involves numerous cognitive operations and symbolic mediations (representation, categorization, textualization).

Although my background is eminently qualitative, I concede that a major limitation of this study is the absence of a “count”, the lack of investigative actions towards estimating the number of those who deem themselves “Zalmoxians” in contemporary Romania.

Another major limitation of the study is the lack of a comparativist approach, a necessary element for cataloguing a study as “anthropological”. However, an analysis of the neo-pagan phenomenon in other states, albeit not difficult to perform due to the wide availability of literary resources, proved to be without immediate use since there is a distinct lack of data with regards to Romania. This naturally leads to a mandatory future study where we may dissolve the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy. As Romania remains one of the most religious countries of both Eastern and Western Europe, even if the public sphere was subjected to more than half of a century of atheistic ideologization, it would be interesting to bring into discussion the relationship between the mainstream dominant Orthodox Church and Zalmoxianism, but this could be the subject of an entirely new study.

Moving beyond the limitations of the study, I deem it necessary to return to the fundamental question that lies at the origin of the research: is modernity able to excise animism, magic and primal spirituality through the amplified intervention of reasoning, secularization and bureaucratization?

We cannot deny that a disenchanted world faces what Lyotard calls “the decline of legitimizing narratives” (Lyotard 1984, p. 65), leading to the disaggregation of a social body integrated in a series of programmatic isolations, a mentality that I’ve noticed in every interviewed subject, without exception. Each of these individuals presents modernity as that historical instance which dislocates society from a coherent, humane, integrative and meaningful locus—the motif of “lost paradise”.

The modern individual faces a profoundly new dilemma which was unknown to his predecessors: the problem of sense and significance (Redden 2011). In a similar manner, the historian Arthur Mitzmann concludes that “the legacy of this rationalization process is the loss of any trace of a meaningful world” (Seidman 1983, p. 272).

Under these conditions, man develops a metaphysical need for a cosmos that is able to provide an ultimate meaning to existence). The necessity for meaning derives from the sharpening of the universal sense of hazard and absurdity that defines existence. High-pressure elements such as death, suffering, the arbitrary character of the distribution of power, wealth and status fuel the necessity of attributing meaning and sense to the events that make up our lives. As a defense mechanism after crushing existential crises, the (neo)pagan creates new symbolic instances, new beliefs and interpretations that are capable of generating meaning and to legitimize the routine of day-to-day life.

Numerous theoreticians presume the fact that the enchanted world takes the shape of an antinomic “other”, which is inferior to modernity. What this paper proves is that religiosity is not incompatible with modernity. It is therefore time to question the “taken for granted-ness” of this opposition between pre-modern religiosity and the secularism that characterizes the modern period. Modernity does not necessarily lead to a twilight of religion. On the contrary, it “equally generates and destroys phenomena that are routinely labelled as religious” (Gilsenan 2000, p. 598).

As revealed by the textual materiality of the empiric research, secularization leads to an implosion of the unitary religious vision of the world and not to the collapse of the sacred cosmos. The diminishing importance of religion on a societal layer is a primary effect of secularization. Thus, the tendency to privatize sacred units takes the shape of an effect generated by secularization which is able to generate an adverse reaction.

Philosophers, sociologists and other scholars are becoming increasingly interested in how secular alternatives to religions are understood and materialized in contemporary society (Pollack 2015; Stenmark 2021). Beyond the dominant theoretical tone of this article—which conceptualizes the religious as diametrically opposed to the secular—, one needs to emphasize that humans manage to live in both “secular” and “religious” worlds, switching back and forth between different sacred and/or secular ontologies (Bullivant 2012; Berger 2014; Hjelm 2018). An individual’s (re)interpretation of existing religious or secular traditions is not necessarily an easy-going process; it can also be a disruptive

force (Eidhamar 2021) as it involves both a re-evaluation and a reconciliation of competing worldviews in an already fragmented, individualistic, non-cohesive and unjust society.

The (neo)pagan religious imaginary and Zalmoxianism in particular shows that the world is going through a resurgence of magic, with new images of the transcendent becoming visible in social life. Along with the shaping of the protesting (neo)pagan counter-culture's Weltanschauung, we are witnessing a process of reinstating the sacred by revaluing mystery and religious rituals. Religion does not fade away into the past and emergent social behaviors do not show distinctive signs of an imperfectly modernized society.

In the spirit of reactive antagonism and post-modern reaffirmation, the emergence of new (neo)pagan religious movements attest to the phenomenon of the "re-enchantment of the world" while also representing a new rich vein for critically investigating the possibility of an all-encompassing, unique and irreversible process of secularization that might envelop the entire societal sphere.

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