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NOTES ON ANTHROPOLOGY IN ROMANIA

by

John W. Cole

This volume presents some results of research conducted in Romania by both American anthropologists and Romanian social scientists. All of the contributors share an interest in economy, society and culture under the conditions of socialist modernization. As one would expect, however, these social scientists differ in their specific research interests. These differences are in part a result of individual preference, but they also reflect differences in the nature of the social sciences in the two countries. Although there are wide areas of overlap in research method and theory, American anthropology is not exactly parallel to any specific Romanian academic discipline. This introduction makes a few observations about the nature of American anthropology in Romania and how it compares to Romanian social science. "Anthropology" is used here to mean the work of American anthropologists who have conducted field research in Romania and "economics," "sociology," "ethnology" and "social science" to refer to the work of Romanian scholars.

Fieldwork in Romania by American anthropologists developed in the 1970s and clearly was made possible by official exchange agreements between the United States and Romania. Before the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) was founded in 1968, no American anthropologist had conducted field research in Romania and virtually every anthropologist who has worked there since has had the support of either an IREX or a Fulbright award. Even when research funds have come from other sources, IREX has been willing to negotiate permission for the research to take place when the scholar has been eligible for IREX scholar-without-stipend status. How the exchanges with Romania developed, and how they work, are explained by Lucia Capodilupo in Chapter 5.

The American anthropologist who develops an interest in Romania soon discovers that it has its own long tradition of social and cultural research. In Chapter 7 Michael Cernea discusses the discovery of this tradition by an American historian who visited Romania in the 1920s and goes on to mention subsequent commentaries on Romanian social science available in the United States. Both ethnological and sociological research were ongoing in Romania until World War II and revived after the war, most vigorously in the 1960s and 70s. In addition, a certain amount of research has been conducted in Romania by social scientists from other European countries and from Japan. The anthropologist with an interest in Romania is therefore joining a well-established intellectual endeavor and faces a substantial literature in several different languages in addition to Romanian and English.

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Since this scholarship was well-developed before American anthropologists began research there, questions arise about what anthropologists can contribute to an understanding of Romanian economy, society and culture that is not already known or on the research agenda of Romanian social science. While American anthropologists and their Romanian colleagues share the same broad interests in socialist modernization in Romania, there is nevertheless sufficient difference in modes of research and analysis to keep the American effort from being redundant. There is enough overlap in focus and method to establish a basis for dialogue between Romanians and Americans and enough differences to keep such dialogue lively and fruitful. This research report provides examples of these differences in American and Romanian efforts. In the following paragraphs I briefly describe five characteristics of anthropology in Romania and compare this American effort to certain aspects of Romanian social science.

Participant Observation. Anthropology long ago settled on participant observation as its principal research strategy. This involves an extended period of residence at the research site and requires that the anthropologist learn how to function in this community and become involved in much of what goes on there. This puts the researcher in a position to observe at first hand activity relevant to the research project. All of the American anthropologists writing for this volume have spent at least a year at their research site, and several more than twice that long. No two of them have gone about gathering data in exactly the same way, but however it was done, it has been dominated by interaction with people. Much information comes from informal interviews, that is, simply from talking to people as they carry out their usual activities. Most anthropologists also depend on formal interviews guided by some kind of interview format: a questionnaire; a schedule of topics to be discussed; the "geneological method"; collection of life histories (discussed by Zdenek Salzmann in Chapter 9); or some combination of these. The researcher also inevitably makes use of information obtained from documents discovered in the course of conversations with people and through exploration of local archives. Many research techniques have been used in the course of these projects, but their use has been guided in every case by insights gained through observations made while resident in the research setting.

Non-corporate Social Relations. A second aspect of anthropological research is its intense interest in non-corporate (often called "informal") social relations. Certainly in any modern urban industrial society, corporate relationships in the form of bureaucratic organization dominate social interaction. This is especially true in socialist societies. An understanding of these societies, including Romania, therefore requires a careful analysis of corporate structures, relations among their members, and relations between their members and their clients. Anthropologists share an interest in these relationships with their Romanian colleagues. However, social relations forged in bureaucracies are not the only ones operating in modern societies. People also interact outside of corporate contexts as family members, relatives, friends, neighbors, age-mates, ritual coparticipants, and so on. Moreover, social relations within
bureaucracies never correspond exactly to the formal role descriptions of the organization. Relations between office holders can be influenced by a shared non-corporate relationship, and people can use their corporate position to advantage outside of corporate contexts. So, while anthropologists recognize the importance of corporate social relations, they also study non-corporate social relations and the ways in which corporate and non-corporate relations influence one another. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 12.

**Qualitative Research.** Field research in anthropology characteristically is concerned with a small scale model or cultural entity. Most often this is a geographically defined place such as a village or an urban neighborhood. The chapters by Salzmann (9), Coussens (10), and Cole (12) are based on research of this type. It can, however, also involve an institution or process which cross-cuts a number of places or articulates between different levels of structure. Thus, Ratner (Chapter 11) examines schools from a number of different communities, and Sampson (Chapter 4) analyzes a planning process linking village, county, and nation.

At least some of the data in a modern anthropological research project are likely to be quantitative and so amenable to statistical manipulation. For example, Ratner's study of education in a Romanian county included a count of students in a sample of schools and information about their parents such as occupation, income and education. In another instance, the University of Massachusetts research team in Brasov County gathered information on marriage and family organization involving several thousand cases. However, an anthropological research project does not rely solely on the statistical analysis of a limited number of variables. Rather, statistical statements are given meaning by examining them in relationship to other information. Case studies of particular events, institutions and individual experiences are used in combination with statistical analysis. The goal of anthropological research is not to choose just several variables for analysis, but to make use of any data or analytic techniques that will contribute to an understanding of the research subject. This combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques yields a deeper understanding than is possible using quantitative techniques alone. Indeed, in many projects, such as Sampson's analysis of the planning process in Feldioara and Coussens' analysis of folk art and state policy, quantitative techniques had no role to play at all.

Moreover, no matter how large or small a role quantitative techniques play in an anthropological project, there is a sense in which the total project is qualitative in nature. Although most or all data are gathered about a particular small scale social or cultural entity, the goal of the undertaking is not just to learn about that place or process, but to use the information to better understand something more general. For example, Coussens is not content just to tell us about folk practice and state policy in the village of Buciumi, but uses this case study to contribute to an understanding of state-community relations in socialist societies. In each case reported here the goal of the research project is to contribute
to an understanding of Romania and of the process of socialist modernization. Each study, therefore, plays the role of case study in relationship to the general issues that it addresses. Its significance will depend on how well the anthropologist can put the single case into a general context.

Context. To be meaningful, then, anthropological analysis requires that the study of a particular community, institution, or process be explicitly linked to a wider social and cultural universe. However, participation and observation are limited both by the time that the anthropologist is in the field and by the amount of space that can be covered by an individual or team. These boundaries can be pushed back through the use of interviews and documents. Using these sources the researcher can find out about what happened before the project began and what was going on in one place while he or she was engaged elsewhere. Still, there are limits to the number of people who can be interviewed and to the number of documents that can be discovered and consulted. No matter how long term the project, it will be necessary at some point to leave off using original source material and to connect the project with existing published literature. In this way the anthropologist can establish links between the research project and large scale social and cultural processes and issues.

Critical Perspectives. The goal of critical social research is to understand the human condition and the factors that make it what it is. Critical research is based on the assumption that societies are arenas of cooperation and competition because people's interests sometimes coincide and sometimes do not. While patterns of social interaction work to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others, the flows of advantage are not always clear cut. Social relations are therefore usually rather ambiguous. The goal of critical social research is to work out patterns of cooperation and competition, of advantage and disadvantage, and to see how social and cultural practices work in relationship to these patterns. Critical social science is interested in how these patterns are created, reproduced, and transformed.

Understanding the human condition and the factors which influence it is never an easy business. It is fraught with difficulties derived from the interplay of society, theory and fact. We approach our research with a perspective that tells us what the salient aspects of the human condition are and how to analyze them. While we try to guard against ethnocentrism and chauvinism, we are nevertheless aware that there is a relationship between our perspective and the concerns of the society in which we live. Therefore, while we try to apply a critical perspective there is always a danger of it degenerating into either apologetics or expose. Apologetics focus on the positive aspects of a society while obscuring or explaining away its problems. Exposes dwell exclusively on a society's shortcomings while ignoring its tolerable, even pleasant aspects. Critical social science tries to avoid both of these extremes.

Anthropology and Romanian Social Science. As in the West, Romanian economic and sociological analysis tends to be national in scope and sta-
tistical in method. Analysis is typically presented as trends over time in a series of variables, taken singly, in paired correlations, or in multivariate analysis. In Romania research is also closely integrated with national planning. It serves several planning functions, including the promise of data and analysis useful for producing new plans and evaluating old ones. The contributions by Ion Totu (Chapter 1) and Ion Iordachel (Chapter 2) demonstrate these characteristic functions. Totu discusses the role that economic science plays in Romanian planning while Iordachel examines the social and economic changes that characterize Romanian development. Publication of research results is also used as a means of informing the public about planning results. Social research is therefore an integral part of the bureaucratic process and research projects are evaluated on the basis of their significance to state and party goals. Debates over theory, modes of analysis and research results occur within this context.

Anthropology is in part complementary to this activity. Where Romanian sociology and economics focus on large scale entities, such as the nation and regions, anthropology is concerned with small scale units; Romanian focus on corporate structures is matched by anthropology's focus on non-corporate ones; Romanian quantitative efforts are complemented by anthropological qualitative ones. So, the "birds-eye" view of Romanian social science is complemented by anthropology's "pigs-eye" view. Anthropology provides analyses of phenomena that are invisible in the macro-analysis of economics and sociology, while the latter deal with data of a scope beyond the research capabilities of anthropology.

While thus often complementary, these differences in approach can also result in conflicting interpretations of social phenomena. An important example of this occurs in the understanding of family organization. Romanian social science expects "rationalization" of production, industrialization and urbanization to result in nuclearization of the family as the corporate structure comes to fulfill functions previously associated with kith and kin. Yet, detailed research in Brasov County, one of the most urban and industrial areas in Romania, has shown that well developed networks of relatives, friends and neighbors are very important to people and helpful in pursuing their interests in a bureaucratic state. In particular, this research revealed the very close cooperation between parents, children and grandparents. The conclusions of Romanian social science are based on analysis of household structure from national census data while anthropological findings are a result of a close examination of social relations, in and between households, in a sample of villages in a single county.

The policies that result from a particular understanding of familial social relations can have very important consequences for the human condition. For example, apartments in Romania have been constructed to meet the needs of the nuclear families that were expected to result from modernization. However, the patterns of ongoing close cooperation between generations lead them either to try to live together under cramped condi-
tions, or to carry out their cooperation from different residences, which is inconvenient. In either case, available housing fails to meet the needs of many people. In this instance anthropological findings run counter to those of Romanian social science. Naturally, anthropological research does not always lead to conclusions that are incompatible with other social research, but it does provide a dimension to social research with important critical implications. The chapters by Coussens, Ratner, Salzmann, and Sampson provide further examples of analysis of small scale social and cultural practice and non-corporate processes with implications for social and cultural analysis and national policy.

Romanian social science includes a well-established tradition of village studies in both rural sociology and ethnology. In his two contributions (Chapters 3 and 8), Paul Simionescu discusses both the content of Romanian ethnology and its role in Romanian planning. Some of this work is very close to American anthropology, for example, the work of Henri Stahl. Most modern work in both fields, however, is significantly different from American anthropology in both focus and method. Modern sociological studies of village communities are like regional or national studies writ small. They display a keen interest in the same social and economic categories as do national level studies. They are mainly quantitative in method and focus on corporate structures. Information on the family is based on household composition and demographic data. These studies have the advantage of articulating very well with regional and national research because they use the same social categories in their analysis and either rely on data already gathered within the community for national surveys, or collect their own data along the same lines. They differ from anthropological research in their focus on structure rather than social relations.

Romanian ethnology shares an interest in small scale phenomena with American anthropology, but differs from it in fundamental ways. One of these differences is in the nature of the data which is analyzed. Where anthropology is primarily concerned with social relations, ethnology tends to focus much more on material culture (house forms, costumes, agricultural implements) and on folk ritual, belief and folk arts. A second difference is that while anthropologists look at the relationship among a number of social and cultural phenomena in a single location, ethnologists tend to examine and compare one or a few traits over a wide area. Thus, anthropologists focus more on relationships between social and cultural phenomena while ethnologists focus on their distribution over space and time.

These differences in focus are accompanied by differences in methods of gathering data. Anthropologists rely on one or two trips of fairly long duration each to their field site, while ethnologists make frequent short visits to a number of different sites, but make these trips over an extended period of time. Thus, while anthropologists develop an intensive knowledge of a particular place, ethnologists develop an extensive knowledge of a wider area.
The most significant contrast between anthropology and Romanian social science resides in the nature of their critical content. The close coordination of Romanian research with state planning makes it probable that it will be of relevance to state and party. At the same time, this close relationship also establishes parameters to critical analysis that are quite narrow. This is confined to evaluation of plans and their impact on the human condition in Romania in terms of standards established by the corporate structure itself. Critical examination of the assumptions and goals of the party and state are not encouraged. Individuals who persist in pursuing such critical research can find themselves in difficulty with the state.

Research conducted by foreigners in Romania must, of course, be approved by the Romanian government. How this approval is secured is discussed both by Capodilupo and by Kideckel and Sampson. Different criteria are applied than is the case for research conducted by Romanians. The main difference is that there is no requirement that the project be significant in terms of state or party goals. During the 1970s, at least, a project would not be rejected as long as it was not overtly hostile to the regime. In practice, this provided a very wide latitude to anthropological researchers. Moreover, not only could the field research be conducted in Romania without interference, but analysis and write-up of the research were carried on outside of Romania. From a critical perspective, this carries both advantages and dangers. Since the anthropological research is under no obligation to the Romanian bureaucracy, it does not face the same constraints that are placed on Romanian scholars. While this leaves anthropologists free to expand the parameters of critical examination, it also leaves them free to conduct research that is trivial and irrelevant to the conditions of life in Romania.

Alternately, there is also the danger that an anthropological research project will take on the characteristics of an expose. Given the negative image of "communism" drilled into the minds of Americans (discussed by Kideckel and Sampson), this is a real possibility. This is perhaps less likely among anthropologists than other social scientists because their training in the United States generally stresses an appreciation for other cultures and cautions against ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, chauvinism for the "free world" is not unknown among anthropologists and must be regarded as the norm in other social sciences in the United States, which tend to regard themselves as a part of the American policy community. Membership in this community places parameters on inquiry which mirror those that exist within Romania, a matter which is discussed further in Chapter 12.

The reader is invited to consider these issues while reading the text that follows. The first three chapters of Part I establish a Romanian perspective on national economic and social change and the fourth chapter examines the connections between these developments and the experience of a single new town. Part II continues with an exploration of some of the factors that have made research in Romania possible and influence the research experience. This is followed, in Part III, by a survey of
Romanian ethnology and by three chapters which sample the research findings of American anthropology in Romania. Finally, Part IV explores some of the implications of anthropological research for American understanding of Romania and other socialist countries of Southeastern Europe.

Notes:
1
A Romanian perspective on Romanian social science is provided by Miron Constantinescu, Ovidu Bădina and Ernö Gall, in Sociological Thought in Romania (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1974).

2
Romanian ethnology is explained in a book edited by Romulus Vulcanescu, Introducere in Ethnologie (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1980). For the work of Henri Stahl, see his Traditional Romanian Village Communities: The Transition from the Communal to the Capitalist Mode of Production in the Danube Region (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).