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What Makes an Ethnographer? Institutionalized Teaching and Informal Learning of Anthropology in Romania[1]

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Abstract
The processes of disciplinary institutionalization emerged from practices of preserving written and oral documents, establishing local and national museums, and developing university courses. In the last 100 years, archives' development assured the professionalization of scholars interested in disciplines unrepresented at the university level, such as ethnography and anthropology. After the 1990s, as the South-Eastern European countries could not imagine an alternative path of development, a westernization process emerged as the main strategy for catching-up with Western Europe.
My paper discusses the institutionalized anthropological and ethnographic research agenda in Romania, questioning its relationships with other social sciences in the context of national development of ethnography as a distinct branch (e.g., from anthropology). Secondly, I argue that institutionalized ethnographic and anthropological practice in Romania during communism significantly lacked reflective assessments and development of a theoretical corpus.

Keywords: anthropology; ethnography; Romania; teaching; learning

Introduction

It is acknowledged by scholars interested in the history of social sciences that ethnography and anthropology in Central and Eastern Europe had a national character (Sárkány 2002, Kürti 1996, Dracklé, Edgar and Schippers 2003, Ciubrinskas 2015) and were interested in studying local people, and in collecting material and non-material *documents* of ethnic and/or nation[al] issues in order to provide historical evidence or scientific knowledge (see also Ignat 2015, Brunnbauer, Kraft and Wessel 2011, Mihăilescu 1993 and 2004, and Iosif 2009). Processes of conservation, systematization, safeguarding, and the displaying of items inside collections, archives, museums, and publications followed such practices. In nineteenth-century Romania, scholars from the field of geography, philology, philosophy, history, and archaeology – disciplines already established – were the first concerned to institutionally organize ethnographic and folkloric materials in the context of the foundation of professional societies, national museums, and collections. The institutionalization of these disciplines thus followed such processes inside other disciplines (see also Vermeulen 1995).

From that point of view, during the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century, there was a sustained and important collecting activity in Romania, and the status of the disciplines in question followed the same path as in other East European countries: anthropology as the study of the human anatomy thus part of medicine, ethnography as Volkskunde (see also Godina 2021).

Neither ethnography nor anthropology succeeded in the process of disciplinary emancipation until 1990, as they had always been entangled with other disciplines (Mihăilescu 1993 and 2004, Geană 1999, Mihăilescu, Iliev and Naumović 2008, Cotoi 2011, Zhdanko 1964, Simionescu 1984). To some extent, ethnography was more instrumentalized when compared to anthropology (see also Hofer 1968) and it was perceived as a method or as a tool for other disciplines (Stahl 1984, Baskar 2008, Krader 1959), while anthropology maintained its route as a biological and medical science, despite some efforts started in early 1960s to open it up to cultural and social anthropology.

Although anthropology in Romania could be considered to have started as a distinct discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not acknowledged as social science, and ethnography – as discipline or as the method – was not part of it until extremely late. In other words, anthropology as a social science started to somehow thrive only after 1990.

In Romania, poles apart groups of scholars, from medicine, from geography, and from Letters[2], put down the preliminaries for anthropology, ethnology and ethnography. Therefore, processes of institutional development need to be studied in their historical contexts mainly because a good, contextualized knowledge of the development of each discipline can help to avoid unfortunate homophonies, unwarranted pluralization, and confusions applied to those disciplines, obliquely in connection with local traditions of practices (see Fruntelată 2017 and Vermeulen 1995). Since the meanings of the terms ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology have been constantly changing since their appearance, and there are still different theoretical discussions and perspectives, it is necessary to follow their historical trajectory, the local/national production of knowledge, and not to project a contemporary picture of the discipline's past (see also Godina 2021).

My paper briefly discusses the historic trails of institutionalized ethnographic and anthropological disciplines in Romania and focuses on the difficulties of teaching and learning ethnography and anthropology in various political contexts in which one or more tradition are in effect.

From vernacular and fragmented collections to institutionalization

The second half of the nineteenth century was one of the explorations, research, and synchronization of science[s] with central and Western Europe, but also a period of modernization. The review of the pioneering collections (i.e., of material and nonmaterial culture) and research carried out before the beginning of the 20th century has no place here, but it is necessary to mention that this period has been well documented by specialists and historians of the disciplines (Bîrlea 1966, Buhociu 1966, Vulcănescu 1966, Vulcănescu and Simionescu 1973, Vulcănescu and Vrabie 1975, Geană 1999, Constantinescu 2009, Ţîrcomnicu 2010).
Vulcănescu and Simionescu's point of view regarding the aforementioned period is
clear in terms of labelling the materials collected prior to the second
half of the nineteenth century. The authors wondered whether these early attempts can be called "ethnological" and whether they were among
hose, whose interests and results wereaimed at creating a scientific area of study (which had
already been established in other countries)? Their answer was as follows:

> A definite affirmative [answer] is impossible in our present state of knowledge. As we now see them, these fragmentary researches may only be viewed as ethnologic intuitions and prefiguration to the extent that their contents or their conclusions achieve a certain generalization, naturally imposed by the comparative point of view. All of this evidence, distant or near, collected and worked out accidentally or according to plan, constitute to a certain extent a history of ethnology as a science, directed toward research into traditional Rumanian civilization and culture (Vulcănescu and Simionescu 1973: 197).

Following the influential tradition of *Volkskunde* from Germany (see Ignat 2015 and Vermeulen 1995) - adopted in particular by the central, northern and eastern Europe countries throughout the nineteenth century – the Romanian Royal Society of Geography was established in 1875 and, together with the Romanian Academic Society (founded in 1866), contributed to the institutionalization of geography and ethnography as disciplines. Moreover, given that the predominant model at that time was the one that regarded geography as a broad-ranging discipline, which could include empirically quantifiable elements of material and non-material culture, the Romanian Royal Society of Geography established a section on ethnography.

In 1902, shortly after the establishment of the first department of geography at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, Simion Mehedinți[3] introduces a new course of anthropogeography, and a few years later, as a follow-up, a course on ethnography. In 1920, the department of geography splits up, and a new department emerges, namely the Department of Geography, Anthropography and Ethnography. Known as one of the founding fathers of modern geography in Romania, Simion Mehedinţi was also one of the most important ethnologists in the first part of the twentieth century. The introduction of the German-Austrian ethnological perspectives (for example: *Volkskunde*, but not *Völkerkunde*, anthropogeography and diffusionist ones; see also Ignat 2015 for a detailed depiction of German influences on Romanian interwar ethnology) have

led later to methodological developments that helped and simplified the professionalization of other researchers who, in their turn, will play an extremely important role in the disciplinary development of ethnography.[4]

Alexandru Arbore, historian, and ethnographer is one of the few Romanian professionals in the first half of the twentieth-century who discuss the relationship between ethnography and archaeology. Starting from Simion Mehedinţi`s perspective on peoples, culture, and determinism of work upon culture, the author points out that ethnography seems to have usurped the place of archaeology, but that there are two complementary disciplines:

> It is clear that, at least for ancient times, archaeology is the science that deals with the disclosure of information material on the missing peoples through excavations or other means, with its special method of works and the characterization of the epochs in great lines, while detailed research, especially the remnants of the material culture found by archaeology, in order to draw the necessary conclusions regarding the specific characteristics of the single peoples of that time, is actually a work of pure ethnographic research (Arbore 1930: 6-10).

Arbore brings to the fore complicated discussions about the concept of *Kulturkreis* – circles or cultural fields, which was the centre of interest for the German-Austrian trans-cultural diffusionists at the end of the ninetieth-century and which, through the influence of Leo Frobenius, Wilhelm Schmidt, Friedrich Ratzel and many others, became a fashion in the historical-anthropological-ethnological-geographic researches at the beginning of the twentieth-century in many European countries. Last but not least, Arbore anticipates the necessity of a major ethnographic work but proposes a historical perspective on ethnography, which should be interested in studying survivals, archaic, primitive elements and other remnants of material culture in order to clarify the beginnings of folk culture (Arbore 1930: 5-9).

Overall, in the first three decades of the twentieth-century, ethnography, defined under the influence of geography (see also Mănuilă 1943) and of the German diffusionists, has undergone an important process of individualization. Starting with the 1930s the status of ethnography is redefined, and its role is reconsidered inside the sociological system. Ethnographic and anthropological issues and question were oversimplified by geography and sociology (see Arbore 1930: 26 and Ionică 1996, chapter I) and were integrated into the large system of sociology and appropriated by monographers. As Stahl clearly put it at the inauguration of the Sociological Museum of Drăguş Village on November 25, 1925, after 5 years of monographic activity of the Sociological School from Bucharest, sociology was a goal in itself:

> [...] I think that now we have understood why we, the monographists, no longer want to be ethnographers, folklorists, but sociologists, and even more so: people reborn spiritually on this path of the sociological monograph (AŞRS 1930: 387-388).

In the interwar period, the Sociological School in Bucharest – which understood sociology as a science of the nation, had a hegemonic integrator character on ethnography, folkloristic, and partly on anthropology, in the sense that the disciplines as such were marginalized, but as a practice was integrated into the sociological system. Moreover, ethnography as a discipline did not justify its existence:

> being considered an unsuccessful double of sociology [...]. Ethnography, folkloristic and the science of culture and folk art were sociological research tools (Vulcănescu and Vrabie 1975: 44).

Regarding anthropology in Romania, the first scholars interested in it were medics, biologists, and geographers. Even though the Royal Society of Geography developed a branch of anthropology interested in the general geographical and biological study of human beings, the development of the discipline switched back to medicine. In 1933, Emil Racoviță – biologist and explorer, established the Anthropological Society in Cluj. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Paul Petrini and Francis Rainer – both medics, lay the foundations of an osteology collection of skulls with various pathologies and makes efforts for an institute of anthropology (see Ion 2014). In 1940, Rainer succeeded in establishing the Institute of Anthropology in Bucharest, under the Faculty of Human Medicine, with no connection to ethnography, but linked to the Romanian Social Institute and its sociological programme. Merging [physical] anthropology with cultural studies, ethnography, ethnology, folklore studies and other social and humanistic disciplines was peculiar and unfitting. During interwar, anthropology worked alongside other disciplines under the hegemonic project of sociology – regarded as a science of the nation and started to synchronize with European trends of studying race – understood as an immutable characteristic of ethnicity and eugenics (Turda 2007, 2010) and was also involved in the development of a national sanitary system.

Learning by doing

Anthropology, as it was imagined and practiced in Romania, was a medical branch related to anatomy and was concerned with what we call today physical anthropology (but excluding forensic anthropology). The narrow and specialized framework of understanding anthropology only in its physical component left an important inheritance to discipline. Unlike sociology, it could be reintroduced and trained during the communist period. The Soviet model of science encompassed physical anthropology as a borderline discipline between medicine, biology, and history, thus excluding the practices of European social and cultural anthropology – which were considered formalistic and idealistic (see Krader 1959: 155). The Institute converted into a Collective of anthropology contained by the Institute of Endocrinology, was able to continue its research and was institutionally active during the communist period. In 1963, the anthropological team is restructured alongside the Romanian Academy and the Centre for Anthropological Research is established. Under the influence of the newly formed Commission for Anthropology and Ethnology at the Romanian Academy, a new section of cultural anthropology is established under Vasile Caramelea`s leadership[5]. The practice of anthropology lingered inside the Romanian Academy although Caramelea succeeded establishing an introductory course to anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy in the 1970s. One of the most difficult conundrums for local scholars was to develop epistemological reasons for a cultural and/or social anthropology, namely a socialist anthropological philosophy in order to back up the practice of cultural anthropology. Such epistemological reasons were never conceived and, under the label of cultural anthropology, Caramelea conducted the section`s research activities by practicing a sort of interwar sociology adapted to newly socialist topics (miners' working conditions, industrial development, behavioural studies and so on).

Despite the newly established institutions, ethnography and anthropology could not be joined and this becomes noticeably clear when comparing the synthesis studies of the disciplines achieved and published at that time (Milcu and Maximilian 1967 and Vulcănescu 1980). In short, while the first volume – *Introduction to Anthropology* (1967), deals in its content with topics such as anatomical morphology and physiology, human races, sexual differentiation, and evolutionism, the second – *Introduction to Ethnology* (1980), deals with issues such as ethnohistory, ethnogenesis and continuity, rural and urban Romanian civilization and so on. Instead, ethnography and some other disciplines (folkloristic, ethnochoreology, dialectology, ethnomusicology, etc.) started to label themselves as ethnology or as ethnological disciplines (see Mihăilescu 2004) and were put at work for the regime (see Iorga 2021 for detailed discussions about ethnography in Romania during communist period). Another example supports the idea: starting with the first issue of *Annuaire Roumain d'Anthropologie* (1964) - the most important Romanian publication in the field of anthropology, the journal has a thematic section on cultural anthropology. A brief follow-up of its content suggests a new (at that time) and important opening to foreign publications alongside with attempts to launch discussions related to the institutionalized development of cultural anthropology in Romania and its connection to new European trends. However, all these remained at the level of readings, reviews, round tables, and project.

John Cole[6], who first came to Romania in the 1970s, states in his report *Economy, Society and Culture in Contemporary Romania* published in 1984 that:

> Although there are wide areas of overlap in research method and theory, American anthropology is not exactly parallel to any specific Romanian academic discipline. […] *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 (Cole 1984: xiii).

In line with Cole but few years later, Sam Beck states a similar condition of anthropology in Romania in his review paper *Indigenous Anthropologists in Socialist Romania*:

> [...] the impact of Anglo-American anthropology on Romania has been negligible. Little significant or long lasting contact has developed between Anglo-American and Romanian anthropologists. Despite the appearance of "anthropology" as a distinct discipline within Romania's Academy of Sciences, no Departments of Anthropology exist in the country, nor is there a unified forum through which anthropological research is carried out. Instead, Romania's "anthropology" remains rooted in the nineteenth century social sciences division of labour that is found in the academy as institutes or divisions within particular university faculties such as Medicine, Ethnology, Folklore and Dialectology and Sociology" (1986: 265-266).

During the communist period, the professionalization of ethnography and anthropology were not to be obtained by university degrees – as there were no such programs but by practice and training inside institutes, research

centres and museums. One could become ethnographer and/or anthropologist and/or ethnologist only if had the chance to be named for a position inside such institutes, centres, or museums regardless of the specialization achieved from the university. Thus, people trained in letters, philology, geography, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology had been professionalized by practice on such disciplines. For example, the development of the project of Romanian Ethnographic Atlas[7] massively contributed to such a professionalization by practice. Nonetheless, the clear-cut distinctions between ethnography, ethnology, anthropology and so on were of small importance during the communist period when paralleled with the very fact that all scholars were researchers[8] – scientists searching for the same goal: peasant culture in rural areas and national identity (see Mihăilescu 2004, Sampson 2018).

From Romanian peasant studies to global openings

As documented for other post-socialist (Dracklé, Edgar and Schippers 2003, Ciubrinskas 2015, Buchowski and Červinková 2016) and post-dictatorial countries (Afonso 2008), in Romania new institutional developments emerged after the regime changed and western manners of practicing social sciences developed mainly in universities and with the help provided by local and international professional associations.

The Romanian Academy was reorganized, and the Institute for Ethnological and Dialectological Research was brought back inside the Academy and became the 'Constantin Brăiloiu' Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, it continues to provide specialization in ethnography, folkloristics, choreology, and ethnomusicology for researchers trained in various related disciplines. In what concerns ethnography, it still follows the agenda provided by the Romanian Ethnographic Atlas' project and overlaps with national/local ethnography. The Anthropological Research Centre received in 1994 endorsement to supervise Ph.D's in medical and biological anthropology, and in 2007 it became the 'Francis Rainer' Institute of Anthropology, which functions today as part of the Medical Sciences Section of the Romanian Academy. The small department of cultural and social anthropology is still active. Anthropology inside the academia is mainly concerned with palaeoanthropology, osteology, medical anthropology, and is deeply related to medicine and biology, while ethnography remain tributary to the agenda developed at the beginning of the twentieth century and to methodologies used for the Romanian Ethnographic Atlas.

In 1990, the Romanian Society for Cultural Anthropology (SACR)[9] was set up by Mihai Pop[10] (as its first president) and Vintilă Mihăilescu[11] with a clear objective: "to promote teaching and anthropological research in Romania". The basis of European opening was set up during the first European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), in 1990, in Coimbra, Portugal where both Gheorghiţă Geană[12] and Vintilă Mihăilescu attended the conference and become members. After Coimbra, they both became the 'representative' anthropologists for Romania. From that point of view, the EASA`s wide-ranging endeavour to find professionals and peers from East European countries significantly impacted the development of anthropological production in Romania. In short, Mihăilescu (1993) started to question the very foundations of Romanian anthropology, ethnology, and ethnography – i.e., the rural/ peasant studies, while Geană (1999) tried to give arguments for a Romanian "anthropology at home" before 1989 that could be comparable with the western practice; but this happened only after 1990. At the same time, some scholars trained in "ethnological studies" before 1989 started to label themselves as anthropologists and to undertake the production of knowledge (be it from ethnography, folklore studies and physical anthropology and so on) from before 1989 as anthropology. Thus, we can talk about three types of researchers: those trained during communist Romania (including anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, ethnologists, historians and so on) who developed their anthropological or ethnological carrier after 1989; those trained after 1989 in Romanian environment under philosophy, sociology and so on and those trained abroad and have returned (see also Mihăilescu 2021 for a detailed picture of contemporary anthropology and ethnology in Romania based on professional associations affiliation and recent knowledge production).

Openings to Western European research traditions have resulted in a change of perspective regarding the status of disciplines in Romania and at the same time, it was possible for Romanian scholars to study social sciences in other European and American universities and to return as anthropologists and professors or to continue their work abroad. After 1990 there was a process of westernization of a part of the old generation as well as of a new generation of professionals through scholarships, education, and prestige gained by studying abroad.

On one hand, ethnography (as *Volkskunde* ethnology, see Godina 2021) is a small part of the ethnological sciences related to the practice of national tradition, whether as cultural anthropology, ethnology, or cultural

studies – mainly at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest and in some national museums. On the other hand, social anthropology has developed disciplinary mainly under universities (The Faculty of Political Science from the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work from the University of Bucharest and University of Cluj) first by hosting introductory courses to social anthropology and ethnography and slowly developing specializations and then master programs in anthropology. First master programme in anthropology was established by Vintilă Mihăilescu at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Science from the National School of Political and Administrative Studies and started operating in 2000. It was closely followed by a new master programme in anthropology and community development at the Department of Sociology, University of Bucharest; both programmes are active and gradually growing. Regarding undergraduate specialization in anthropology there were two moments. Firstly, before adopting the Bologna system undergraduate studies were of 4 years (8 semesters) and in some universities, mainly under sociology departments (Bucharest, Cluj, Timişoara, Craiova, etc.), students could choose a sub-specialization in anthropology starting with the 5th semester. Secondly, after adopting Bologna system (3 years, 6 semesters) this mechanism could not work anymore, but in 2009 the University of Bucharest succeeded establishing a unique[13] undergraduate specialization in anthropology hosted by the Department of Sociology (for detailed discussions about the ways of practicing anthropology in Romania, topics and types of fieldwork research see Chelcea 2009, Şerban and Dorondel 2014, Fruntelată 2017). It worth mentioning the fact that in Romania a master programme is the highest qualification one can achieve in academic development under the label 'anthropology'; otherwise, one can only continue Ph.D. studies under various labels such as: sociology, philosophy, letters and so on, or to go abroad.

Conclusion

Although we can talk about a process of synchronization and westernization of some parts of anthropology, ethnography, and sociology (mainly in universities) after 1990, some other parts of these disciplines continue the old line, but in a new and problematical environment. For instance, training researchers by 'doing' inside the Romanian Academy is no longer possible due to the lack of big projects and lack of funding. On the other hand, it seems to be as easy to label oneself as anthropologist/ethnologist as it is to un-label oneself as anthropologist/ethnologist regardless of the background. This dual landscape of structural/institutional, epistemological, and organizational arrangements is not specific to Romania – it also could be found in other post-socialist countries and does not necessarily follow an [scientific] evolutionary line, or a transitional one, or a peripheralization process but is rather entangled and knotted with local and global politics of science and the local, regional, and global scientific production of knowledge which needs more analyses and discussions.

Different perspectives upon what anthropology, ethnography, and ethnology is, is not a novel issue in Europe, but the way it works, the degree of instrumentalization, the knowledge it produces and the content it produces today that shapes potential developments are worthy of further research.

Notes

[1]An earlier, oral version of this paper was presented at the 7th edition of the international conference *Rethinking Educational Ethnography. Rethinking platforms for teaching ethnography: facing changing conceptualizations of culture and challenges from post-materialist philosophy, globalization, and mobile modernity*, in 2018 at ELTE, Budapest, Hungary. I am indebted to György Mészáros for his insightful and comparative comments.

[2] The Faculty of Letters develops its curricula within the humanistic sciences framework by mixing linguistics, art, communication, ethnology and administrative sciences.

[3] Having studied in Germany under the guidance of Friedrich Ratzel, he was a member of the Romanian Academy and has been strongly influenced by his teacher from whom he took the term anthropogeography.

[4] For instance, see the case of Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaş who, at the end of the nineteenth century, went for training in Germany where he worked with Wilhelm Riehl and after his return in Romania, he establishes the Museum of Ethnography, National Art, and Decorative and Industrial Art, in 1906, in Bucharest. The clear purpose of the museum was to 'gather all the documents related to cultural, artistic, and ethnographic status of the Romanian people from oldest times to nowadays' (Tzigara-Samurcaş 1936: 39).

[5] Vasile Caramelea was a former student and close collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti – the leading figure of the interwar Sociological School from Bucharest.

[6] In the early 1970s, John W. Cole – anthropologist and professor at the University of Massachusetts leaded a team of American anthropologists – UMass Romanian Research Group comprising Steven Sampson, David Kideckel, Steven Randall, Marilyn McArthur and Sam Beck, in Romania through IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) Program (see Cole 1984).

[7] Following an old idea of developing atlases, the project of Romanian Ethnographic Atlas started in the early 1970s and continued until 2014 – when the fifth and last volume was published. The project employed an extensive field research campaign that last for over a decade (1972-1984) in which tens of scholars, researchers and other personnel operated and got ethnographically trained (see Iorga 2021).
[8] For example, *ethnographer* was just an entry-level hierarchical position before becoming a full researcher and anthropology was not regulated as a profession.
[9] In 2008, the association changed its name into Society for Social and Cultural Anthropology (SASC).
[10] Mihai Pop (1907-2000) was a highly influential folklorist and ethnologist. He did his studies in Czech Republic and in Poland. He was a part of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1930s and a close collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti, participating in several fieldwork research campaigns. He was affiliated to numerous international associations, director of the Folklore Institute (1965-1974) and professor.
[11] Vintilă Mihăilescu (1951-2020) was an anthropologist trained in psychology in early 1970s, then worked at the Centre for Anthropology under the supervision of V. Caramelea, until 1991. He was the director of the Romanian Peasant National Museum, the head of the Department of Sociology at the National School for Political and Administrative Studies, a prolific writer, and a dedicated professor.
[12] Born in 1942, he was trained in Philosophy with a Ph.D. related to social and cultural anthropology. He started working at the Centre for Anthropology becoming a close disciple of V. Caramelea and he's continuing its legacy at 'Francisc Rainer' Institute of Anthropology, Romanian Academy as a senior researcher. He was also a professor of anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Bucharest.
[13] It is unique for two reasons: it is the only one of its kind in Romania and more than half of the board professors were trained in anthropology abroad.

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