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HOW I BECAME A 'ROMANIA EXPERT'

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ABSTRACT: This paper, a revised presentation at a panel on academic exchanges at the 2018 Conference of the Society for Romanian Studies, discusses the challenges of researchers studying small, insignificant places, and particularly when our specific knowledge pushes us to become generalists. Since every country has a '*La noi ca la nimeni*' ('Nobody has it the way we have it') discourse, how do we make Romania interesting?

Keywords: planning, urbanization, systematization, area studies, UMass Romanian Research Group, social anthropology

Introduction: Romania and Me[2]

I first came to Romania in 1974, as part of a group of anthropology students from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, under the direction of Professor John W. Cole.[3] As part of the group, dispersed in several villages in the Braşov area, my original research plan was to carry out ethno-linguistic fieldwork in the village of Feldioara, near Braşov. However, I soon discovered that Feldioara had been selected to be developed into a small town. So like many anthropologists, I was forced by real life to change my topic, and I ended up researching the process

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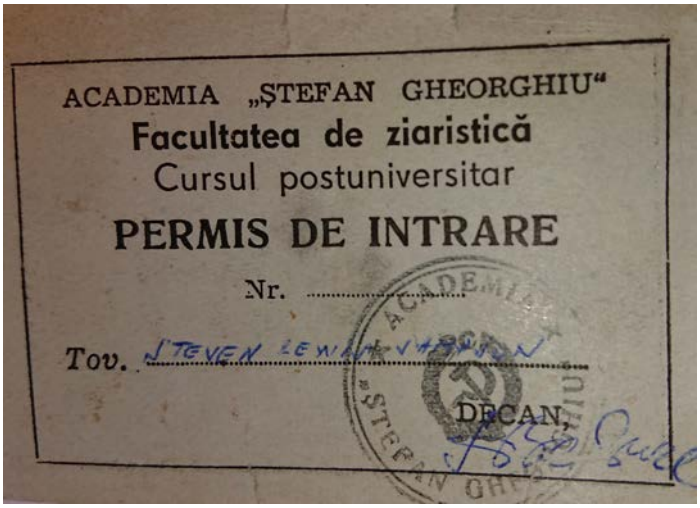
[2] Revised presentation for a panel on the role of foreign exchange in Romanian Studies, Annual Conference of the Society for Romanian Studies, Bucharest, June 2018. As this panel brought together scholars from various disciplines, not only anthropologists, this paper was written for this mixed audience. I would like to thank Iuliu Raţiu for organizing this panel and for his work in having our contributions published.

[3] Besides John and myself, our Romanian Research Group consisted of David Kideckel, Sam Beck, Steven Randall and Marilyn McArthur. A set of early publications describing our work appeared in *Dialectical Anthropology* 1(4), 1976, and in the Romanian sociology journal *Viitorul Social* 6(1), 1977, pp. 155-166. (*http://bibliotecadesociologie.ro/download/cole-john-w-sampson-steven-kideckel-david-a-mcathur-marylin-randall-steven-g-1977-schimbare-si-integrare-sociala-in-zona-brasov-viitorul-social-vi1-155-166/*)

of urbanization and systematization.[4] Over a period of 18 months, I studied how socialist planning ideology interacted with bureaucratic improvisation. The plans for Feldioara's urban development did not work out, of course. They were exaggerated in ambition, poorly thought out, lacked sufficient resources, did not involve the locals, had competing agendas, and often stopped and re-started without any rationality except that is what *Ceaușescu și partidul* (Ceaușescu and the party) wanted. Following my Ph.D., in 1980-1981, with a research grant from the Danish Social Science Research Council (I was living in Denmark), I returned to Romania to study local party elites. I was based at the national party training school, Academia Ștefan Gheorghiu.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Entry pass to the graduate school of the communist party. *Source: Author's archive*.

I visited *județ* party schools and villages to study how local leaders performed their role as middlemen; like middle managers everywhere, they were pressed from the top down and from the bottom up. My research in Feldioara and with the local party leaders led to a series of studies on planning and improvisation, bureaucracy and corruption, the Romanian underground

[4] For more details on this initial fieldwork, see my two articles on fieldwork in Romania written with David Kideckel (1984, 1988), and my 2019 paper 'Recalling Romania' to appear in a forthcoming collection on fieldwork in Eastern Europe edited by Raluca Mateoc. I received my Ph.D. from UMASS in 1980 and published my dissertation in revised form in Sampson (1984b); to ease access, I have scanned and uploaded all my early publications on my personal website *www.stevensampsontexts.com.*

economy, rumors and rumor spreading, the informal sector, and a general interest in how societies like Romania muddle through rather than exploding (Sampson, 1983-1989). I even did a short (unpublished) piece on the *Securitate*, entitled '*Fii atent*' ('Watch out!'), concluding that *Secu* was just like every other Romanian institution, incredibly inefficient, but also brutal (Sampson, 1983d). Some of these studies were academic, others were published in different form in the Danish press, or disseminated at conferences, or even broadcast through the BBC, Voice of America and Radio Europa Liberă. On my visits to Romania, I gave copies of these papers to friends and colleagues. These papers were passed on, copied, and even discovered among the belongings of other foreign researchers in Romania.

By 1984, I had now been in and out of Romania for 10 years. In July 1985, on a holiday visit to Romania with my wife and two young children, we were detained on entry at Otopeni Airport. I remember the look on the young border officer's face as he looked at me, then my passport, then me again, his computer screen flashing, and once again at me, at my passport, at the flashing screen, and raising a shaking finger, told me to go sit over there and wait. Perhaps he had never come face to face with a *duşmanul poporului* (enemy of the people) before. After waiting an hour in the transit hall, I was finally approached by a man in uniform, either border guard or *Securitate* officer. I was prepared for some kind of interrogation or discussion. I asked him, in Romanian, why I was being refused entry. 'Why?', I asked. 'You know why' ('*Ştiţi de ce*'), he responded. And that was the end of my 'interrogation'. My family and I then remained overnight in the hot, stuffy Otopeni transit hall until the following afternoon, when the next plane flew back to Copenhagen. Back home I addressed the Romanian embassy and requested a new visa. I did this several times up until 1989, but I was unsuccessful. I discovered later on, in my *Securitate* file of about 500 pages, that I had been declared *interzis pentru intrarea în ţară* (prohibited from entering the country), for a period of exactly five years, from December 1984 until 31 December 1989. During the period when I was forbidden to enter the country, I followed Romanian affairs from afar, writing articles for newspaper and occasionally on the radio and TV, both in Denmark and a few times with the BBC, VOA and Swedish Radio. In late December 1989, I appeared several times on Danish TV and radio as a Romania expert, much to the envy of Romanian exiles living in Denmark.

I returned to Romania in March 1990. After a long drive from Denmark, where I have lived since 1978, driving all the way through Eastern (oops! Central) Europe to the village Feldioara, my car had broken down. Incredibly, the local policeman, who in the Ceauşescu era would have been monitoring me suspiciously, offered to loan me his personal car! 'No problem, just take it,' he

said. I took his car to Bucharest for four days! A Romanian sociologist, Septimiu Chelchea, formerly at the party school, published an article in the newspaper *Adevărul* about my analysis of Romanian rumors. The article was entitled 'Robin Hood in Romania'. Apparently, I was Robin Hood.

What a change.

By 1992 and through the 1990s, I worked in Romania as a consultant doing 'The Transition'. As a 'Romania expert', I was part of a Danish consulting team on contract with the EU. Our mission was to set up the Romanian Ministry of Environment. After that, with the World Bank, I did a brief assessment of social problems in the Jiu Valley. I then worked with another international team, on the fourth floor of the Government building, in what was then the Department of Reform. Our mandate was 'public administration reform', and I was charged with issues related to civil society and public communication. Our EU team restructured the government's complaint department, and we remodeled the Government reception hall. We installed computer hardware, wrote instruction guides, held workshops and trained government officials in how to organize cabinet meetings, known as 'machinery of government'. After a couple years work in Romania, I began to work on projects in other countries of the Balkans, doing projects in NGOs, human rights, democracy, and anti-corruption (e.g. Sampson, 1996).

A Professional Stranger

Let me backtrack a moment and recapitulate my own relationship to Romania during the 1990s. Perhaps the easiest way to look at this relationship is to use a classic article by the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1971 [1908]), called 'The Stranger'. 'Who is the stranger?' asks Simmel. The stranger embodies a combination of proximity and distance. The characteristic of the stranger is this combination of nearness and remoteness in the same person. The stranger, says Simmel, is not a wanderer, but nor is he a member of the community. The stranger is close by, but not one of us. If there is one way to describe anthropological fieldwork, then that's it (a well-known anthropology textbook by Michael Agar is in fact entitled *The Professional Stranger*). As an anthropologist in Romania, but as a foreigner/stranger, *un străin*, I became close to many people. I lived with them and was among them, but I was not of them. I was always someone else. We Western researchers conducted field research in Romania, living and talking to people, even when it was officially illegal for Romanians to even speak to a foreigner without making a report to the police.

A second characteristic of the stranger, says Simmel, is that the stranger is often a trader. The stranger invariably has resources from the outside which they trade with those on the inside. As foreign anthropologists in Romania, we

also certainly traded. Like all Westerners in Romania at the time, we had access to special goods from the dollar shops (cigarettes, whiskey, electronics); we had dollars; or we could bring in goods from abroad: birth control pills, Swiss army knives, auto parts, a Samsonite briefcase, blue jeans, children's clothes, powdered milk. I could trade these items or give them as gifts to Romanian friends and informants.

Third, Simmel observes that the stranger is 'objective', in that they are not tied to anyone locally, and for this reason, people can confide in the stranger in a way they would otherwise not tell even their closest local friends. Indeed, as researchers, we learned intimate details of people's lives precisely because we were strangers and could not be suspected of being *Securitate* informers. We were people from another world.

But the stranger's objectivity, their outsider status, also entails that they view the locals as a collective, as a 'them', just as the locals also see individual foreign strangers as *străini*. The stranger is for Simmel a sociological category. As a stranger, I also found myself judging Romanians not as individuals with their unique points of view, situations and solutions, but as Romanians. I searched for a theory of 'how Romanians are'. It is not just foreigners who attempt such a project. Romanian poets, dramatists, historians and ethnographers have all tried to formulate theories of 'how Romanians are': think of Caragiale, Boia, Rădulescu-Motru, etc. to explain 'how Romanians are'. I have tried it myself on occasion (Sampson, 1994).

Simmel looks at the stranger as a special category of person, neither one of us, but not an outsider either. I, too, was a special category of person: for some Romanians, I was simply off limits; these were people who took seriously the law about interacting with foreigners. For others, I was a target, an *obiectiv* about whom they should make a report to the *Securitate*. And for still others, I was an instrument, a means of obtaining some dollars or even a ticket out of the country via the coveted invitation abroad. For many villagers, I was '*Domnul Ștefan*' or '*Americanule!*'. For Romanian intellectuals, I was '*cercetatorul american din Feldioara'* (the American researcher from Feldioara). For the *Securitate* I was, 'Samy', my *numele conspirativ* (code name) in my file. In these files, I was some kind of CIA agent seeking to discover clues about the country. But I was also being viewed as someone whose mission was to denigrate Romania through my discussions with Romanians and my articles, many of which were summarized in their reports. Finally, for a few close Romanians, I was Steve, a simple friend (*prieten*), confidante, someone with whom we could discuss politics, exchange gossip, gossip and send family photos. Of course, many of these friends also ended up having contact with the *Securitate* organs, none of it pleasant.

To sum up, Simmel's remarks on the stranger are more than relevant to anyone doing research in Romania, both those foreign sponsorships and those without. Moreover, they also apply to expatriate Romanians who return from abroad. Being a stranger was not the only framework for my research relationship with Romania. I was, of course, part of several academic communities. I was part of the community of Western anthropologists, part of the East European/Soviet studies community, and one of the small group of Romanian Studies specialists, the Romanianists. As we at this conference are among such a forum of Romanian Studies specialists, I will concentrate on this latter community (in Bucharest in 2018 of the 450 participants in the SRS conference, 280 came from abroad, of which many were ethnic Romanian expatriates).

Studying Small Places

Romanian Studies has always existed under two shadows: One was the shadow of area studies generally. Romania existed within the field of East European/Balkan/Slavic Studies. Romanian studies was the orphan inside Slavic departments. The second shadow was in the Soviet Studies or Communist Studies area. Romania was viewed as a type of regime: with Marxist ideology, political authoritarianism and command economy. Anyone who went to a Soviet Studies conference in the 1970s or 1980s found that most of the papers were about the USSR and Russia; Romania shared the fate of the other East European states: they were interesting when there was a social revolt or some kind of deviance from the Soviet model, but unlike the USSR and Russia, they were not strategically important. In academia, Romanian Studies existed within the Romance Language departments, alongside French, Spanish and Italian, often with a single courageous professor who covered Romanian philology, culture and history under their area. The Romanian scholars I know have had this combination of what the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1953) called 'the hedgehog and the fox'.[5] I would say that many of us Romanianists were like Berlin's hedgehog: we were specialists in one particular aspect of Romanian life. However, events and practicality often compelled us to become foxes about Romania; we had to know a lot of different things. We had to become 'Romania experts'. This was certainly true of Romanian exile professors in Europe and the U.S. But it was also true of Western Romanianists as well. Probably the best example is (no pun intended) Dennis Deletant, certainly a leader in Romanian studies, with his incredibly broad range of interests in all things Romanian, from philology to the *Securitate*.

[5] Berlin takes the slogan from the ancient Greek poet Archilochus. 'A fox knows many things, but a hedgehog one important thing'.

So we Romanianists are, in some ways hedgehogs. We know a lot about one aspect of Romanian life. But we are also foxes, trying to keep up with many other aspects of Romanian life in the context of changing interests or political crises. With this background, let me make four basic points here, at the risk of restating the obvious. The first point concerns the mission that we anthropology hedgehogs had in Romania.

Our Successful and Failed Missions

For anthropologists of Romania some decades ago, we had two missions. First, we had to justify why studying (in) a place like Romania was relevant to anthropology, when so many of our colleagues were doing fieldwork in the more classic anthropological sites (Highland New Guinea, East Africa, Amazon, Mexico) and were researching classic problematics of kinship, ritual or exchange. Making our work relevant to anthropology was Mission Number One. Thanks to diligent colleagues in our field, we Romanian studies anthropologists were successful in this mission. Especially Katherine Verdery, David Kideckel, and Gail Kligman made other anthropologists read about Romania for truly anthropological reasons, not Romanian reasons.

The second mission for we anthropologists of Romania was more difficult: we had to convince the *Securitate* why we were researchers and not spies. In this mission, we had help from courageous Romanian academics, who in their private conversations and reports with the organs tried to explain what it was we foreign anthropologists were doing and why it was not espionage. Unfortunately, in this second mission, we and our Romanian allies failed miserably. We were judged as spies, whether we knew it or not, whether we admitted it or not. We were spies, but it was not because we were working for the CIA (which we were not), not because we had grants from organizations close to the U.S. Government (which we did), and not because we had some kind of secret mission (which we did not). No, we were spies because we were finding out things about Romanian society and everyday life that the state considered strategic; things they did not want us to know, and things they did not want others to know. These 'things' were what we anthropologists might call 'way of life' or 'practice' or 'coping strategies', or 'local knowledge' or 'culture'. But for the *Securitate* it was strategic knowledge. As we moved about in ways which they could not decipher, interacting with different groups of people who were considered to have access to strategic secrets (engineers, for example, or people who had ration cards for eggs!), we were finding out what *Secu* considered to be 'secrets'. We were seen as spies because our knowledge, they assumed, could be used by those whom the *Securitate* thought were

enemies of the regime (at home or abroad, including Hungary). Three of the secrets which we obtained, for example, was the secret of how inefficient the communist system was, how oppressive it was, and how clever Romanians were in getting around it. The relationship between authoritarian oppression and informal coping strategies is a theme in much of the work on Eastern Europe (cf. Wedel, 1986), and in many anthropological studies of marginalized groups. For the *Securitate*, however, our social science insights comprised secret knowledge, and knowing such a secret, or diffusing it to others, made us dangerous to them. Of course, the *Securitate* knew this secret already. They knew what we knew, and we knew that they knew. The problem was that they did not want anyone else to know. Ceaușescu's Romania was a regime of hierarchical knowledge supported by intimidation, coercion, suspicion and violence. It was a regime which made some people desperate to survive, even to the point of betraying others (Verdery, 2018). Inside this web, we were a bunch of Western anthropologists out there in the countryside running around talking to people, living and partaking of daily life with Romanians in villages, having intimate dinners with intellectuals, observing political meetings and walking alongside people as they worked their gardens, slaughtered pigs or celebrated weddings. What remains surprising is not that we were suspect, but that we were allowed to do this for so long. If I were one of *them*, I would not have let *me* in for the ten years that I managed to visit Romania. The reason we could run around, of course, is that our presence in Romania was part of a larger strategic relationship between the U.S. and Romania, allowing Romanian researchers and specialists to come to the U.S. (discussed in Kideckel and Sampson, 1984 and Sampson and Kideckel, 1988).

The Romanian Studies Community

Romanian Studies, like other kinds of 'area studies' has been marked by the triangular nature of the area studies community. Members of the three groups in this triangle each have their respective biography and career trajectory. One group are the foreign (non-Romanian) scholars who learn the language, culture and history for whatever academic reasons, and who have experienced Romania as adult researchers. I am one of these. Second, there is the local Romanian scholar, who has indigenous knowledge and upbringing in a specific local milieu; some of these local scholars have developed close connections with foreign scholars, while others remain ensconced in local enclaves due to language, political persuasion or an antipathy toward foreign researchers (Romania had a major gap between those local scholars who had relations with foreigners and those who did not; this is not purely an artefact of

knowing English, nor is it a Romanian phenomenon; here in Denmark there is a word applied to these locally anchored scholars, who are called 'world famous in Denmark'). The third point in this triangle is the émigré scholar, the formerly local scholar now living and working abroad who interacts with us foreigners, initially as a resource of local knowledge and subsequently as an equal. When I attended conferences of the Society for Romanian Studies in the 1980s, the participants brought together only foreign and émigré scholars (groups 1 and 3). In contrast, our conference in Bucharest in 2018 brought together all three groups (plus a fourth group which I will not deal with here: returned émigrés who after prolonged study or residence abroad, decide to return home and pursue local careers; obviously, this group did not exist before 1989).

Needless to say, during the 1980s, the *Securitate* knew how to cultivate all three groups mentioned above. Each of them have their own epistemologies and ontologies; their life course was different, their relationship to Romania, and to the authorities, was profoundly different, the way in which they could utilize their expertise was different as well. If you survey various area studies milieus – Romania, Balkans, East Asia, Pacific Islands, Lusofone studies, you name it – you will find many of the same configurations, sometimes tripartite, other times including the fourth group of returning émigrés. Communist Romania's relationship to its own intellectuals, to foreigners and to its émigrés was marked by the nature of the Romanian political regime. Romanian émigré intellectuals had a different status before 1989 and after. In this sense, 1989 marked a truly revolutionary change in this configuration, especially as concerns the role of the returned émigré who had studied or worked in the West and returned to teach in university, modernize the administration, run an NGO or re-enter cultural life.

The Advantage of Studying Small Places

Studying small, insignificant places – and, let's face it, that's what Romania has been and still is – may lead one to feel isolated. But it also has a somehow liberating character which is at once both intensely personal but vibrant. For those who study small places, the scholarly milieus are intimate, the networks smaller and more intense, generating both long-term friendships and intense hostilities. (An example: In 1986, I was fortunate to have the sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu at my home in Copenhagen. He lived in Bucharest, and had published critical articles abroad under a pseudonym. Casals. Over dinner, we discussed his work, and I gave him some of my articles on Romanian bureaucracy and the informal sector that I thought he might find of interest. Some days later, Câmpeanu informed me that he found my articles of interest and precisely for that reason that I should absolutely not call or visit him in Bucharest, for fear that I would be followed. In the meantime, I published a review of Câmpeanu's book

in the journal *Telos* with a number of criticisms (Sampson, 1986). In the 1990s, living and working in Bucharest, I learned that Câmpeanu was extremely angry about my review, and on the few occasions we encountered each other, his hostility was unmistakable. Such is the trajectory of friendships in socialism and post-socialism).

The liberating aspect of area studies of Romania is that it constitutes more of a community than one might encounter among scholars interested in, say, French literature, Italian Renaissance Art or British colonial economy in India. In the Romanian Studies community, everybody knows everybody; or can easily get in touch with them. The community of scholars is much smaller, even if it includes the scholars residing abroad and the local milieu. A further advantage of this small community is that it provides a base of operations for those who inevitably leave it to pursue other interests for a time, and then return. In a typical pattern, one has researched or attended conferences on Romania for some years, but has then pursued other academic or even vocational interests. But Romania hangs with you. Some years later you return 'home', finding some of the familiar faces, and some new ones.

Becoming an 'Expert'

When small, insignificant places suddenly get into the news, usually due to a political crisis, mass violence or disaster, our hedgehog expertise about Country X or Area Y suddenly becomes a commodity. It can be packaged, marketed, and disseminated in an interview or an op-ed piece or a popular book. A knowledge of Romanian language or history may push you into being a 'Romania expert' on a current crisis, for better or for worse. If you are an anthropologist, for example, with a knowledge of village life or household economy, you might end up with a journalist who wants you to talk about the 2017 anti-corruption demonstrations (which happened to me); in the 1990s, I had appeared in radio and TV discussions on how to make democracy in Eastern Europe. But I had also written articles about Transylvania, the Hungarian minority, Roma/Gypsies, and yes, about 'the real Dracula'. In a kind of rhizome fashion, my trajectory of expertise proceeded from life in a village in southern Transylvania in the 1970s, to explaining stagnation of the Ceaușescu regime in the 1980s, to how to make democracy in Romania in the 1990s, to civil society in the Balkans, to anticorruption NGOs in the 2000s. In this sense, area studies is full of risks: our hedgehog knowledge becomes fox-like. Our expertise gets pushed to the envelope, with the risk that we speak as dilettantes, or simply uninformed. My article on Dracula in Romania and in Dracula films (which I grew up with as a kid in my native Philadelphia), was severely criticized—not by historians but by Dracula film experts.

Let me summarize these four features of my career in Romanian studies. One was the idea of concretizing our mission, both in our academic field of study and to the security organs; the second was being enmeshed in this triangular group of Romanian Studies scholars with quite different biographies and career trajectories; the third was the subtle liberating character of knowing about a small, relatively insignificant place, a kind of nerd-liberation; and the fourth was the exhilaration and hazards of being thrust into the expert role. I think that Romanian Studies has been marked by all these four aspects in a uniquely Romanian way. I say 'uniquely Romanian' because there are plenty of situations where academics from abroad study small, relatively insignificant places; this is especially true for anthropologists, who study marginal groups in far-away places.

Learning From Another Small Place

So let me pursue these four points by making some contrasts between my own studies of Romania, some decades ago, and the current situation where I have been living: Denmark. I have lived and worked in Denmark for 40 years (for 20 years I have worked in Sweden, commuting daily by boat/train across the water). Denmark is a small country in Northern Europe, an EU and NATO member, notable for social welfare and political consensus. I happen to know Americans residing in the U.S., who, just like I was studying Romania, were studying Denmark. One of these Danish specialists was a professor at UMASS, where I myself studied. He was a specialist on Danish, and he called himself a 'Danist'. And back when I was thinking what I would do with a career as an anthropologist who studied Romania, he offered me some words of encouragement: 'My career', he said, 'has never gone wrong with me being a Danist'. He was a Danist. So if he could be a Danist, well, then I could be a Romanianist. A meeting of the Society of Romanian Studies is, after all, a meeting of Romanianists.

Since then, I have met a few other Danists. They are sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, International Relations scholars, welfare state theorists, historians, archaeologists, literary scholars and philosophers. If you are a Danist, you find yourself in this world of 'Scandinavian Studies'. I have attended Scandinavian Studies conferences, and they resemble Balkan Studies conferences. At Scandinavian Studies conferences, you meet specialists on topics such as Swedish film, Norwegian history, Viking archaeology, Danish philosophy, welfare state theory, Nordic media studies, etc. Like other kinds of area studies, Scandinavian and Danish studies has its collaboration and conflicts between three academic tribes: 1) the foreign scholars who have learned knowledge of a Scandinavian language and culture who come to Denmark, do their research and

then returned home to pursue careers; 2) local Danish scholars who invariably view the parachuting foreign researchers as a bit ill-informed, naïve or not sufficiently competent in the nuances of Danish language, culture and history ('they will never understand us'), but who nevertheless might provide them with resources, such as the invitation to hang out at Berkeley or Minnesota or Wisconsin; and, 3) the group of Danes and other Scandinavian émigrés living in the US and the UK who teach Scandinavian studies in British and American institutions (as voluntary exiles). Because of their language skills, academic reputation, organizational engagement and personal biographies, this third group of individuals has great influence in journal editing, publishing, organizing conferences and forming international collaboration arrangements. You might call them the Danish versions of professors Stephen Fischer-Galați, Vladimir Tismăneanu or Lavinia Stan (all prominent members of the Romanian Studies community, but who also have other specialties as well in their fields).

Scandinavian Studies and Romanian Studies thus share a number of structural similarities. I was one of these naïve foreign researchers who popped up in Romania 1974, settled in a village, learned the language and spent a lot of time with ordinary villagers learning about their lives, and then returned home. People like me have been the subject of much debate in anthropology. The Hungarian ethnologist Tamás Hofer (1968), several decades ago, made a very famous comparison of how we American anthropologists work, comparing us with home-grown European national ethnologists. He called us 'slash and burn' anthropologists, after the name for swidden cultures in New Guinea and elsewhere. We slash-and-burn anthropologists go into an area, cultivate it with the goal of making an important theoretical impact, and then we move on. Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict were Hofer's foils. (Mead worked in the Pacific, Benedict with North American Indians, but both later on did work on East Europe, and Benedict wrote a treatise on Romania). More recently, the Polish anthropologist Michal Buchowski (2004, 2012) has also made similar accusations of how East European scholarship has been overlooked by Western anthropologists. Within area studies generally, many foreigners are accused of being slash-and-burn scholars. Within our own communities, however, we are still more like hedgehogs, with our nerd-like interests in intimate details of far-away places which are not very strategically important. Most area scholars, including Romanianists, have experienced this combination of exhilaration in knowing a lot of things about a little place, and then the boredom or letdown when you find out that no one is really interested in Romania unless you can put a certain angle on it. The Danists have succeeded in putting this angle on Denmark. I therefore think Romanian studies might have something to learn from those who study the Scandinavian countries. Let me therefore take Denmark as an example.

Denmark is a small, insignificant, welfare state. It has the world's highest taxes. Its two major cultural figures are Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard. It gave us archaeologists such as P.V. Glob, linguists such as Hjelmslev, the writer Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen) and scientists such as H.C. Ørsted and Niels Bohr. They are the Danish equivalent of, say, Ionescu, Brâncusi, Coandă and Noica. Unlike Romania, Denmark has no natural resources to speak of. Instead, Denmark creates famous design of furniture, porcelain, and silver. Once in a while, Denmark makes the news, either because it has great restaurants (the world's number 1 restaurant Noma, which among other things serves ants); or because it has good TV detective dramas (such as 'The Bridge' or 'The Killing'), or because it has a strict immigration policy (requiring asylum seekers to surrender their jewelry or banning burkas in public). In the presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton once said 'We are not Denmark', a statement which was front-page Danish news. Trump officials have also spoken of socialism in Denmark, which led the Danish government officials to issue a rebuttal statement. In one of Philip Roth's earlier novels, the satire *Our Gang*, President Tricky E. Dixon actually bombs Denmark. Recently, Denmark has become famous for its concept of cozy personal well-being known as '*hygge*'.

Denmark is also interesting for academic reasons. In the International Relations literature, Denmark is discussed in terms of its international role far out of proportion to its small size. In history and economics, scholars analyze Denmark's peaceful social and agricultural revolution, which retained the small farmer in an advanced economy. In welfare studies, scholars discuss Denmark's 'flexicurity' system whereby firms can easily hire and fire workers, the lack of any minimum wage, generous welfare provisions and high unemployment benefits. Corruption researchers comment on Denmark being the world's least corrupt country, a consequence of its high level of social trust. Happiness researchers point to Denmark as among the world's happiest countries.

Danish intellectual entrepreneurs and Danists around the world have cultivated Danish uniqueness in these areas. Hence, with generous state contributions, Denmark has a Hans Christian Andersen Institute, a Kierkegaard Research Center, a Center for Welfare History, and a Center for Happiness Research. Civil society expert Robert Putnam has participated in projects researching the high level of social trust in Denmark. There are research projects on why Denmark is not corrupt, and Denmark proudly hosted the International Anti-Corruption Conference in 2018. And Francis Fukuyama's book, *Origins of Political Order* equates successful state building with an institution-building journey he calls 'Getting to Denmark'. Now these kinds of academic enterprises – H.C. Andersen, Kierkegaard, Welfare History, Happiness Research, Social Trust - do not exist in Romania. Nor do they exist anywhere else in this particular form;

they are specifically Danish. The reason is that Danish politicians, cultural personalities and academics are concerned with what the world says about Denmark. *So are the Danists*, for obvious reasons. The Danish elite is interested that the world sees Denmark as welfare-oriented, as uncorrupt, that people feel 'happy', that there is social cohesion, political consensus, and that it retains a national tasteful furniture design and has '*hygge*' (a book about *hygge* has been translated into Romanian). So Denmark thus has its own '*La noi ca la nimeni*' (Nobody has it the way we have it) discourse. The Danish '*La noi ca la nimeni*' is quite different from Romania's '*La noi ca la nimeni*' discussion. It is not a lament, a *doină*; it is not melancholic or cynical. Rather the Danish discourse of uniqueness is about what the world sees in Denmark, about what is valuable in Denmark, about what the world can learn from Denmark, and what Denmark can give back to the world. It is about Danish exceptionalism in a quite different way than, say Lucian Boia's view of Romanian '*altfelitatea*' (exceptionalism). This image of Denmark did not come out of nowhere. It came because there were Danists who were pushing it, Danists who were pushing Denmark so that people like Robert Putnam or Francis Fukuyama would take a closer look. The Danists had a mission. And it is this mission I think we Romanianists can learn from.

Conclusions: Making Romania Interesting

Let me conclude with a challenge. The challenge for we Romanianists (and for Romanian Studies) is to reflect upon how does the world see Romania? What can Romania give back to the world? Here Romanianists have a special task, not only as academic researchers, but as intellectual entrepreneurs. The task is not just to say good things about Romania in order to offset the bad things. It is to make Romania intellectually attractive. One example would be the work of the citizenship scholar Rogers Brubaker, collaborating with Romanian colleagues in his study of ethnicity and nationalism in Cluj (Brubaker et al., 2006).

Small places like Romania are always going to be used. They are going to be exploited by policymakers, stereotyped by journalists and slash-and-burned by careerist academics. There are always going to be fractures between the ambitious foreign researchers, the envious local scholars who feel overlooked, and the émigrés trying to achieve their career goals and recognition both at home and abroad. When Hillary Clinton, reacting to Bernie Sanders' praise of the Danish welfare system, declared 'We are not Denmark', the Danes were not offended. They felt relieved. Danes do not want Denmark to become America. They want to hear people like Putnam or Fukuyama talk about 'Getting to Denmark'.

No politician I know has uttered the phrase 'We are not Romania' (although with Romania's EU presidency taking place in 2019, this might change). And a slogan like 'Getting to Romania' would certainly have a different echo these days than 'Getting to Denmark'. In both cases, however, the role of the area studies scholars, the Danists and the Romanianists, remains crucial in influencing the kind of discourse about the country they study. Slogans like 'Getting to Denmark' are cheap talk, of course. But in the nature of academic fashion, such talk can lead to intellectual cooperation, institutional collaboration, and yes, grant money! 'Getting to Denmark' can be the magic bullet. The task of Romanian studies is to undertake this kind of project, to make the world see Romania, its lights and shadows, and to show what Romania can give back to the world. When you become a Romania expert – by design or by accident -you take on a mission. We hedgehogs need to become foxes. We need to make Romania interesting to others. *Hai să facem! Trăiască Romanian Studies!* (C'mon let's do it. Long Live Romanian Studies!)

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