Workshop

Doing Fieldwork in Socialist Eastern Europe: Methodology, Ethics and Engagement

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The University of Fribourg

-Book of abstracts-

Settling pond, Roşia Poieni copper mine, Romania

Chris Hann, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle / Saale
How Far Is Tázlár From Budapest?

The answer is roughly 130 kilometres. When serendipity led me to this community on the Danube-Tisza interfluve in 1976, it sometimes seemed further. Communications have not improved significantly in the intervening half century, but my concern in this lecture is not with measuring the length and duration of a journey. Recollections of past fieldwork are shaped and reshaped by later visits and by the state of the world today. The economy, politics and society of the Hungarian countryside were transformed in the 1990s. I shall look back to the 1970s and suggest that in some significant ways the distance between what I found in Tázlár then and what I experienced in various milieus in Budapest was actually smaller than the chasm which separates village from capital in the 2020s.

Carol Silverman, University of Oregon
Ethnographic Research about/with Roma during/after Socialism: Methodological and Ethical Strategies

This presentation traces my changing research methodologies, logistical challenges, and ethical quandaries working with Roma in the Balkans. In the 1970s I considered myself a documenter and analyst, and in no way an activist; there were few published works about Roma to consult and no models of engaged research to follow. I became politicized because ethnicity and religion were politicized. In socialist Bulgaria, for example, the Romani music I was studying was prohibited, and thus I analyzed state repression and countercultural resistance to it. After 1989, migration emerged as a theme in my research as I followed Roma seeking refuge in the diaspora. Today I am involved with Balkan Roma in a transnational kinship network including the US and several countries in western Europe. I now approach research from multiple locations with the collaborative guidance of community members.
Numerous ethical questions have arisen from my shifting positionalities. Whereas during socialism, I called myself a folklorist but was often configured as a "spy," today I label myself a scholar/activist. Whereas during socialism I faced numerous institutional constraints, today my non-Romani identity poses questions about my role, as Roma take charge of their own scholarship. Racism has been a constant but has assumed various forms, currently visible in xenophobia, evictions, harassment, and physical violence, both in the Balkans and diaspora locations. Analyzing how I strive to use my professional and privileged position for advocacy and collaboration, I point out failures and successes, with their accompanying dilemmas.

Raluca Mateoc, University of Fribourg
Revisiting Romanian rural socialism via three memory frames

Ethnicity, planning of rural areas, folklore, household economy, with the state-enforced collectivization of agriculture (1949-1962) and emerging property regimes at the forefront are some of the sub-themes informing the examination of Romanian rural socialism (1945-1989) in post-socialist anthropological work. By challenging the established temporalities in the study of Romanian rural socialism, this study explores the nexus of three memory fields within a Western Romanian countryside. First, oral history addresses new themes in relation to specific triggers at the interviewing time (different migrations, elections, or post-restitution land use). Second, archival documents are viewed as social fields which leave ground for exploring the vocabulary of repressive institutions but also gender roles, work hierarchies or everyday village atmosphere. Third, permanent and temporary exhibitions within local museums are discussed in terms of memorial practices such as chosen display themes and educational, artistic, and justice-making roles. The

three ethnographic resources are addressed epistemologically (in relation to the "farewell" to the postsocialism concept), topically (in connection to environment studies, political ecology, or the anthropology of infrastructure which currently inform studies of Romanian countryside) and methodologically (when field experiences are converted into artistic experimentation and performative exchange).

Takahiro Miyachi, University of Tokyo
Political anthropology and entangled socialism in the 21st century Bolivia

Socialism (or socialismo in Spanish and Portuguese) has been one of the most debated political concepts in Latin America in the present century. The tarnished and obsolete image of socialism, caused mainly by the collapse of Eastern Europe communist regimes and the Soviet Union around 1990, was considerably overcome with the increase of discontent toward neoliberalism, which was the principle of public policies for restructuring Latin American countries trapped in economic quagmire in the last quarter of the previous century. As a matter of fact, Latin American radical left presidents, backed by this ideological tide turn among the people, held equality, solidarity, sovereignty, and other values as goals of "socialism of the 21st century".
This presentation will focus on Bolivian case and cover the following three topics:
(1) how did Evo Morales administration of Movimiento al Socialismo (2006-2019) justify its "socialist" political projects by mobilizing collective memories related to Bolivian multitudes and, by doing this, how did the official "socialism" become full of contradictions?
(2) how do representative works of political anthropology evaluate Morales administration and what alternatives do they envision for future Bolivia?
(3) what do the logic of Morales' official socialism and that of the anthropologists mentioned in (2) have in common?

François Rüegg, University of Fribourg
Bounded by the Nation state

For those who studied "material culture" in the 70s in Romania, the main obstacle was more ideological than political. "Culture" had to be considered as an exclusive national heritage. Its study was placed under the control of national institutions controlled themselves by the State ideology. Hence the challenge was cultural nationalism and the absence of any comparative study, outside the national borders. But since that was also the case in most of Western European national Institutions dealing with Ethnography and Folklore, the real conflict was a disciplinary one, confronting ethnography and cultural/social anthropology.
The same applies for the methods. Invasive ethnography was a national tradition since the interwar period in Romania. Village ethnography missions consisted in massive interrogations lead by "delegations" of "experts" in different topics, with in view the production of the national Ethnographic Atlas and other manuals and monographies. This is why, after being part of such a mission, I preferred to conduct my research alone.
After 1989, ethnographers converted to cultural/social anthropology tried to adapt to the new Western post-colonial trends in cultural and social anthropology, focusing on minorities, notably the Roma, and criticizing nation-state majorities which tended to monopolize research. Similarly, to constraints imposed by the EU on the new candidates, Romania and Bulgaria, academic pressure was exerted by foreign scholars on national ethnographers and folklorists: to be a part of international research programmes, they had to follow their western colleagues interests and the

contemporary anthropological trends. Only a very few "native" scholars dared researching abroad, and when doing so, most of the time they chose their own emigrated community.

Steven Sampson, Lund University
Fii attent (Watch out!) Surveillance and Intimacy in Ethnographic Research

Several articles in the *Recalling Fieldwork* collection discuss the role of state surveillance and how it affected our ethnographic fieldwork. This was certainly the case in my own research in Romania in the decade from 1974-1985, where my secret police (Securitate) file ended up being over 600 pages long, and where I was blacklisted in 1985 due to hostile activities. Other ethnographers had similar experiences. Here I would like to use these discussions and connect the role of surveillance with the ethnographic project of achieving some kind of intimacy with the people we study. By 'intimacy' I mean the method whereby we ethnographers use our very self, our person, as the primary instrument for understanding how people live their lives. In the socialist states, with their surveillance apparatus, most ethnographers were able to overcome these barriers and achieve some kind of intimacy with the people they studied. Here I will talk about three kinds of surveillance and how it affected different kinds of intimacy: 1) the familiar state surveillance carried out by secret police against us and our informants; 2) the peer-to-peer surveillance experienced by all ethnographers who immerse themselves in small communities where everyone seems to know everything about you and you about them; and 3) the self-surveillance that we conducted as we tried to figure out what was going on, whom to trust, what trust meant, and our subsequent guilt as we learned about the effect of our presence on innocent citizens and the information they provided about us. The three kinds of surveillance entailed different kinds of intimacy, both overlapping and contradictory. As fieldworkers, all anthropologists are looking for intimacy. But there is a dark side to even the closest relationships. To find the solution to this dilemma, we need to start asking some painful questions. We need to 'fii attent' (watch out/pass auf).

Gerald Creed, City University of New York
The Traffic in Social(ist) Relations

Long term fieldwork is a defining hallmark of anthropology. While there are many reasons anthropologists stay in the locales we study for extended periods, including the need to observe the annual round, and the aspiration to gain an insider's (emic) perspective, one of the main (and often unstated) reasons is to get to know the people we're studying. To put this directly, and ungenerously, we traffic in social relations. We invest time, and sometimes resources, to get to know our interlocutors well enough to learn things they would not reveal to a stranger, or even an acquaintance. This is one of the unique values of anthropological methods. Managing social relations is always a delicate matter, but the socialist context of Eastern Europe in the 1980s added particular dimensions to this dynamic. In this contribution I reflect on how my relationships and interactions in Bulgaria were colored by the socialist milieu. I suggest that aspects of socialism both facilitated and restricted my social relations. More specifically, I suggest that I cultivated a sort of double consciousness, viewing my presentation of self, what I was doing, and my relations with others, through the lens of imagined or known socialist authorities.

Ketevan Khutsishvili, Tbilisi State University
Anthropological fieldwork in Soviet Georgia: the "complex-intensive research method"

This contribution outlines the social and political embeddedness of the Georgian ethnological school founded by Giorgi Chitaia (1890-1986) and his newly developed "complex-intensive" method. As in the whole Soviet Union, the only ideological approach was Marxism-Leninism; scholars were obliged to follow the evolutionary methodology. Although synchronic in some respect, his attitude was historical-comparative and thus oriented to revealing the diachronic info-connections of "ethnographic realities", i.e. the line of development. Contradictions were interpreted as permanent tensions between the new and the old. Chitaia stressed the importance of systematically gathered "real ethnographic facts", which can only be collected during ethnographic fieldwork in combination with archaeological and historical data. The method found wide and extensive application by the representatives of Chitaias' school. As a result of many expeditions, a great number of data was collected, some of them published, but most of them preserved in the archives of the institutions. Georgian ethnographers in this tradition preferred to study a small district intensively than "ethnographic realities" on a large territory. Chitaia's method and concept of ethnological research later became the foundation of the next generation of Georgian Soviet anthropology in the late Soviet period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the method was not abandoned but transformed in terms of ideological, institutional and methodological background.

Petr Skalník, University of Wrocław
Doing social anthropology in Central Europe before and after the fall of communism

The span of my research in three central European communes is full 50 years. While doing social anthropology in Šuňava (northern Slovakia) was a semi-clandestine individual activity with reluctant support by my then employer, follow up study in the same commune after 1990 was self-financed but locally welcome and appreciated by both officials and villagers. On the other hand the project of a complex social anthropological and sociological re-study of Dolní Roveň (East Bohemia, Czech Republic) was carried out in the years 2002-2004 by three major researchers and a host of students of social anthropology from the University of Pardubice with the support of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. Another re-study was carried out in Opole Silesia in the years 2015-2019 with the financial support of Polish Narodowe Centrum Nauki. The seven researchers were experienced scholars who intermittently spent weeks and months in the commune of Dobrzeń Wielki in order to examine the social impact of the contruction of a giant power station. During the research five villages and the power station were incorporate into the city of Opole against the will of the citizens of Dobrzeń Wielki. The paper will compare the conditions for research in each of the communes and discuss also the ethical implications of the research during communism and in post-communism.

Gheorghiță Geană, „Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropological Research Centre of the Romanian Academy
Fieldwork as a Multiple Challenge

One of the most important changes that marked the evolution of anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was its passing from an "armchair" enterprise to a scientific approach based on "fieldwork". More or less spontaneously practised until Malinowski, the fieldwork became later on a *sine qua non* component of the concept of scientific anthropology itself. At a simple comparison, the field seems to be for an anthropologist what the

laboratory of experiences is for a physicist or a specialist in chemistry. Nevertheless, the field research implies a set of multiple challenges. Just from the beginning, the researcher leaves their familial milieu in order to spend long enough time (one year as a rule) within "other culture". This crossing the Rubicon is a genuine test for the researcher's capabilities of adaptation to the new life conditions – both natural and sociocultural; however, while the natural conditions can be anticipated by information about the geoclimatical constants, the sociocultural ones remain unknown at least until the real contact with the population to be studied. In Romania, two peculiar aspects were added to these general conditions of adaptation soon after the "cultural anthropology" was introduced as a new paradigm, in 1964: first, the misunderstanding around this domain, often taken for either the philosophy of culture or the simple ethnography and folklore studies; secondly, the risk for the supporters of the new paradigm of being accused of falling under the influence of Western values. In my case, a supplementary challenge was the reorientation from the metaphysical concerns to the study of human concrete problems. Finally, I understood that fieldwork does not bring about only ephemeral scientific experiences, but also memorable life stories, referential sequences in the biography of any researcher devoted to anthropology.