

A COMMENTARY ON THE LIMITS OF EUROPEANIZATION*

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ABSTRACT

The studies assembled in *Universitatis Sapientiae – Social Analysis*, 4: (1–2)/2014 comprise a multiplicity of themes and assorted research perspectives on the process commonly known as “Europeanization”. Despite their diversity, their analytical common denominator is that they highlight the conceptual and heuristic limits of the dominant convergence paradigm. Officially endorsed by EU institutions, this social-scientific paradigm focuses on overcoming differences in levels of regional development. It is also characterized by a uniform approach regarding disparities in development levels and towards the progress of convergence. More specifically, it focuses primarily on quantitative indicators. By contrast, this volume engages with a host of hitherto neglected issues such as the local differences and specificities that developed within the convergence process. These include, but are not limited to: the emergence of a distinct type of “post-peasant” society in the Romanian rural milieu, the practice of ethnography in the archives of the Romanian secret police, as well drug policy in Hungary from the 1970s through the 1990s. My objective here is to provide a critical précis and commentary to some of the studies collected in this volume.

Keywords: Europeanization, convergence, post-peasant society, Romanian secret police, drug policy.

The studies assembled in this special issue of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae – Social Analysis*, edited by Juliana Bodó, propose alternative heuristic frameworks for understanding what is commonly known as the process of “Europeanization”. The dominant paradigm, officially endorsed by EU institutions, focuses on the issue of “convergence”, namely the political, legal, administrative, economic, and

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statistical indicators that point to the reduction of regional disparities pertaining to the level of development¹. However, Bodó rightly observes that the social and cultural processes that occur in the post-socialist region are not always translatable and need to be understood in their own terms. After all, it is merely plain good sense to argue, as the editor does in the Foreword, that the encounter between the global and the local leads not only to “uniformity and homogenization”, but also to the occurrence of new forms of cultural differentiation. These equally pertain to the “identity structures” of groups and localities, as well as to “models of life conduct” and behavioral patterns (p. 5).

Accordingly, this multiplicity of themes requires assorted research perspectives and methodologies. Most approaches employed in this small, yet intellectually rich volume, are drawn from the field of cultural anthropology. These are leavened with sociological methods and insights drawn from the historical record, particularly as they pertain to continuities and/or discontinuities between the “real socialist” and post-socialist period. What follows, therefore, is a critical précis and commentary to some of the studies contained in the volume. Given the broad thematic range of the volume, these studies were selected according to this reviewer’s academic interest and competence in addressing the subject matter.

Therefore we begin with Vintilă Mihăilescu’s study, entitled “Săteni. A Diffuse Household in a Post-Peasant Society”. Therein the author attempts to encapsulate the post-socialist evolution of the Romanian rural social milieu into what might be termed a “post-peasant” society. Methodologically speaking, this transformation is traced through the evolving self-perception and self-representation of the author’s informants, who aspire to overcome the historical status of “peasant”. These identity changes are underpinned by transformations in the domestic economy and social relations of the “diffuse household”, which Mihăilescu characterizes as an “ambivalent” yet nonetheless typical “locative and occupational social category” that emerged during the period of communist rule. What characterizes a “diffuse household”, the author clarifies, is that its members work both in and out of the household, combining both social capital and economic resources as strategies for upward socio-economic mobility or during life setbacks. Such households also entail a social division of labor amongst its members (p. 31, 37–38).

¹ Typical examples of convergence-orientated social-scientific literature include Aurel Iancu, *Transition, Integration and Convergence. The Case of Romania* (București: Institutul Național de Cercetări Economice “Costin C. Kirițescu”, 2010), available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2528526>; Geoffrey Pridham, “Political Elites, Domestic Politics and Democratic Convergence with the European Union: The Case of Romania during Accession”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 23: (4)/2007, p. 525–457, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523270701674616>; Monica Raileanu Szeles and Nicolae Marinescu, “Real convergence in the CEECs, euro area accession and the role of Romania”, *The European Journal of Comparative Economics*, 7:(1)/2010, p. 181–202, available at <http://search.proquest.com/openview/debe8098c0e1c82758f8ac8ae2dd36ec/1?pq-origsite=gscholar>.

It is further worth noting that the argument is structured around a longitudinal study capturing the typological changes of one household (the Apetrei household). The Apetrei household's socio-economic function(s) and internal mode of organization are regarded as "typical" for diffuse households (see p. 38–40). In turn, the very emergence of new socio-economic and locative categories is embedded within and captured throughout the article by the village of Săteni. The village of Săteni is an heuristic construct akin to a Weberian ideal-type, one which dramatizes "the pattern of relations in recent rural Romania" (p. 31–32).

The Apetrei household contained at least three families, and Mihăilescu provides a fairly dense description of the life trajectories of some of its principal members. This description edifies the social history of the household by evidencing how the social relations within the household, as well the members' social status in the community has changed in response to market dynamics and opportunities for migration. Mihăilescu is particularly sensitive to the ways in which generational and economic divisions structure kinship within the "domestic unit (p. 34, 38). The concept of the "good householder" as a marker of both ethos and achievement is a nexus for economic allocation and legitimizes the flexibility of entrepreneurial/survival strategies within a family, as well within a broader social sphere.

One important aspect of the study is that it traces the emergence of new types of social capital. It is through their economic role and changing status within these evolving social networks that the members of the Apetrei household construct their new, "post-peasant" identities. One female informant, for example, left school after completing only 10 grades and migrated to Austria. Though her relationship with her Austrian employer-cum-prospective husband did not work out, one gathers that she came back to Săteni with a respectable sum of money. Having regrettably spent the money too quickly, she then moved to Bucharest to work in a bar. The salary was miserable so she had rough time of it until another salutary opportunity emerged through someone from a neighboring village. This person introduced the informant to yet another older, rich Austrian with whom she lived for a period of time (p. 36). After finally settling in Săteni, our female protagonist married an entrepreneurially-minded kinsman and started running a convenience store.² She gradually assumed the role of a "modern business woman", often acting as a "modernizing factor" in the household (p. 39). Indeed, an entrepreneurial mindset appears to be fairly widespread throughout the Apetrei household.

The household itself is part of a burgeoning, official "agro-tourism" network, while individual members pursue other potentially profitable activities such as woodworking and bee-keeping. By the end of the story, our protagonist couple even manages to relocate in a new house away from the outskirts of the Gypsy quarter, not least in part thanks to their robust contribution to electioneering (p. 42–43).

² From Mihăilescu's account we might infer that the couple consisted in fact of cousins, since in 2005 they "started building a new house on their grandmother's land" (p. 34).

In conclusion, although the formation of new types of social capital is well documented and constitutes a captivating story in itself, this study might have benefitted from a more rigorous, inductively theorized definition of these social networks.

By contrast, Katherine Verdery's contribution, entitled "Ethnography in the Securitate Archive", is drawn from her recent book *Secrets and Truth: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*.³ The study provides a dense though commentary relative to the edifying of the institutional architecture of the Securitate, its hermeneutic, truth-producing, and subject-making epistemic practices. In regards to hermeneutics, there is a double thrust. First, the reading of the strategies dictated to the Securitate itself by its logics of producing knowledge. Secondly, elucidating some of the cognitive schemes that shape scholarly interpretations at some historical distance in post-socialism. For this reviewer, what stand out are the pedagogical practices (in the subject-making sense) of the Securitate, the conspirative quality and structure of the institution, as well as the complicated truth-producing agency of its files. While Verdery emphasizes the "postmodernist" nature of the composite identities produced and then reified by a diachronic assemblage of files, this excerpt merely alludes yet seldom elaborates upon the modes in which Securitate categories and practices constructed social reality on a truly societal scale (see p. 20–21, 22–23).

We might therefore regard the Securitate as a microhistorical example of a well-developed and well-internalized form of panopticality. For Verdery, the institutional logic behind seemingly wasteful strategies that duplicate the collection of information and the recruitment of collaborators has to do with a conspiratorial epistemology and mode of institutional organization. Not reducible to a division of labor, this compartmentalization is a fundamental aspect of how intelligence work is organized and carried out, with Securitate being an extreme case (p. 13–15). Yet Verdery only asks but does not answer the question, at least in this excerpt, of whether the duplication of work undertaken by the different Securitate departments in order to gather information and recruit informants "denotes a pedagogical practice". The purpose here would be to "train as many people" as possible in the particular process of producing information, while the method would consist in teaching people to repeat and circulate "a limited set of categories and techniques" (p. 14).

To this, I argue, the answer must be a categorical "yes". For Verdery, the Securitate's subject-making is to be found in the production of known targets in its files. Yet this equally applies to the selves molded by the aforementioned pedagogical process, and, radiating outwards into society at large, of selves perpetually on guard.

³ Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truth: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013). NB: This reviewer has read only the portion published in the present volume, but not the entire book.

This is because the “conspirativity” of the Securitate was itself embedded in, and generative of various folk types of knowledge and quotidian concerns. This would entail doing a third type of hermeneutics, namely that of the apprehensive (or apprehending) self-policing subject – panopticality also produced by the “conspirativity” of the Securitate apparatus. Though Verdery carefully details the workings of “conspirativity” as a structuring mechanism for the entire institution of the Securitate, this study only extends the analysis to its social uses during the post-1989 period. One might note, however, that, under a more capacious description, “conspirativity” could be characterized as ubiquitous, exerting a powerful grip upon the social imaginary during the late Socialist period. It is important to note, however, that, according to one reviewer of Verdery’s book, there is a separate, subsequent chapter with a potentially more fruitful social bent. This chapter is described as looking at how the knowledge-production technologies of the Securitate became integral to the Communist regime’s goal of scientifically managing social life.⁴

What is illuminating in Verdery’s analysis is that the subject-making capabilities of the Securitate’s epistemic apparatus enacted an assemblage of human subjects and non-animated files, the latter endowed themselves with agency (p. 21). During the “really-existing” Socialism, the fetishization of files provided a self-evident *raison d’être* for the Securitate, and, just as importantly, enhanced its mystique. At the same time, this had the effect of diminishing the Securitate’s panoptical capacities. The often inadequate communication between various branches of the apparatus, as well as the heteroglossic, open-ended nature of each file led to the absence of a truly summative perspective.

On the other hand, Verdery frames the fetishization of the files in a post-1989 context. She critiques the reading strategies that seek to compare files with the lived experience of “targets” and “collaborators”. As such, she also questions their utility in any potential process of lustration, since new modes of fetishizing these files have emerged. For example, the simple presence of persons on the record might be enough to taint them, thereby rendering the files “not fully agents but mere accomplices” (p. 23), as in the Czechoslovak case. In sum, this is a very good contribution, not least because it poses further questions and opens up stimulating lines of inquiry.

On her part, Ezster Zsófia Tóth looks of how the Hungarian communist regime sought to scientifically manage humans in the area of public health, more specifically drug use. Her study is entitled, “Dr. Bubó and his Clients. Drug Use and Drug Policy in Hungary from 1970 through the 1990. Translating Health in Doctor-Patient Relationships”. The author eschews both Foucauldian and symbolic

⁴ Alexandra Urdea, “Of Spies and Ethnographers”. Review of Verdery, *Secrets and Truth: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania’s Secret Police*, H-Romania, H-Net Reviews. January, 2016, available at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44582>.

interactionist approaches towards the subject matter. Such approaches would have centered on the modalities in which drug users were cast as invisible, stigmatized and/or marginalized, particularly during the “real socialist” period. Instead, Tóth provides us with a straightforward, well-documented and multi-dimensional description of the “translation and transfer and of knowledge in medical cultures of prevention in Hungary” during the time period identified in the title (p. 131). The evidence presented comprises newspapers, archival sources, and oral history interviews with doctors and clients. Accordingly, the article focuses on the changes in drug habit, drug policy, and methods of drug rehabilitation.

Tóth shows that the Hungarian authorities were aware of a burgeoning drug issue during the 1970s and especially during the 1980s, when many people started drinking tea made out of poppy seeds and the infamous Polish “compote”, whose recipe was introduced by Polish tourists. Other popular methods of getting high were sniffing glue out of a bag, but especially the abuse of prescription drugs which were often mixing with alcohol (p. 132). Significantly, there was scant mention of drug use in the public and political discourse. Because drug use was treated primarily as a matter of policing, during this time period there was no comprehensive public health policy designed to address the issue. What methods of rehabilitation existed were patterned on those used to help alcoholics and prioritized addressing the physical addiction. By the mid-1980s, however, some scant progress had been made with the creation of a couple of drug centers. These facilities offered day care and longer inpatient services longer than the usual hospital treatments (p. 112).

What is conspicuously absent from the author’s account of drug policy during the period of Communist rule is the question of whether self-help groups such a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) tried to emerge and, if so, how did the authorities regard them? The author does not tell us, for example that Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), on which NA is closely modeled, already had a presence in Hungary by the late 1980s.⁵ Although the context in which self-help groups emerged (or tried to emerge) obviously varied amongst the various countries of the former Eastern Block, this article would have been even stronger had the author undertaken even a brief comparison to what was occurring in neighboring countries.

In the Czechoslovakian case, for example, AA was viewed with suspicion by the authorities because of its belief in a higher power which was at odds with Communist ideology. More popular and arguably more effective was the officially-endorsed, self-help organization named KLUS (*Klub léčených u Skály*) [Club of People Treated by Skála]. KLUS used and continues to use self-help principles and

⁵ Roman Gabrheľic and Michal Mikovsky, “History of Self-Help and ‘Quasi-Self-Help’ Groups in the Czech Republic: Development and Current Situation in the Institutional Context of Drug Services”, *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 4: (3)/2009, 142, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15560350903038718>.

mutual support, yet its sessions have been led primarily by addiction professionals.⁶ The Czechoslovakian case might go some ways towards explaining the dearth of Hungarian self-help groups for drug users during the Socialist period. The handing of drug dependency as a police matter might be explained not only by the illegal and/or controlled nature of the substances consumed by the users. Just as importantly, organization such as NA seek to safeguard the anonymity of its members in order to shield them from social stigma and promote what they describe as a “spiritual”, Twelve Step path towards recovery. In itself this would have been sufficient to elicit the suspicious of the Hungarian Communist authorities, who were naturally inclined to regards such groups as potentially subversive.

In Hungary, the real change in the scale and pattern of drug use, as well as in public health responses, occurred at the beginning of the 1990s. It was Albanian dealers who spearheaded the sale of heroin on a large scale, and this was shortly followed by the appearance of speed from Polish, Hungarian and Dutch Sources (p. 135). Faced with a growing public health problem, the authorities responded with a growing number of drug clinics and by introducing methadone treatment. However, since the number of existing hospitals and clinics was already inadequate, the 1990s did not see the development of a public health infrastructure capable of helping the large number of addicts seeking help (p. 135). Organizations such as NA also appeared and multiplied due to their ability to function openly and freely, thereby offering an additional measure of hope.

Be that as it may, it is clear that by the 1990s Hungary was well on its way towards achieving a type of “convergence” with Western European countries in terms of public health problems. Evidently, this was not the kind of “convergence” policy makers in Bruxelles and Budapest had in mind. Yet this is itself a powerful argument for the need to continue elaborating new types of analytical approaches toward “Europeanization”. In this sense, this volume constitutes an excellent step in the right direction.

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