

Diana Benea

University of Bucharest, Romania
diana.benea@lils.unibuc.ro
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4178-1651>

“What’s in a Name?”

The Institutionalization of American Studies in Romania

The present article sets out to analyze the emergence and institutionalization of American Studies as an academic discipline in Romania, with a focus on the specific contexts and factors that influenced this process, and the ways in which its practitioners defined, constructed, and focused their endeavors. Taking the University of Bucharest as a case study and adding insights from other Romanian universities, the paper seeks to give an account of: 1) the ways in which the several decades-long tradition of teaching American literature in the Communist period (sporadically until the 1960s, but ever more substantially in the following decades) prepared the ground for the institutionalization of American Studies programs; 2) the “conditions of possibility” that enabled this institutionalization after the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, with an emphasis on the restructuring of the Romanian higher education system, on the one hand, and the specific renegotiations of the field of American Studies, on the other; 3) American Studies curriculum development and its impact on Romanian academia as an example of curricular reform in the spirit of interdisciplinarity; 4) the situated contributions that Romanian Americanists have made to international scholarship in American Studies by bringing new research agendas to the fore.

Key words: institutionalization; American Studies; Romania; curriculum development; post-Communism; higher education reform; situated research

How does “the new” emerge in the history of academic disciplines? How is new knowledge produced through research and how is it subsequently codified and transmitted in new study programs? How do social, political, and institutional contexts shape the construction of scientific knowledge? And to zoom in on the specific concerns of this article, what are the specific challenges of institutionalizing a discipline that was created within the interstices of other disciplines and defined through its object of analysis, i.e., America, rather than specific methods? Furthermore, what are the particular difficulties of engaging in this process when the field

itself is undergoing radical restructurings and paradigm shifts? To further complicate matters, what version of America should be relevant for a country enmeshed in a complicated process of transition to democracy after the overthrow of the most repressive political regime in the former Eastern bloc?

Adapting the famous question at the core of Janice Radway's Presidential Address to the American Studies Association on November 20, 1998, this article fundamentally asks: "What's in a Name" when it comes to the development of American Studies in Romania? Focusing on the University of Bucharest as a case study, the first part of the article provides an overview of the "prehistory" of the discipline, from the first courses in American literature of the late 1940s to the launching of a pioneering course in American civilization in the late 1980s. The second part is devoted to an institutional history of the founding and development of graduate and undergraduate programs in American Studies at the University of Bucharest, highlighting their overall vision and specific curricular structure, while also addressing the particularities of similar programs launched at other Romanian universities, such as the A.I. Cuza University of Jassy, the Ovidius University of Constanța, the West University of Timișoara, the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj, or the Transilvania University of Brașov. This process of institutionalization is necessarily situated within the double context of higher education reform in post-Communist Romania, on the one hand, and the shifting contours of the field of American Studies, on the other. Finally, the third part of this history examines a particularly productive research area of American Studies in Romania, hitherto unexplored in the international field: the analysis of post-Communist Cold War cultural spaces through the lens of transatlantic dialogues and connections. This signature body of research is regarded as translating into practice Radway's call for an awareness and preservation of "the ways in which knowledges are themselves particular and situated, that is, generated in, and relevant to, specific contexts and histories" (Radway 23).

From American Literature to American Studies: A Prehistory of an Academic Discipline

The English Chair at the University of Bucharest was founded in 1936, in a historical and political context in which the newly founded British Council was promoting Great Britain's interests in Romania through cultural diplomacy efforts (Stefanidis 132). With a teaching staff of two, Brit John Burbank and his assistant Ana Cartianu, the Chair offered a curriculum oriented towards the acquisition of linguistic skills and, to a lesser degree, towards developing an understanding and appreciation of the traditions of British literature, mostly through *explication de texte* seminars. From such modest beginnings, the teaching of literature quickly went on to become an increasingly substantial component of the curriculum, as reflected in the qualitative and quantitative shift from the close reading mode of the late 1930s to the six-semester survey course inaugurated after the Reform of Education of 1948, which covered the entire history of British literature (Dumitriu, "English Studies" 63-64). However, for obvious political reasons, American writers were taught only sporadically in the first two decades of the department's existence, despite scholarly interest in this area

on the part of such professors as Dragoș Protopopescu,¹ who took over from Burbank as holder of the Chair in October 1940, shortly before the British legation withdrew from Romania. The first course in American literature, with the broad title *The Idea of Man in American Literature*, was offered immediately after the 1948 reform by Professor Mihnea Gheorghiu,² who succeeded Protopopescu as Head of what was now the English Department. Designed in accordance with the politicized, ideological canon of the time and "the publications of Soviet scholars" (Gheorghiu 73), the course provided a brief history of American literature from the early settlements to Theodore Dreiser and Howard Fast. This survey class was then substituted in the early 1950s for a special course taught by Professor Petre Clinca, which featured Marxist-Leninist interpretations of classics such as Mark Twain and Jack London, as well as Marxist writers such as Albert Malz and Michael Gold, whose chief merit lay in exposing the evils of capitalist society.³ A broader and more systematic approach to the study of American literature was introduced in the late 1950s owing to Professor Cartianu's efforts, now Head of Department. A specialist in nineteenth-century British literature who was also strongly drawn to the American literary landscape, Cartianu paved the way for the consolidation of this field by offering a course in nineteenth-century American literature with a special focus on its Puritan roots, incorporating American topics into her research,⁴ and encouraging many young scholars to pursue research projects in this area (Dumitriu, "Ana Cartianu" 10).

A slow but steady progress towards the institutionalization of the teaching of American literature began in the 1960s, in the context of Romania's distancing from the Soviet foreign policy line, which led to an improvement in the bilateral relations with the US and other Western democracies and to a welcome increase in cultural, scientific, and academic exchanges. Launched in Romania in 1960, the Fulbright program was a major vehicle of strengthening Romania's cultural ties with the United States. In 1963, Thomas Amherst Perry, Professor and Head of Department at the Central Methodist College of Fayette, Missouri, became the first US Fulbright scholar in American Language and Literature to arrive at the University of Bucharest. As he later recounts in *Passage to Romania: American Literature in Romania* (2001), his comprehensive study of the reception of American literature in Romania,⁵ the news

¹ A distinguished scholar and translator of Shakespeare and other British writers, Protopopescu also wrote on American topics. See, for instance, his 1935 article on Edwin Arlington Robinson and the wider landscape of modern American poetry. Protopopescu also translated a number of works of American literature, most notably Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (Împăratu Negru, 1943).

² Mihnea Gheorghiu also translated many canonical works of American literature, including Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (*Fire de iarbă*, 1950), J. F. Cooper's *The Last Mohican* (*Ultimul mohican*, 1956), and plays by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

³ For an account of the Romanian canons of American literature in translation, see Rodica Mihăilă's article "The Literary Canon as a Space of Transition: The Case of American Literature in Romanian Translation."

⁴ See, for instance, Cartianu's essays on William Faulkner in *Eseuri de literatură engleză și americană* (*Essays in British and American Literature*), published in 1973.

⁵ Importantly, many of the early US Fulbrighters to Romania produced seminal works on Romanian culture and literature, e.g., Keith Hitchins' major contributions to Romanian history, Perry's *Bibliography of American Literature Translated into Romanian: With Selected*

of his appointment spread quickly and aroused enthusiasm in the intellectual circles of the time, "with the implication that it would open doors to Western thought and literature" (Perry 126). This expanding of horizons is precisely what the students who attended Perry's elective course must have felt as they plunged into a selection of readings meant to address the geographically and ethnically diverse nature of American literature, which included "a black (James Wheldon Johnson), a Cajun (George Washington Cable), a Dutchman (Washington Irving), a Southerner (Poe), New Englanders (Wilder and Frost), and a Westerner (Twain)" (127). The impact of the courses offered by US Fulbrighters, and, more importantly, the "missionary work" they undertook in Romanian universities in the less than auspicious context of Cold War politics and secret police surveillance could hardly be overstated. Professor Rodica Mihăilă, whose relentless efforts, commitment, and vision were the driving force behind the institutionalization of American Studies in Romania, fondly recalls her experience as an undergraduate who benefitted from the expertise of Ralph M. Aderman (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), the second Fulbrighter affiliated with the English Department at the University of Bucharest, in 1965-1966:

For the several students who attended his class, Professor Aderman represented a direct contact with America, with its values and traditions, with the freedom of thought and life, since the lectures and class discussions often went beyond the boundaries of the nineteenth century and brought us into the present, even though, more often than not, any comparisons with our Romanian context were left only implicit. This first direct contact with America would change my life, stir my imagination, and direct my career towards the heretofore-unknown field of American Studies, which Professor Aderman introduced to us as a product of liberal education meant to explain America and the experiment of its democratic construction. (Mihăilă, "*Studia Americana*: Începutul"⁶)

Starting with the late 1960s, the academic exchanges between the two countries were also enhanced via the research and lecturing grants in the US awarded to Romanian professors, who later returned to their home country as specialists in various aspects of American literature and culture, thus contributing to the early institutionalization of the field. On other fronts, increasingly productive cultural exchanges were further promoted by the American Library, established in 1972, and the American Cultural Center, which made available a wealth of valuable resources related to the study of American culture, while also bringing influential American writers and literary critics to Romania.⁷ On a larger scale, through the 1960s, Romanian publishing houses and cultural journals further responded to this burgeoning interest in, and demand for, American culture by publishing an impressive stream of translations from American authors, including lesser-known figures or very recent texts, as well as collected works of canonical writers, new anthologies of American drama and poetry, and ever more sophisticated critical studies on major American writers,

Romanian Commentary (1984), or Ralph M. Aderman's numerous articles on Romanian writers and the reception of American writers in Romania.

⁶ This and all subsequent translations from Romanian are mine.

⁷ The English Department was a major beneficiary of such visits, as it hosted leading contemporary writers, such as John Updike, Saul Bellow, Robert Coover, N. Scott Momaday, Ronald Sukenick, poets William Snodgrass, Diana Wakoski, Robert Pinsky, John Balaban, as well as critics like M.L. Rosenthal, Leslie Fiedler, and Ihab Hassan.

which were increasingly synchronized with the critical methodologies of the time (Perry 133-146).

Through the 1970s, the American literature courses on offer at the University of Bucharest became much more diverse, as on top of electives taught by American visiting professors, they also included special courses developed by the members of the English Department, as well as lectures on American topics provided within the framework of a six-semester comparative literature course by members of the Comparative Literature Department, such as Dan Grigorescu,⁸ who was both a comparatist of the first rank and one of the most distinguished Romanian specialists in American literature and culture. Significantly, although American literature was still in the process of consolidating its status in the English curriculum, more than half of the members of the English Department pursuing doctoral studies at the time chose American writers for their dissertation topics.

A further step towards the academic institutionalization of American literature in the 1970s was the introduction of a one-semester survey course, which was taught by Professor Geta Dumitriu and later Anda Teodorescu and Rodica Mihăilă. By the mid-1980s, this survey course was mandatory for both second-year English Major and fourth-year English Minor students. As evidenced by the two-volume textbook published in 1985, the course was a comprehensive account of nineteenth-century American literature, with extensive chapters on major figures in fiction and poetry, up-to-date critical references, as well as broader reflective essays on American literature and its relation to the British tradition, on the one hand, or the role of Puritanism and the frontier as shaping forces in the evolution of American culture, on the other (Dumitriu, *Literatura americană*). One year later, the symposium *English Studies at the University of Bucharest*, held in November 1986 and dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the English Chair, further testified to the growing interest in, and increased significance of, American literature as a research field, as it included a considerable number of papers on such topics as post-war American drama, Emily Dickinson's poetic imagery, Kate Chopin's and Edith Wharton's short fiction, or the reception of American literature in Romania ("English Studies" 68-71).

It was in the very same year 1986 that a groundbreaking one-semester course in American civilization, developed and taught by Professor Mihăilă, was introduced in the English curriculum with a view to offering a thorough understanding of the cultural and historical background informing American literary traditions. Significantly, the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and the A.I. Cuza University of Jassy started similar courses in American civilization in the same period (Mihăilă, "Reconstructing the Academy" 18). Several years later, in 1993, Mihăilă was to publish an innovative study entitled *The American Challenge: An Introduction to the Study of American Civilization*,⁹ which was devoted to an exploration of the making of American culture through the lens of several influential paradigms (Puritan, democratic, nationalist, frontier, progressive, liberal, Cold War, counterculture, neoconservative, multicultural), complemented by a parallel inquiry into the development

⁸ Dan Grigorescu's critical studies on American culture include, among others, *13 scriitori americani* [13 American writers], 1968; *Arta americană* [American art], 1975; *Dicționar cronologic: Literatură americană* [Chronological dictionary: American literature], 1977.

⁹ Reviewed by Stephen Whitfield in *American Literature*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1995).

of American Studies as an intellectual movement and an academic discipline. The first undertaking of this kind in Romanian scholarship and one of the first post-Cold War attempts to discuss American Studies from a self-consciously Eastern European perspective, the book offered valuable insights into the theory and practice of the field, making a strong case for the benefits of applying “the inter- and/or multi-disciplinary model of American Studies in the study of one’s own culture as well as in inter- and cross-cultural studies” (*The American Challenge* 9-10). “The blue Bible” (Luca), as it was affectionately called by the enthusiastic students of American civilization at the University of Bucharest, Mihăilă’s seminal study has had a formative influence on several generations of Romanian scholars of American Studies, representing one of the truly foundational moments of this field in Romanian academia.

Post-Communist Institutionalization: Contexts and Development of Study Programs

For political reasons pertaining to the Cold War antagonism between the Soviet Union and the United States, the institutionalization of graduate and undergraduate programs in American Studies could only take place after the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989. Significantly, in this particular historical context, the institutionalization process had to negotiate both the post-Communist reconfiguration of higher education in Romania and the shifting landscapes of the post-Cold War recasting of American studies as a field, amid calls for an enhanced self-reflexivity and a turn towards more comparative, dialogic, and international perspectives. An examination of these conditions offers crucial insights into the development and the articulation of the program in Romania.

The post-Cold War reconfiguration of American Studies, or what has been called the New American Studies, was defined by a paradigm shift from Cold War nationalism and exceptionalism to “a postnational and comparative American Studies” interested in designing “articulable programs” and appropriate methods for the investigation of “the ways in which ‘America’ signifies in the new global, political, technological, and cultural circumstances” (Rowe 3-4). Energized by the tropes of the “contact zones” (Pratt) and the borderlands, this new agenda began to delve into the theoretical implications and explanatory powers of such (physical and discursive) border spaces, broadly construed as “paradigms of crossings, intercultural exchanges, circulations, resistances, and negotiations” (Saldivar ix), thereby serving to reorient the frames of analysis towards processes of cultural encounter and confrontation, with a special emphasis on the phenomena of hybridity, cross-pollination, and creolization. Furthermore, the critique of exceptionalism (and of the core-periphery model of power that subtends it) worked to reposition the US within an increasingly interconnected global space, as “one node in an interlocking network of commercial, political, and cultural forces,” which called for a reconceptualization of modes of cultural transmission as perpetually “passing back and forth disparate local and global systems of power” (Pease, “Exceptionalism”). Predicated on a more acute understanding of both the involvement of the US in the world and the involvement of the world in the US, this “worlding” of American Studies also brought to the fore the formerly silenced legacies and current manifestations of US cultures of

imperialism, inviting scholars to engage "in the work of recovering the memory of America's disavowed imperial past, so as to erect anti-imperialist norms into newly forged interpretive frameworks" (Pease, "Postnational and Postcolonial" 267). Naturally, this radical restructuring of "American" American Studies through the 1990s raised fundamental questions about the ways of its possible "translation" to Romanian academia. How would Romanian scholars respond to the heterogeneity of the field? What fresh perspectives and new contributions could their specific positioning bring to the teaching of American Studies as well as to international scholarship?

Adding to these profound, multi-layered paradigm shifts within the field itself, Romanian scholars had to face another set of reconfigurations, those of the post-Communist landscape of Romanian higher education, in their efforts to institutionalize American Studies. Upon its founding as a field in the United States, the promise of American Studies was that it would lead to institutional and instructional reform by bringing together knowledge produced across various disciplinary fields, thus creating problem- or paradigm-driven approaches in lieu of the method-driven approaches inherent in the definition of any individual discipline. The efforts to institutionalize American Studies in Romania in the early 1990s were prompted by similar hopes that it would have a wide-ranging impact on the national system of higher education, which was at the time undergoing a dramatic transition from the centralized and planned system of the Communist regime to fast liberalization, institutional autonomy, and the search for new models of education meant to address the new needs and expectations of a democratic regime and to respond to the demands of a newly emerging market-driven economy. Needless to say, after the collapse of Communism, all the countries of the former Eastern bloc witnessed an "isomorphic process" accounting for a series of similar developments in higher education (expansion, autonomization, "de-polytechnicization," an increase in the range of elective courses, the emergence of private universities, as well as, later on, that of agencies for quality assessment and accreditation); however, the most intriguing of these common characteristics was the discursive invention of a "European model of education" they wished to emulate (Reisz, *Despre fertilitatea erorilor* 122-130). As Robert D. Reisz contends, while such a model did not really exist in practice and only came into being much later, with the adoption of the Bologna Reform, which was designed as a mechanism to ensure coherence across European systems of higher education, "in inventing the desired model, the Central and Eastern European systems developed similar structures" (127).

How did, then, Romanian universities build this new model of higher education as they transitioned out of the multiple constraints of the Communist system? Characterized by "a definite desire to control all aspects of academic life and to use higher education to meet its ideological and economic objectives" (Sadlak 66), Romanian higher education during Communism privileged an instrumental "output orientation" and a high degree of uniformity across specializations and programs (see Reisz, "Curricular Patterns"). However, not long after the collapse of Communism, in the mid-1990s, the situation changed "beyond recognition": "a world of not-yet structured institutional change, opening up to huge opportunities, in which everything seemed possible" (Miroiu 23). While more profound structural and institutional change was, indeed, harder to achieve, the first palpable reform to occur in the post-Communist environment as an expression of the newly found sense of academic

freedom and institutional autonomy was curriculum development. Prompted by a range of factors including “the political outdatedness of some disciplines, the accumulated frustrations of teaching staff who could not bring their research interests into the curriculum, the long-lasting curricular immobility, and the need to establish closer contact with corresponding degree programs in the West” (Reisz, “Curricular Patterns” 281), curriculum renewal aimed to diversify the educational offer and recover the process-orientation (and the rudiments of a tradition of liberal education) that had been distorted and largely suppressed during Communism. Several other specific educational objectives emerged as increasingly desirable in the early years of the post-Communist transition: “general skills, more critical thinking and less specialized knowledge,” as well as a marked interest in studying foreign languages (287-9). This array of competencies was to be provided within new study programs; tellingly, the American Studies program was well positioned to develop such skills and cater to these specific needs. As Adrian Miroiu remarks, through the 1990s and early 2000s, the freedom Romanian universities had in designing new study programs was quite remarkable, correlated as it was with a huge demand for higher education (Miroiu 40). At the University of Bucharest, the newly founded programs of this kind included Journalism and Political Science, established in 1990 and 1995, respectively; other programs, which had been discontinued during Communism, such as Sociology, reopened immediately after the 1989 revolution. However, the more or less spontaneous reforms that dominated the early years of post-Communist transition were soon replaced by a back-and-forth movement between reformist impulse, on the one hand, and conservative resistance and ossification, on the other, that has ever since characterized Romanian higher education.

Naturally, institutionalizing new academic disciplines and study programs is no small endeavor, especially in the context of a fluid scene as described above. As Small has noted, the institutionalization of any new academic enterprise requires obtaining “specific resources—material capital, political support, intellectual recognition, and prestige—from specific constituencies,” which are themselves situated at various levels, “in local institutional, wider academic, and even wider public arenas” (694). Taking stock of this long process of institutionalization, Professor Mihăilă, the founder of the American Studies programs at the University of Bucharest, sheds light on some of the difficulties in securing such resources within the specific institutional framework in which the programs were created. The first set of challenges arose from curricular questions embedded in the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies, which implied departmental border-crossing and collaboration, curriculum development and restructuring, as well as training and/or finding specialists despite the massive post-Communist brain drain. Secondly, there were other concerns specifically arising from the institutionalization of the program within the English Department, particularly a commitment to the philological orientation of the English curriculum, accompanied by the relatively marginal status of American literature and culture. Finally, in the context of scarce financial resources, the need to identify and secure funding sources had to be addressed (Mihăilă, “Reconstructing the Academy”).

Benefitting from the support of Professor Emil Constantinescu, Rector of the University of Bucharest at the time and later President of Romania (1996-2000), the real institutionalization of American Studies as a study program started in 1993 with the

launching of a specialization within the English Minor undergraduate program at the University of Bucharest, consisting of several mandatory courses in American literature and civilization. Academic ties with the US were strengthened in this period by USIA-sponsored academic exchange programs, such as the three-year exchange between the University of Bucharest and Duke University, which further accelerated the pace of institutionalization of this field in Romanian universities. In 1996, the University of Bucharest inaugurated a Center for American Studies, headed by Professor Mihăilă, and launched a two-semester American Studies graduate program; soon after, the A.I. Cuza University of Jassy started its own MA program in American Studies. The same period saw the opening of a Center for American Studies at the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj and launching of a graduate program in American Studies.

The MA program in Bucharest, which was restructured into four semesters in 2007 in line with the Bologna Reform, was designed to offer an inter- and multi-disciplinary study of the United States and its diverse cultures, experiences, institutions, narratives, and intellectual traditions, through the lens of historical developments in American Studies as well as the most recent reconfigurations of the field, in particular transnational and comparative approaches. This encounter with a wide spectrum of subjects and approaches provides both a more comprehensive understanding of America and substantial training in interdisciplinary research that aims at crossing the boundaries between traditional disciplines and critically engages with constantly evolving disciplinary intersections and reframings. Thus, the program also promotes an understanding of the practice of American Studies that transcends its narrowly defined subject matter and methods; echoing Jay Mechling's account of the "American Studies Thinker," it construes American Studies as cultivating "a way of thinking" or "a cognitive style" defined by the willingness "to step outside of [one's] taken-for-granted reality" in order to "play with ideas and perspectives" (Mechling). Importantly, this multifaceted, reflexive inquiry across a plethora of fields and perspectives is not merely an exercise within the bounds of what has been traditionally regarded as the ivory tower of academia; on the contrary, in line with the underlying philosophy of American Studies, the graduate program in Bucharest has also been committed to fostering a sustained interest in the value of public humanities in our contemporary civic life. Furthermore, with its marked interest in investigating the democratic experiment in the US, the program has been instrumental in developing citizenship skills and contributing to democracy-building efforts; as such, in the former Eastern bloc, "American Studies was no longer a US export but a national investment in democratic reforms," as Professor Mihăilă argues ("New Challenge for American Studies" 134), especially in the turbulent years of the post-Communist transition.

Testifying to this complex vision of the pioneering program in Bucharest is Ioana Luca's account, a former member of the American Studies teaching staff, currently affiliated with the National Taiwan Normal University, who was among the first fifteen students to embark on the MA program in 1996:

Coming with a rigid background (most of us were graduates of philology, while only a few were graduates of economics, medical school, or history), the program broadened our horizons and triggered in all of us an awareness of contemporary issues, be they

political, economic, or related to human rights...The structure of the program accordingly provided ample opportunity for creative diversity. (Luca)

In practical terms, this vision of American Studies was translated into a modular curriculum structure, which now consists of the following eight areas:

- American Studies: Theories, Strategies, and Practices;
- History, Politics, and Government;
- Society, Difference, and Diversity;
- Identity Constructions;
- Euro-American Relations;
- New Cartographies of the Cultural Space;
- Media Communication;
- Business Communication.

This curricular structure, both flexible and coherent, has allowed the program to address successfully the first set of difficulties delineated by Professor Mihăilă, namely the challenge of finding and training the teaching staff for such an interdisciplinary undertaking, with English as the language of instruction. Thus, especially in the first decade, some of the courses in the graduate program were taught by professors from other faculties of the University of Bucharest (History, Journalism, Sociology, Political Science, Law, etc.) and other academic institutions (The Academy of Economic Studies, The National University of Film and Theatre Studies), whose research interests included American subjects. It is vital to note that in order to attain organizational stability and institutional legitimacy, the program grew into a successful model of cross-faculty and cross-institutional collaboration; owing to the pooling of resources, it offered effective solutions to address one of the more challenging aspects of the reform of higher education in Romania: curricular reform in the spirit of interdisciplinarity. Later on, members of the English Department started to specialize in various areas of American Studies as part of their doctoral or post-doctoral studies and had an opportunity to expand their research and teaching expertise thanks to Fulbright grants in the US; upon their return, they introduced new courses in such areas as Native American studies, popular culture, or transatlantic relations, among others. Significantly, from the very start of the program, the curriculum has also included courses taught by US Fulbright grantees affiliated either with the English Department or with other departments of the University of Bucharest or other universities, who kindly agreed to offer classes in the American Studies program. The topics of "the Fulbright seminar," as it is now titled in the curriculum, have varied yearly depending on the specialization of the scholars in question, covering a wide range of interests, from adaptations of the classics in contemporary American drama to African American leadership, to mention two of the most recent courses taught within this framework.¹⁰ As this brief overview shows, the vigorous

¹⁰ The experience of US Fulbrighters who arrived in Romania in the volatile post-Communist period offers an insight into the many other transitions that the Romanian higher education system was undergoing at the time, particularly in what concerns teaching models and methods. Jim Welsh, US Fulbrighter affiliated with the A.I. Cuza University of Jassy in 1994 and 1998, remarked in an interview that most of the classes at his host institution were in the form of traditional lectures delivered in an authoritative, sage-on-the-stage manner, while individual projects or debates were fairly rare (Welsh 276). In her account of her arrival at the

support of the Romanian-US Fulbright Commission has been instrumental in developing and diversifying the curricula of the newly founded program.

Given the diverse specializations of the teaching staff—both core and associated—the program has been able to support an exceptionally wide array of MA dissertation topics tailored to the students' own interdisciplinary interests, some of which developed later into doctoral research projects. In addition to the courses, another novelty of the program was the introduction of a sixty-hour internship in various cultural, educational, and non-governmental institutions (the Fulbright Commission, American Corner, the Central University Library, the Center for Independent Journalism, Pro-Democrația Association, etc.), meant to equip graduate students with indispensable practical experience and prepare them for future employment in the changing Romanian job market.

The MA programs in American Studies established in the 1990s at the universities of Bucharest, Cluj, and Jassy were followed by graduate programs at the West University of Timișoara (American Studies) and at the Ovidius University of Constanța (Anglo-American Studies) in the 2004-2005 academic year. With the exception of Cluj, all the other programs are organized in English Departments under the general field of "Philology." They are all informed by a similar overall vision of the theory and practice of American Studies, reflected in a core curriculum which includes general courses on such topics as theories in contemporary cultural discourse, US political and institutional discourse, the practice of cultural analysis, media culture and communication, as well as more specialized classes on ethnic American literatures, US popular culture, and the history of feminism in the US. It should be noted that this common overall framework accommodates variations from program to program in terms of curricular organization, thus allowing for certain areas or topics to be explored in more or less detail. As such, the program in Anglo-American Studies at the Ovidius University of Constanța exhibits a stronger orientation towards literary culture, as demonstrated by a greater number of courses in this area (e.g., post-9/11 American literature, transatlantic connections in contemporary poetry, feminine voices in contemporary theater, fictional representations of the city, among others), while the program at the West University of Timișoara incorporates a substantial, four-semester component of Media Communication in the US (print, visual, and online), along with a five-semester exploration of the US literary tradition. The modular structure of the program in the A. I. Cuza University of Jassy is similar to that in Bucharest, with two or more courses under each of the following headings:

- American Studies: "Old" and "New" Paradigms;
- Multicultural Perspectives;
- Literary Genres;
- American Linguistics;

University of Bucharest in 1995, Barbara Nelson, who has ever since been a most cherished collaborator of the American Studies program and an unofficial Fulbrighter-in-residence, elaborated on her attempt at introducing oral history methods "à la Studs Terkel" as part of class assignments. The results, which had been very successful in the US, were not as spectacular in Romania; many students considered this an odd academic requirement while their would-be interviewees were suspicious about being recorded (Nelson 207-8).

- Critical Thinking, Literary Thinking;
- Arts;
- Regionalism.

Despite some variations and shifts in emphasis across the spectrum of programs, they all share a “core” of major objectives, such as developing advanced skills in the analysis of various US cultural phenomena, acquainting students with diverse methodologies and interdisciplinary formats, and stimulating comparative analyses with other cultural spaces. Notably, all these programs have also benefitted extensively from the expertise of US Fulbrighters affiliated with their institutions. Special mention must be made of the graduate program in Transatlantic Studies at the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, which is unique in the landscape of US-focused study programs in Romania in that it is organized within the Faculty of European Studies and falls within the general field of study of “International Relations.” The program has a strong focus on current aspects in the international and transatlantic agenda, offering courses in such areas as comparative institutions and politics in Europe and North America, transatlantic economic relations, security issues in the Euro-Atlantic world, cultural diplomacy, or negotiations and intercultural relations.

Significantly, the graduate programs founded in the mid-1990s and early 2000s prepared the ground for the introduction of undergraduate programs in American Studies and a further consolidation and recognition of the field in Romanian academia. Some historical landmarks include the introduction of a minor in American Studies at the University of Bucharest in 1999, followed by the start of a four-year major in 2004, which was restructured into a three-year program in 2005, in accordance with the Bologna Reform. Following the introduction of the major, the minor program was discontinued. The year 2004 also saw the inclusion of “American Studies” in the national list of specializations, under the general field of “Cultural Studies.” Undergraduate programs were established in Jassy and Constanța in 2005, at the Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu in 2009, and, more recently, at the Transilvania University of Braşov.

The curriculum of the undergraduate major at the University of Bucharest, which has served as a model for all the other aforementioned programs, consists of three categories of courses:

1. Core courses (Introduction to Cultural Studies, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, a four-semester course in the history of American literature, and six-semester courses of English linguistics and English language practice, respectively).
2. Specialty courses structured into three modules: “Cultures and Values” (Popular Culture, Ethno-Racial Identities), “History and Politics” (the American Constitution, US History, Political Doctrines, Transnational Relations), and “Society and Communication” (US Mass Media, Visual Culture, Film Studies).
3. Complementary disciplines pertaining to the students’ “minor” language and culture (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Russian, Korean, Hindi, etc.). This complementary component allows the students to carry out fruitful comparative analyses of the US and another cultural space, thus resonating with Radway’s argument that American Studies programs “should require extensive knowledge of a language other than English and that the question of what life is like when it is lived between and among different languages should be structurally embedded at the heart of the curriculum” (Radway 23).

In addition, drawing from the tradition of the graduate program, a Fulbright seminar (on such topics as American Icons, to provide the most recent example) taught by US scholars along with a sixty-hour internship in similar institutions is included in the fifth and sixth semesters.

An insight into the ways in which students responded to this curricular design is offered by Ilinca Diaconu, former faculty in the American Studies team, currently affiliated with Wayne State University in the US, who was part of the first cohort of twenty-five students of the program. Her recollections emphasize the novelty of the program within the landscape of Romanian higher education and the fundamental ways in which it has shaped her career:

My first impression as a freshman in the American Studies BA program was of curiosity and excitement. While looking at the list of courses offered for first-year students, I was very pleased to realize that I was interested in most of them. I fondly remember looking forward to, for instance, Professor Ruxandra Rădulescu’s course on Native American culture and Professor Mihaela Precup’s introduction to Visual Culture. As my undergraduate studies progressed, I maintained my interest in the courses offered and genuinely enjoyed most of the material I engaged with as well as the knowledge I gained as a result. These years also had a positive effect on my life as they set my future academic, professional, and even personal path. (Diaconu)

The curricula of the other undergraduate programs in American Studies are structured around the same core and specialty disciplines enumerated above, with slight variations from program to program, particularly in regard to elective classes. Among the respective novelties of each program, one finds mandatory courses in Law and Literature (Bucharest), Religion in the US (Constanța), Cognitive Science (Jassy), or American Sociology (Brașov).

Although they do not organize undergraduate programs in American Studies *per se*, many Romanian universities offer a range of courses on American topics as part of their BA curricula for the English Major and Minor programs, such as mandatory courses in American literature and American civilization, as well as more specialized courses on Paradigms in Contemporary American Linguistic Thought or American Literature in the Movies (Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj), and electives in Media Discourse in the US (West University of Timișoara) or American Cultural Studies and Mass Culture in the US (Partium Christian University of Oradea).

Towards New Research Agendas for American Studies in Romania

This overview of the institutionalization of American Studies in Romania would be incomplete without at least a brief account of the second pillar involved in the process of acquiring recognition and legitimacy as a scientific field: the consolidation of a research culture in American Studies. Founded in 1999 and gathering over one hundred members from many universities across the country, the Romanian Association for American Studies has been a major platform for the development and dissemination of research in American Studies, especially through organizing a biennial conference with the support of the Romanian-US Fulbright Commission

and the US Embassy. Notably, the association has also organized the 2016 edition of the biennial conference of the European Association for American Studies, held at the Ovidius University in Constanța, which brought together over four hundred Americanists from across Europe and the US to engage critically with the manifestations and ramifications of *Mapping Transnational America*.

Informed by recent concerns and methodologies in the field, the American Studies scholarship in Romania has also been generative of situated research areas that are particularly significant for the Romanian/Eastern European context and its transatlantic engagement with the US. As Professor Mihăilă argued in several articles on the post-Cold War recasting of American Studies, one of the glaring absences of this discourse was precisely the “post-Communist Other”; if the Cold War American Studies agenda was predicated on the existence of the Communist Other, after the collapse of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, post-Communism was hardly ever recognized as a possible site of otherness, a category generally articulated through the lenses of race, gender, and sexual orientation, which were understood as reproducing “imperial relations of dominance and interdependence” (“Crossing Borders” 21). As Mihăilă explains, the historical and geographical positioning of Romania as a nation “of and on the frontier,” a country between Western and Eastern traditions, placed until not too long ago at the crossroads between three former empires (the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Russian, later on, Soviet), whose liminality was further accentuated by the post-Communist transition, could offer a compelling site of reflection for the New American Studies scholarship and its interest in “borders, hybridity, imperialism, postcolonialism, transnationalism, post-nationalism, and globalization” (20). Importantly, while pursuing research agendas synchronized with the current concerns of international American Studies scholarship, the work of Romanian Americanists over the last three decades has also successfully addressed the absence of the post-Communist Other from the field, producing an already substantial body of knowledge in this area.

The titles of the first volumes of conference proceedings resulting from the biennial conferences of the Romanian Association for American Studies are indicative of this concern with American-Romanian cultural connections and modes of viewing America from Romania: *Transatlantic Connections: Essays in Cultural Relocation* (2000), *American In/From Romania. Essays in Cultural Dialogue* (2003), and *New/Old Worlds: Spaces of Transition* (2007).

Starting with the mid-2000s, the Center for American Studies at the University of Bucharest has hosted a number of research projects funded by the Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development, and Innovation, which have further illustrated the ways in which the interdisciplinary methodologies of American Studies as a research model can generate significant insights about the repositioning of the Romanian cultural space from post-Communist liminality and marginalization to accession to global transnational structures such as NATO and the EU.

Entitled *Romanian Cultural Space in Transatlantic Perspective: From Post-Communism to Post-Accession* (2007-2011, director Prof. Dr. Rodica Mihăilă), the first research project funded under this scheme resulted in four important volumes published by the University of Bucharest Press: *Transatlantic Dialogues: Eastern Europe, the US and Post-Cold War Cultural Spaces* and *East-European Cultural Space from Post-Communism to Post-E.U. Accession: Transatlantic Perspectives and History in the Making* (eds.

Rodica Mihăilă and Roxana Oltean, 2009 and 2011), *Cultura românească în perspectivă transatlantică. Interviuuri* (Romanian Culture in Transatlantic Perspective. Interviews, eds. Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru and Teodora Șerban-Oprescu, 2009), and *Romanian Culture in the Global Age* (eds. Rodica Mihăilă and Dana Mihăilescu, 2010). Locating Romanian identities at the intersection of three categories of analysis – their cultural legacy, post-Communist experience, and current negotiations of the global, transnational world – and drawing into their view other Eastern European spaces as parallels or counterpoints, these volumes investigate a wide assortment of case studies (in literature, mass media, film, as well as political, historical, and academic discourse) emerging in multiple contexts (mainland and diasporic Romanian, Eastern European and American) and gesturing towards various strategies of representation. Despite their different angles of analysis, the inquiries proposed in the volumes nonetheless converge to formulate a vision of the post-Communist-to-post-accession scene as dominated by “the fluidity of cultural boundaries, the permeability of identity borders and the reversibility of cultural mythologies . . . beyond tropes of difference and exoticism” (Mihăilă and Oltean 10). In this process of transatlantic crossings and dialogue, America itself becomes a space of reflexivity allowing for a refashioning and renegotiation of Romanian and Eastern European cultural identities.

Building on this research legacy, the following projects hosted by the Center for American Studies have further expanded on the Romanian/Eastern European-American perspective, through explorations of such themes as *Cultures of Diasporas: the Margin and the Mainstream in Jewish-Romanian and Jewish-American Literatures* (2007-2011, director Dr. Mihai Mîndra), or the emerging culture of Eastern European *Women's Narratives of Transnational Relocation* (2011-2013, director Dr. Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru), as glimpsed through a comprehensive array of narratives interrogative of an equally comprehensive range of experiences.

Situated at the intersection of American cultural, literary, visual, memory, and trauma studies, more recent projects have examined such topics as *Cross-Cultural Encounters in American Trauma Narratives: A Comparative Approach to Personal and Collective Memories* (director Dr. Roxana Oltean, 2011-2014), *Intergenerational Dynamics of Vulnerability in American Trauma Narratives* (2015-2017, director Dr. Dana Mihăilescu), or *Representations of Violence in Contemporary American Popular Culture* (2015-2018, director Dr. Mihaela Precup), which have collectively contributed to an understanding of cross-cultural and trans-generational encounters in a wide array of American (trauma) narratives related to the Holocaust, (post-)Cold War configurations, the Vietnam War, the AIDS crisis, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The first in this string of projects has also established a young researchers' lecture series devoted to sharing work in progress within the academic community of Americanists at the University of Bucharest and beyond, having also included several visiting international scholars as speakers.

Together with individual research projects in more traditional as well as newer areas of American Studies, these joint efforts and the resulting outputs have both increased the visibility of the American Studies programs in Romania and impacted Romanian research culture as well as international research in the field of American Studies. While the Romanian academia has been exposed to the interdisciplinary nature of research in American Studies, the international field has benefitted from the fresh, situated perspective of Romanian Americanists, which has materialized

into an ever-growing body of scholarship drawing on hitherto-unexplored comparative Romanian/Eastern European-American approaches. This vibrant research agenda has also served as a vehicle for substantial curriculum development within the American Studies undergraduate and graduate programs across the country, which testifies to the ways in which the teaching and the research components of the program inform and enrich each other.

Conclusions

The institutionalization of American Studies—analyzed in this article primarily through the lens of the pioneering graduate and undergraduate programs at the University of Bucharest, which offered a model for the programs that were later developed in other Romanian universities—has significantly contributed to the post-Communist remapping of higher education in Romania, opening it up to new contents and new theoretical and methodological paradigms that cut across rigid departmental boundaries, in line with some of the most recent reconfigurations of the international field. In addition to emerging as a model of interdisciplinarity and of cross-departmental and institutional collaboration, American Studies programs have also offered an insight into the liberal education model, in which the discipline has been embedded since its establishment in US universities in the 1920s. In its exploration of the curricular and research innovations brought by this new academic discipline, the institutional history offered in this article has hopefully made the case for the wide-ranging impact and continuing relevance of American Studies in Romanian academia, as well as for its increasingly influential profile in international scholarship.

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