

PAUL HENRI STAHL AND THE UNUSUAL LEGACY OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL OF BUCHAREST. THE COMPARATIVE METHOD AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES

LUCIAN DUMITRESCU*

ABSTRACT

By employing an agent-structure ontology specific to critical realism, the article poses two research questions related to the interdisciplinary activity of Paul Henri Stahl, on the centenary of his birth. First, is it possible to examine an author's work in a sociological vein and what kind of sociological research does one carry out by exploring how an author taps into a particular structural opportunity? The second research question is directly related to Paul Henri Stahl and seeks to understand whether he can be deemed both a successor of the Sociological School of Bucharest and an innovator relative to the sociological tradition of the Gusti School. To answer the aforementioned questions, the article resorts to critical realism as a methodological choice and explores how Paul H. Stahl evolved into a master of interdisciplinary research under the influence of micro- and mezo-structural influences wielded by his father, Henri H. Stahl, and the Sociological School of Bucharest. The article also pays heed to Paul Henri Stahl's agency in dealing and innovating with respect to such influences.

Keywords: Paul Henri Stahl, sociology of intellectuals, critical realism, Henri H. Stahl, the Sociological School of Bucharest.

INTRODUCTION

In this special issue dedicated to Professor Paul Henri Stahl, I am exploring a small part of his work by starting from two premises. The first premise is that of "good science", which is based not so much on axiological neutrality as on the intellectual honesty (Porpora and Morgan, 2020) of the researcher. This aspect compels me to state my research concerns from the outset. Historical sociology and the comparative method, coupled with the agent-structure ontology of critical

* PhD in sociology and PhD in philosophy, scientific researcher, Institute of Sociology of the Romanian Academy, e-mail address: dulust@gmail.com

realism, will allow me to project only a partial¹ image on the work of Professor Paul H. Stahl. It is therefore likely that, setting out on the road with these research interests, some of Professor Paul Stahl's ethnographic and anthropological approaches, that are of central importance to his work, will remain untackled. The second premise that this text is built on is that of exploratory research. Typically, one resorts to exploratory research when the researcher has insufficient information either on the object of inquiry or on the context in which the research is to be carried out (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 81). What make my research exploratory are the aforementioned cognitive biases, as well as some lingering vagueness about the tradition of the Sociological School of Bucharest, through which I read some of the scholarly writings that inform this text. Last but not least, I deem this text to be the result of an exploratory research in relation to my attempt to highlight an unusual legacy of the Bucharest Sociological School, namely an epistemic package with which Paul H. Stahl came into contact during his formative years as a researcher in Romania, and which he clearly enriched improved once he arrived in France in 1969. This epistemic package which comprises the comparative view on social sciences, that had been employed by some prominent members of the Sociological School of Bucharest (as this text will show), and the theory of social structures.

Based on the abovementioned aspects, the text posits two research questions. The first one, which is meta-theoretical and general in nature, seeks an analytical solution for the exploration of a particular author. More precisely, could one claim to do sociology simply by investigating an author? If the previous question is answered in the affirmative, another question naturally arises: what kind of sociology one does we do by exploring the work of an author? The second research question directly concerns Professor Paul Henri Stahl, about whom Gheorghe Șișeștean said that "(he) belongs to the last generation of sociologists of the Bucharest Sociological School" (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 3). What has Professor Paul Henri Stahl borrowed from the legacy of the Sociological School of Bucharest? Three research practices: "permanent contact with grassroots reality, collaboration with all the social sciences and a special place of sociology's links with history" (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 4).

But is that all? Gheorghe Șișeștean's perspective is precise, but this text aims to show that Paul Henri Stahl is not only a continuator of the Sociological School of Bucharest. He is also an innovator in relation to the middle-structural influences of this School and the micro-structural influences of his father, Professor Henri H. Stahl. The text thus attempts to demonstrate that the comparative method and the sociology of social structures are epistemic practices through which Paul Henri Stahl could be deemed both a continuator and an innovator of the Bucharest

¹ After all, the aim of social science research is to provide as complex a picture as possible of the phenomenon or process under investigation, the premise being that social research is a sophisticated common sense (Myrdal, 1969).

Sociological School. Specifically, what this text seeks to demonstrate is that Paul H. Stahl gets familiar with the comparative perspective and the sociology of social structures, which were relatively marginal epistemic approaches within the School, especially the latter being more in line with the “Henri H. Stahl doctrine” than with the “Gusti doctrine”, and takes them to a higher level in his own research. For this reason, I believe that Paul Henri Stahl is one of the authors to whom young researchers could turn to, in order to get a grasp on the Sociological School of Bucharest’s legacy, that is almost extinct nowadays.

Regarding the first research question, I will try to offer a quick answer. The intellectual field approach, that is connected – usually through subordination – with the political and economic field in a particular institutional context (Guga, 2015), the author viewed as a function-author (Foucault, 2004) to which a discourse or several discourses are subordinated, as well as the biographical approach (Bosomitu, 2014) – are, all, vantage points that have already been employed in Romania in the scholarly field of sociology of intellectuals. In contrast to the above, one of the less refined approaches that can be put into practice more easily by younger researchers belongs to Wright Mills, who delves into the opportunity structure available to an author which occurs at the intersection between history and biography, that is, at the intersection between historical structures and the character of the individual (Mills, 2000, p. 9). Closely related to the approach I use in these texts is Bob Jessop’s (2007) *strategic-relational view*, according to which the institutional-organizational structures that constrain the individual’s aspirations, choices and actions are not absolute, but relative (Dumitrescu, 2024). In other words, the individual endowed with the capacity of strategizing, choosing and acting can modify his or her institutional environment through one’s activity – to the extent of one’s own resources, including here one’s ambition. The approach I am taking here is a post-positivist one, inspired by critical realism and based on the agent-structure ontology. According to this approach, the purpose of sociology is to explore the individual’s effort of restructuring his or her own structure of opportunity. More specifically, agency aims at modifying the structural constraints of the institutional environment in which the individual operates, a process that post-positivist sociology explains through a historical narrative that highlights the mechanisms of institutional constraint (Parker, 2000). Arguably, this approach has nothing to do with expectations that the personality under investigation will live up to the moral standard imposed from the outside, by the investigator (Bosomitu, 2014). In other words, the researcher explores the strategy through which the investigated personality taps into a structure of opportunity structure that is provided by an institutional setting which simultaneously coerces and empowers the individual. The peculiarity of this type of post-positivist sociology resides in the ontological depth that it projects onto the social world, an approach that runs counter to the one-dimensional ontologies that tend to be prevalent in low to medium capacity states, institutional contexts, where social sciences are hardly reflexive and usually

status quo-oriented. In the case of a personality such as Professor Paul Henri Stahl, the ontological vision of critical realism underlines especially the middle and micro constraints (Porpora, 1987), namely those constraints or influences derived from the sociological practice of the School of Bucharest or from Professor Henri H. Stahl. Why are we nominating only these constraints? The answer would be, because this text, as the result of an exploratory research, is limited in scope. And also because these two influences have shaped Paul Henri Stahl as a master of social research before he left for France in 1969. Connected to that, here is what we learn from Henri H. Stahl about the monographic campaign in Șanț, Năsăud County, that took place between 1935 and 1936: "A scout camp was also set up there, under the direction of Goia, in which I also included my 10-year-old son Paul, whom I had taken as a small child on various field trips, such as the one in Drăguș, with Brăiloiu, when Paul made his first contact with a profession in which he would become a master, long after that" (H. Stahl, 1981, pp. 335–336).

What this text does not explore are the macro-structural constraints of a neo-colonial state (Chirot, 2002), that is, Romania as a satellite of the Soviet Union, which, from 1948 onwards, banned sociology as a science, out of universities, and also the mezo- and macro-structural constraints of a France in which Paul Henri Stahl, after 1969, becomes a master of interdisciplinary social research.

FROM THE COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BUCHAREST SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL TO THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

What this section sets out to demonstrate is that the comparative view of social research, perfected by Paul H. Stahl, especially after his departure to France in 1969, constitutes a micro- and meso-structural influence exerted on him by both his father, Henri H. Stahl, and the Bucharest Sociological School. My point is that the notable aspect of Professor Paul Stahl's research activity is that he was not simply influenced by the Romanian epistemic influences, with an emphasis on the comparative view in this case. Paul Stahl also innovated in relation to this scientific grammar that he learned in the epistemic community of the Sociological School of Bucharest, perfecting it in his own scientific endeavor. Exploring Paul Stahl's capacity for innovation in relation to the resources and, simultaneously, the constraints of an epistemic community such as the interwar Romanian School constitutes a sociological approach specific to the sociology of intellectuals. It studies the strategy of intellectuals (seen as agents) to partially shape or even fundamentally change the opportunities, limitations and vulnerabilities of an epistemic community (seen as the structure). The heir of the Bucharest Sociological School is not the one who "serves" Dimitrie Gusti, an approach that has nothing to do with reflexive sociology, an idea I once heard, to my utter surprise. Despite his personal ego, Gusti did not want his disciples to "obey" his sociological vision. The heir of the Bucharest Sociological School is rather the one who, by drawing on reflexive

thinking, understands and simultaneously innovates in relation to the tradition of this school, given that innovation is still possible in the institutional space of the contemporary Romanian sociology. In my view, Paul H. Stahl was a reflexive continuator of the tradition of the School.

The “tradition” of the Sociological School of Bucharest seems to be encapsulated today in a discourse full of clichés, in relation to which claiming that the comparative vision is part of the School’s heritage and, moreover, that it has also influenced Paul Stahl, could amount to heresy. It is not the place here to discuss at length the clichéd narrative about the legacy of the School, and therefore I will limit myself to mentioning just some of the main clichés. The first and also the main one equates the Gusti School with the monographic method. This cliché is tantamount to reducing the internal diversity of the School, camouflaging *soft* (epistemic) and *hard* (political and ontological) dissent under the guise of a seamless epistemic community, and simplifying the process through which the School moves from fundamental research for political-cultural action to a political-cultural action pursued at the expense of fundamental research (Guga, 2015, p. 23). Undeniably, the monographic method constitutes the intellectual hallmark of the Sociological School of Bucharest, along with the theory of sociological parallelism. Yet the monographic period constitutes only one stage or form in the development process of social research in Romania, as Dimitrie Gusti imagined it. The first of these forms was the Romanian Social Institute, which dominated Romanian culture through its manifestations in the first decade after 1918 (Vulcănescu, 2005, p. 1042). While the Faculty of Social Sciences, an unrealized project, would have been the third stage in the development of social research in Romania. It is therefore erroneous to exclude the Romanian Social Institute from the Sociological School of Bucharest’s legacy, of which the monographic method represented just the second stage of development. Another major cliché related to the Gusti School is that of projecting onto it an ahistorical national ontology, under the influence of Lucian Blaga and Mircea Eliade (Guga, 2015, p. 78), while the sociology of the nation carried out by Gusti was in fact focused on the nation-state as a historical structure, i.e., an institutional process unfolding in time and space. This sociology of the nation aimed both to build a modern, inclusive nation and to connect public policy decisions with the needs of the peasantry, which represented over 80% of the population of Greater Romania and was treated more as an object and less as a subject of politics. In close connection with the ahistorical and metaphysical national ontology projected onto the Gusti School by some contemporary exegetes, an ontology with which the School’s scientific research had no connection, a third cliché emerges, namely that of methodological nationalism, on the basis of which the state, nation and society are fused one into the other, while the internal factors of development and modernization are seen as being completely isolated from the regional and international ones (Pradella, 2014). Overlooking the connection between local structures and the regional one may have significant effects on the

accuracy of sociological explanation, especially in the case of low to medium capacity states that have emerged in the outskirts of empires. The institutional development of these states is influenced even today mostly by external rather than internal factors. In sum, based on the aforementioned clichés, the emergence of a comparative approach within the Sociological School of Bucharest seems to be highly unlikely.

In 1993, Professor Paul Henri Stahl was elected honorary member of the Romanian Academy. His speech for his reception into the Academy, entitled *Muntenia – The Land of Mountains*, is based on a comparative analysis of the medieval European state formations that emerged in the mountainous area. The analysis was focused on the emergence of the state in Muntenia, at the foot of the Southern Carpathians, with its power being projected on both the Transylvanian and the mountain slopes (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 5). From Gheorghe Șișeștean, author of the most comprehensive article I have read so far on Paul Stahl's bibliography, we learn that his concern for the comparative approach has developed even further once he arrived in France, in 1969. "The richness of French libraries" (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 14) is the reason why Paul Stahl started using more frequently the comparative method. Can Paul Stahl be considered a comparativist? In my view, the answer is affirmative, for several reasons. The first two are certain, while the third one relies on personal speculation. In *Tribes and Villages in Southeast Europe* (published at Paideia Publishing House in 2000), Prof. Stahl exemplifies how is the comparative method used in ethnological and sociological research. The second argument that support my earlier statement that Paul Stahl can be deemed a comparativist researcher refers to his rejection of methodological nationalism, which, by isolating the internal factors from the external ones, in exploring and explaining different social processes and institutions, lowers the quality of explanation. In this sense, in the introduction to *Tribes and Villages in South-East Europe*, Paul Stahl quotes Nicolae Iorga, who believed that national prejudice, by putting the preferred community before all others, "helps" you to understand nothing (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 10). In Paul Stahl's view, those "scientific researches" that support national prejudice are of no scientific value. "An absurd competition pits scientists here and abroad against each other: before the cannons start firing, the clash takes place through arguments drawn from the social sciences, and the situation can only get worse when research is oriented in the direction of national and governmental biases" (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 5). There is no such thing as the absolute objectivity, continues Paul Stahl. But we can get closer to it by using appropriate methods. Among these, the comparative research. "Nowadays it is increasingly obvious that you cannot know one population by isolating it from the others" (P. Stahl, 2000, pp. 5–6). Last but not least, the reason why I consider Paul Stahl as a comparativist researcher is his inductive approach to social research. This is not to say understood that Paul Stahl would have had an anti-theoretical attitude. On the contrary, he was preoccupied with "theoretical openings" (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 16), which is not surprising, considering the influence of Henri

H. Stahl, who could not stand “the use, in sociology, of notions to which you have not given a precise content” (Rostás, 2000, p. 10). Paul Stahl was also favouring conceptual precision. The family, for instance, is an imprecise concept, as long as it can include not only the domestic group of a household, but also people outside the household. As a result, the domestic group appears as a more appropriate concept for people living in the same household. “These people live together, work together, own the same property, keep the same religious holy days, without ruling out the possibility that they might be related”. The nuclear family represents the domestic group at a certain stage of social evolution, a thing that will escape our grasp should we study families only in terms of the number of people comprising it and fail to take into consideration the practices mentioned above. The sociologist, and more broadly, the researcher in social sciences, begins to engage with the object of knowledge through concepts. Depending on the clarity of these concepts, the researcher’s access to the object of knowledge is more or less precise. For Paul H. Stahl, however, it was imperative to start from facts and not from theories (Șișeștean, 2009, p. 14). This inductive approach works well when it comes to comparative research, despite the prejudice according to which comparative research is useful only for testing theories. This prejudice states that the comparative method can be used only in a deductive approach. But comparative research can also be used inductively, that is, to help compare institutional contexts in order to construct concepts or theories (Simmons and Smith, 2021). Therefore, I believe that the inductive predilection of Paul H. Stahl, a predilection documented by Gheorghe Șișeștean, can be exploited in a comparative approach to science, through the type of field research that aims at constructing or improving concepts. This personal speculation on my part may constitute another argument for Paul Stahl’s profile as a comparativist researcher.

The question is whether Paul Stahl identified himself as a comparativist? Yes, he did, but a modest one. In his book *How the Land of Vrancea Faded Away*, Paul Stahl points to three factors that explain the dismantling of the joint traditional property in the region being researched. These are: the servitude processes that free villages’ peasants went through, the 1923 Constitution and, in general, the modern legislation of Greater Romania, which contrasted with its archaic local institutions, and, last but not least, the deforestation of Vrancea through extensive logging in the inter-war period, without any concern for the social and environmental effects of such actions. Paul Stahl points out that such destructuring of the archaic institutions that has happened in Vrancea Country in interwar Romania had also happened in other European countries. “These (such cases – our note, L. D.) are not clear enough for me to make a comparison here, one which would require identifying the circumstances that allowed these communities to survive” (P. Stahl, 2002, p. 80). Paul Stahl also portrays himself as a modest comparativist in *Tribes and Villages in South-Eastern Europe*: “My uneven knowledge of the Balkan regions does not allow me to undertake a satisfactory comparative presentation in all respects” (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 12). Anyone reading *Tribes and Villages in South-*

Eastern Europe will note that Paul Stahl undertakes a comparative study of several traditional social structures belonging to Albanians, South Slavs, Greeks and Romanians. There are two fundamental questions that the researcher using the comparative method, whatever the field of research, need to answer to. First, what is it that are we comparing? Second, to what purpose are we making the comparison. Regarding the first question, Paul H Stahl compares traditional social structures with a focus on the household: the domestic group, its hierarchy, property, women and their roles etc. Relative to the second question, the comparison is mainly concerned with the transformations that the domestic group has undergone in contact with modernity in the communities under investigation. Notably, when carrying out his comparative research, Paul H. Stahl uses the theories and empirical data of the Bucharest Sociological School which, according to Gheorghe Şişeştean, “paradoxically, are less used in current sociological circles in Romania” (Şişeştean, 2009, p. 18).

It is worth noting Professor Gheorghe Şişeştean’s remark that, once he arrived in France, in 1969, Paul Stahl became more interested in the comparative method. Not having sufficient data at my disposal, it is difficult for me to say how interested Paul Stahl was in comparative approaches prior to that. But what I intend to show in the following is that not only Henri H. Stahl and Dimitrie Gusti but even Anton Golopenţia, the most important epistemic disident of the Sociological School of Bucharest, concerned themselves with a comparative perspective. My contention is that Paul Stahl had come into contact with this comparative epistemic package during his training as a social scientist in Romania. of course, the transformation of the comparative perspective used by the which inter-war Romanian sociologists – and which today is a *rara avis* in the field of Romanian social sciences – into the comparative method that Paul Stahl had resorted to, in order to carry out research in different countries of South-Eastern Europe is his undeniable merit. Henri H. Stahl was concerned with historical sociology, i.e. with the evolution and transformation of social structures over a long period of time, and he also showed an interest in comparative research, although this was not a defining feature of his interwar writings. However, as early as the interwar period, Henri H. Stahl argued for the importance of long-term historical and anthropological data in the investigation of traditional social structures. Subsequently, the diachronic comparison of different types of economic and political organization became increasingly manifest in his historical sociology. He has also argued for the need of a comparative approach in examining “the mechanisms of the processes of transformation of social structures from one type of social-economic organization to another” (H. Stahl, 1972, p. 190). In a posthumously published work (1992), Henri H. Stahl includes a six-page section entitled *Rules of the Comparative Method* in which, on the one hand, he addresses the central question of the comparative method, namely “what is it we are comparing?” and, on the other hand, he discusses the importance of comparison for understanding social processes. “On the contrary, it is the ‘long-lasting’ phenomena that are suited to systematically made comparisons, ‘morphologies’ and ‘social

processes' can only be understood within a comparative perspective" (H. Stahl, 1992, p. 84). Notably, in Henri H. Stahl's view, one that is still valid today, comparative sociology does not employ comparison on singular events, but rather long-term structures and processes.

Arguably, Dimitrie Gusti was not a comparativist of the stature of Paul Stahl. Gusti acquired his comparative epistemic training in Germany as a student. Specifically, Gusti studied international law and foreign policy in Berlin with Professor Franz von Liszt. And, importantly, he was a contributor to the *Review for the Science of Comparative Law and Social Economics* (Vulcănescu, 2005, p. 943). But the representative of the Bucharest Sociological School who had a more developed comparative view of social research was Anton Golopenția. Through his idea – and practice – of partial monographs, which did not investigate the totality of the social problems of a village, but only those that were important for the whole of interwar Romania (H. Stahl, 1981, p. 361), Golopenția became an apostate and a rebel in Gusti's eyes. Still, the village typologies built upon the data provided by the partial monographs could have been used in order to produce a comparative explanation. But what matters for this discussion is Golopenția's sociological framework he insisted on studying Romania's social history issues at the regional level, at the scale of South-Eastern Europe, in contrast to the predominantly localist vision of the Sociological School of Bucharest. Moreover, in his geopolitical writings, Golopenția placed emphasize on the need for regional research, which would include states from the same political environment as Romania, going so far as to openly assert the need for comparative sociology. "The processes which transform the structure of a group of fellow countrymen from abroad or of a foreign state can be established by comparing their structure in two sufficiently distant moments of their existence" (Conea *et al.*, 1940, p. 114). Golopenția directly suggests the need for diachronic comparisons of the social structures of the states from the same political environment such as of interwar Romania through a sociological perspective that would emphasized the importance of the long duration of institutional development, in contrast to the "Gusti doctrine", which was more concerned with recent history. The conclusion I am drawing is that a regionally-inspired comparative perspective, focused on South-Eastern Europe, but not necessarily a comparative method, was already embraced by salient representatives of the Sociological School of Bucharest.

SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES

This second section of the text brings into discussion the epistemic inheritance that Paul H. Stahl owes to Henri H. Stahl, rather than to the Bucharest School of Sociology, namely the sociology and ethnology of traditional social structures (that Paul H. Stahl explores comparatively in several countries of South-Eastern Europe). There are two reasons that lead me to argue that Paul H. Stahl's interest in traditional social structures comes from Henri H. Stahl rather than from the Gusti

School. First, it is his interest in historical sociology and in exploring the change and continuity of social structures over long periods of time. The “Gusti Doctrine” (H. Stahl, 1981, p. 60) concerned itself mainly with field research and was rather focused on the present. The historical framework of the Gustian “law” of sociological parallelism paid heed to the investigation of recent history and its impact on the phenomenon being studied. In contrast, the “Henri H. Stahl doctrine” of social research took into consideration long-term of social structures, whose evolution from past to present was the main concern of Henri H. Stahl’s historical sociology, that emphasized the ‘path dependence’ of contemporary institutions on traditional social structures. This distinctive perspective of research, that entails the extensive use of historical and anthropological data, led to the emergence of “social archaeology”. Its interdisciplinarity was to be used not only in researching the present, in line with the “Gusti doctrine”, but also in exploring the past. Secondly, this social archaeology was practiced by Henri H. Stahl mainly in his own field research. Due to the fact that Henri H. Stahl’s historical sociology used in the exploration of social structures drew on Marxism, it was completely ignored by ex-communist sociologists in the 1990s, who also abandoned the agrarian issue question after Henri H. Stahl’s death (Guga, 2015, p. 29). However, although it was not one of the dominant lines of research, the sociology of traditional social structures could not have been completely ignored by the Sociological School of Bucharest. After all, the villages investigated by the monographic teams, during the 1920s and 1930s, were riddled with traditional social structures. Moreover, one should not forget that it was Henri H. Stahl’s interest in traditional social structures, such as the joint traditional property that have brought the monographic teams to the Vrancea Country, to Nereju. So even if the exploration of traditional social structures via historical and anthropological data was not of central concern within Gusti School, it is clear that such issues were not completely overlooked. My point, however, is that the “social archaeology” of Henri H. Stahl, with its openness to anthropology and long-term history, accounts more convincingly for Paul H. Stahl’s fascination with traditional social structures than the marginal concerns that the Sociological School of Bucharest might have had in this direction.

Equipped with the “H. H. Stahl doctrine”, which combines history and social anthropology, Professor Paul H. Stahl has explored comparatively the traditional social structures in different countries of South-Eastern Europe. A narrow perspective on social structures would equate them with institutions. The more sophisticated perspective exposes two directions in exploring social structures. The first one derives from Durkheim’s sociology and defines social structure as the social relations between social facts. This leads to a view of structure as the statistical regularities between them, simultaneously eliminating individuals from sociological research. The second one, which draws on Marx, refers to the complex of social relations between individuals, and places emphasis on the agency, meaning the individual’s capacity to modify, through his/her will and action, these social structures (Porpora, 1987). According to critical realism – the meta-theory that

underpins my approach here –, social structure refers to “systems of human relations between social positions” (Porpora and Morgan, 2020). The definition is dry and reveals little beyond the Marxist influence. In reality, the definition shows that, ontologically, social power is embedded into the social structure more than in discourses and behaviors. More precisely, the differences in social power, experienced by each individual in both traditional and modern societies, derive from the differences in social relations relative to the particular social positions. Neither the issue of power, nor the concern to precisely define the traditional social structure appears in *Tribes and Villages in South-East Europe*. However, Paul H. Stahl directly captures the social structure, i.e. the power relations, in which women were involved in traditional Albanian, Greek and South Slavic societies. In Albania, a woman was not forced to bring a dowry into marriage. The man, on the other hand, had to amass a thousand piasters before he could hope to find a wife. Young men who were not wealthy enough, i.e. those who could not raise this amount of money, had very little chance of getting married. So traditional power relations could also work against them. The practice of bride buying was a social fact in Albanian villages. But despite this, it was not at all clear to whom the bride belonged after marriage. Paul Stahl describes the institution of the levirate, whereby the purchased woman remained in the household as an heirloom in the event of the husband’s death, being taken into the possession of the deceased’s next of kin or other members of the household (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 29). Tradition commodified women and did not allow them to remarry or return to their birth family without the permission of the family of the late husband. Should the woman remarry or return to her birth family without permission from her husband’s family, the institution of *vendetta* was activated, which could lead to the murder of rivals. The woman’s predicament in the traditional family could only be improved if she bore male children. If she gave birth to girls or in the case of infertility, which in traditional societies was considered exclusively her fault, the woman could return to her family. But not before returning half of the price paid for her initial purchase as a bride or by handing over another woman of the same family (Paul H. Stahl, 2000, p. 33). In Greece, the system of social relations between women and the traditional household was not much different from the one in Albania. The woman belonged to the lineage of origin, bride-buying was practiced, as was the obligation to have as many sons as possible. Sterility was attributed exclusively to the woman. In case of divorce, the children remained in the husband’s family, as his property, and if the divorced woman wanted to remarry, she needed the former husband family’s consent. Note that in 1907, 49% of men in the Messa Mani region were literate, in contrast to 5,47% of women (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 94). Among the South Slavs, with reference to the tribal societies of Montenegro, the minority status of women in traditional societies seems to be most pronounced among all Slavic societies. Here, women are cast almost in the role of slaves to their husbands, women’s labor is harder than men’s, and women are

obliged to give birth to many sons who “provide for the old age and the perpetuation of the household, have someone to pass on property to, and finally, are supported in the hard life beyond the grave” (P. Stahl, 2000, p. 73). Remarkably, Paul H. Stahl managed to capture the mirroring of social structure in the religious structure of the traditional societies he investigated.

But beyond the relatively static perspective on the social structures in the *Tribes and Villages of South-Eastern Europe*, Paul Stahl also proposes a dynamic view of these. In this sense, the reader who might be interested in the institutional metamorphoses generated by the penetration of capitalism in the villages of interwar Romania should read the book *How the Country of Vrancea Faded Away*. The work contains an analysis of the political practices events in Nereju, which were not included in the three-volume monograph of Nereju published in French in 1938. According to Paul Henri Stahl, the reason why the political manifestations were not included in the monograph is due to Emanoil Bucuța’s desire not to “tarnish the legendary aura of the Land of Vrancea” (P. Stahl, 2002, p. 8), a piece of information that Paul Stahl had gathered from Zoltan Rostas. Those who read *How the Land of Vrancea Faded Away* will discover that the research included in the volume could not only tarnish “the legendary aura of the Land of Vrancea”, but also the legendary aura of interwar democracy, with the consequence of damaging the image of the elites of the time on an international level. Therefore, beyond its ethnographic component, *How the Land of Vrancea Faded Away* is above all a work of political sociology, which explores the quality of local interwar political institutions. With data gathered through field research (interviews and observation), the book reveals the precariousness of the political institutions of Greater Romania, which is hardly surprising for a neo-colonial state (Chirot, 2002) that emerged – and reproduced itself – on the outskirts of empires.

The paper also examines the impact of comprador capitalism on traditional social structures, with an emphasis on the process of dismantling the traditional joint property. Henri H. Stahl was a well-known observer of the way in which representatives of the interwar Romanian state, such as Tache Ionescu and Alexandru Marghiloman, together with representatives of the village bourgeoisie, acted as agents of Austrian logging firms (H. Stahl, 1981, p. 64). Important here are Paul Stahl’s comments on the mismatch between the practices of the interwar Romanian state and the traditional structures of the villages of Vrancea. “The inappropriateness of the institutions imposed on local life by the state is striking: the elimination of old forms of administration based on tradition, appropriate to this region, resulting from local life and a long evolution, can only sadden, but also provoke indignation. The use of their positions in the administration in their self-interest goes hand in hand with their continuous shifting in political opinions; they are accompanied by a total disregard for political doctrines. Political life manifests itself as a phenomenon artificially superimposed on a society unrelated to it” (P. Stahl, 2002, p. 13). In short, the political manifestations in Nereju were a form without substance, just like the interwar Romanian democracy appears to us now. These

political manifestations were studied indirectly, from the perspective of the quality of the institutions in *How the Country of Vrancea Faded*, in contrast to the predominant contemporary procedural-legal discourse or the one which differentiates between interwar democracy and communist totalitarianism. Paul Stahl does not speak here of form without substance, but of “blind imitation”, this being one end of the continuum on which attitudes in a peripheral state in relation with the Western world can be placed, at the other end being total rejection of those (Roberts, 1969, p. 147). Notably, Paul H. Stahl argues that what accounts for “blind imitation” is a process of rapid social change, with its radical effects on institutions. “The aftermath of such sudden changes has caused great suffering, impoverishment of the country, and a shaking of its moral values. Even if stemming from the best of intentions, blind imitation and copying, often without adjustment, the laws and rules of life that suit other countries, and other forms of social life, inevitably leads to suffering and backwardness. A change of this magnitude can only be useful if informed on the fundamental research of social realities and with respect to the differences between Romanian regions” (P. Stahl, 2002, p. 80).

Paul Stahl paid interest to the transformation of the traditional structure of joint traditional property under the impact of comprador capitalism, and noticed that *the dissolution of joint ownership in Vrancea Country was carried out abusively, as the common lands, once used collectively, were gradually taken over by the more powerful members of the community, as well as by Austrian logging companies*. The latter were buying up the rights off the local people, changing the common ownership of the forests and thus replacing the natural, limited, survival-oriented exploitation of the forest by the peasant household with the capitalistic, unlimited, profit-oriented exploitation of the forestry company. The effect produced by the change in the logic of forest exploitation in the Vrancea Country is emphasized by Paul Stahl before his departure to France: “Traveling through the region in the 1960s, I was struck by the desolate, almost bare hills, with mud flowing downhill, the result of the savage deforestation that had been ravaging the land for more than a century. This careless deforestation of entire mountains was repeated in the 1940s and 1950s by the SovRoms: for its airways, it was said that the SovRoms got the airplanes, airports and pilots from Romania, while the air came from the USSR (a phrase used in the 1960s)” (P. Stahl, 2002, p. 17). Three types of external interventions, spread over a long period, i.e. at least a generation, have fundamentally changed the institution of joint traditional property in the Vrancea Country. These, according to Paul Stahl, were the transformation of free peasants into serfs, the intervention of the interwar Romanian state after the adoption of the 1923 Constitution and, last but not least, the abusive and fraudulent penetration by forestry companies, supported by legislative changes adopted by the interwar Romanian state.

I conclude this section by mentioning another traditional social institution. This is the institution of the chief of the Vrancea Country, who held the *uric*, that is, the inscriptions attesting the rights of the locals over the forests and lands of

the Vrancea Country, which had been issued by Stephen the Great himself. Unsurprisingly, the locals would not explain the decline of the Vrancea Country as a result of the transformation of the joint traditional property under the action of the external factors mentioned above. According to the popular explanation, the decline of this land was due to the fact that the Vrancea *uric* had been lost by Popa Taftă, leaving in its place only “copies of no strength” (H. Stahl, 1999, p. 166).

CONCLUSION

As this is an exploratory research, the details of which I have offered in the introduction along with my own research biases, exploring a part of Paul Stahl's work from the perspective of micro- and mezo-structural conditioning leads me to only one partial conclusion. On the one hand, the influence on Paul Henri Stahl's research of the epistemic package he acquired in Romania both from his father, Henri H. Stahl, and from the Sociological School of Bucharest is quite evident. On the other hand, the earlier pages have found evidence that Paul Henri Stahl is not only a continuator of the sociological tradition of the Sociological School of Bucharest. He is at the same time an innovator in the remit of comparative method and the sociology of social structures.

My research leaves the most important part of Paul Henri Stahl's work unexplored. Also, I have not investigated at all the impact of macro structures, those specific to a neo-colonial state such as Romania, which abolished sociology in 1948. How Paul Henri Stahl has coped with the institutional vulnerabilities of such a state, both before his departure to France in 1969 and after his return to the country, may represent a new line of research. On the need to reinvent oneself as a sociologist in the 1950s in Communist Romania, on the challenges of finding a job that allowed one to do field research during those harsh years, as well as on the challenges of fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s, we find partial data in Gheorghe Șișeștean's article. But these data do not exhaust such a research direction. Also, how the research environment in capitalist France was structured by Paul Henri Stahl's research vision, as well as what has survived in that institutional environment from the tradition of the Sociological School of Bucharest, constitute another research direction, which, in my opinion, could lead to new approaches specific to the sociology of intellectuals, as a subfield of political sociology.

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