Romanian Studies and Area Studies — A Necessary Re-examination

Mona MOMESCU
Institutul Limbii Române
N. Iorga Chair for Romanian Language and Culture,
Columbia University, New York
Ovidius University, Constanța

Abstract

During the Cold War, the former "satellites" of the former USSR were approached, in the US academia and, consequently, in security studies, under the umbrella of Area Studies. The study of the languages and cultures of those countries, among which Romania was one made the core of Area Studies. The seminal book of Charles Jelavich (Jelavich, 1969) set the standard for Area Studies in the region, and stated clearly the role of languages and national literatures in the field. Shortly after, Richard Lambert (Lambert, 1973) coordinated an ample review of the status of the language/area studies in Central and Eastern Europe, which showed serious imbalances within a field that was supposed to appear homogeneous. His research was based on the number of enrollments, as well as on the academic/social relevance of the academic programs.

The fracture within Area Studies in the region deepened after 1989, when the Post-Communist countries faced individual issues that raised different types of research/academic/security interests in the US. Based on my personal experience as a Romanian language and culture instructor and curriculum designer at the Nicolae Iorga Chair at Columbia University (Romanian Language Institute), the article will examine the status of Romanian Studies within the new ideological landscape. Caught between the irreversible fears of the postmodernist "millennialism" (see, Jameson, 1998), and the in-betweenness (Chakrabarty, 1998) brought by globalization, Romanian Studies, and Area Studies in general have faced a rapid adoption of theoretical 'parlances', some of which are incompatible with the very nature of the field, yet they make the field 'recognizable' and 'user-friendly'.

Key words: Area Studies, Romanian Studies, disciplinary status, Language/ Culture teaching.

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

Romanian Studies, as a field, has still not been defined, despite some constant recent efforts of both Romanian (Cap-Bun 2008) and non-Romanian scholars. Examined from 'the inside', Romanian Studies, as a special, well-defined field of research and teaching does not seem to find its utility; all the possible questions on Romanian identity do not summon answers that may offer a unitary view, useful to the non-Romanian scholar or learner in the field, or any other type of specialist that may use. In other words, a coherent and autonomous field of Romanian Studies, for "internal use" does not find its use, as most of the identity issues are intrinsic to a Romanian subject. A homogeneous new field brings together language, literature, history, political science will, in my opinion, situate itself in contradiction to the "internal identity model" and canon that sets the ethno-linguistic/literary discourse at its center. In addition to this, the 'immanentism' that informs the ethno-linguistic based theory of identity in modern Romania would find very few common points, if any, with a field that is founded on a large and sometimes contradictory set of theoretical and, mostly, ideological principles that revolve around the principles of: hegemony, the West vs. the East, the Soviet/ post-Soviet vs. the European, and many other dichotomic categories that appear unrecognizable to a Romanian.

My main question, for which I will try to formulate an answer that argues the necessary re-examination of the relation between Romanian Studies and Area Studies is the following: how, and to what degree of accuracy, can we define the object of Romanian Studies in a manner that does not appear unrecognizable to a non-Romanian subject or offensive, or antagonistic to the principles of modern Romanian identity complex, as shared by Romanians. One may wonder why such an enterprise needs to be taken, in the first place. Many decades have elapsed since the theoretical apex of modernism and postmodernism questioned and replaced the already hesitating teleology of modernism. As a result, the studies on 'collective identity' and its manifestations abandon the Marxian approach of the cultural studies of the sixties, and display an increasing relativism, and a different type of stereotypization. For example, a cultural studies approach of identity played up the Marxian determinism, the relation between the center and the margin seen in terms of hegemonies, analyzed various aspects of culture from the perspective. Since the early 90's, the cultural studies approach has been generously embraced by Eastern European scholars who, after the Western moment of overjoy in relation to the 1989 upheaval in the region, felt the acute need to make their cultures known using a critical language recognizable by the West; consequently, a plethora of Marxian, feminist, Baumanian, postmodern readings of issues pertaining to the identity of the Eastern European cultures was published. Their effort was acknowledged and echoed by similar readings of the East by Western scholars (Wolfe, Todorova).

It is of cardinal importance to realize that, in this rather heterogeneous attempt to create a recognizable field of Romanian Studies, one should keep in mind the following:

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

1. post-1989, the national canon/ paradigm of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe has been analyzed in accordance to the new geopolitical changes; the commonalities of all the cultures in the region were explored against two main theories: a. the post-colonial discourse (more evident in the 90's), in which all the former "satellite" countries of the former USSR, and the characteristics of their cultures were pigeonholed into this model; b. the new relativism, a combination of the Annales school of history, and of various particular explorations of mythology, formae mentis, and of the national canon (see, for example, Lucian Boia, for Romania);

2. the analysis of the national identity complex, which relied on the post-1848 Ernest Renan model ("an ethnic group, therefore a nation"), aggregated around a language / national literature / national history complex came into scrutiny, as per the new realities, such as: the affirmation of the identity of ethnic minorities in the region, the strong anti-Communist attitude, the review of another identity label of part of the region, namely Balkan.

3. the late developments and redefinitions of identity in the region at the following levels: political, by the adoption of and conformity to a supra-national European Union induced identity; at the cultural level, by the questioning of the central role of the national language-national literature-national history triad that informed the identity complex in the region for over a century; the general directions in world history, economy and social life, such as globalization, its intrinsic critique, and the advent of the digital era.

All of the above could not leave the reflection on identity untouched. While under 1 we assist to a willing adoption of leftist discourse, while vituperating on Communist ideology, under 2 and 3 we assist to a more fluid and poly-discursive approach of the "national Studies", be those Romanian, Bulgarian, Polish etc. In other words, it appears that the definition, followed by a necessary identification of methods of approach and of an adequate methodology in Romanian Studies may not ignore the theoretical and analytical realities of the last two decades.

This is why, asking myself many times what is the object of Romanian Studies, and what is a minimal set of adequate theoretical approaches that would give stability, legitimacy and visibility to the field, I found myself under the siege of countless studies, that cannot be ignored, opinions, personal traumas of the authors, adaptations of Western models and/or articles that pontificate on the need to continue the post-Romantic view on the national canon and simply not surrender to the new ideologies that are conducive to the weakening of national identity.

In addition to this, my continuous restlessness has been caused by the fact that, as a Romanian language and culture instructor in a US university, within a department known for its leading role in Area Studies in the past (the East-Central European Center/The Harriman Institute at Columbia University, New York), I have been aware of the difficulty of giving a voice to

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

Romanian Studies beyond the mere teaching of the language; students need to become familiar with Romanian culture beyond the analysis of stereotypes, while the instructor has to offer a realistic, valid, appropriate image of his/ her culture and literature beyond personal tastes or favors made to what "students like/ expect". Teaching Romanian literature in Romanian is a wishful enterprise, as in a non-degree program very few students reach the language competence that allows them to read and appreciate the most wonderful accomplishments of Romanian literature; to be realistic, even fewer enroll in the program with the declared purpose to become specialists in Romanian literature. The majority of the learners would like to acquire a comfortable level of language competence, and to know the culture in a manner that would serve their future professional path (usually Eastern European Studies, Political Science, Social Studies, etc.). From this perspective, the articulation of a Romanian Studies field beyond the national canon of teaching Romanian literature, thematically, or chronologically and/or Romanian history becomes a stringent need.

Therefore, a review of the main directions in classical and contemporary Area Studies (hereafter, AS) would bring interesting theoretical background for the definition of Romanian Studies. Consequently, an adequate set of methods and sub-field appropriate methodologies can be identified.

1. A Short Contemporary History of Area Studies and the Role of Eastern Europe

AS seems to have lost its academic interest in the US, at least in its traditional form, in which language studies, and literature/culture played an important role. Created as a necessity to know "the Other" during the Cold War, AS became obsolete: as the political changes in the area began to unfold, it failed to recognize its object of study, or it was simply pushed aside by other theoretical and methodological models that suited our constantly changing history.

For one thing, AS, as a field defined as such, and analyzed through a homogeneous theory (the US/ West vs. the Iron Curtain) did not justify its existence anymore, given the new developments in the area. Post-communism, with all its attached sub-'post-isms' replaced one reading method with a plurality of others, drawing their source from post-colonialism, post-communist economy, social studies, anthropology, etc. The greatest paradox is that the object of study (the countries in Eastern Europe, post-early 1990s), a former victim of the Iron Curtain type of Marxism, was being examined through the lenses of Western Marxism, most of the time. On the other hand, the 'native voices' of those countries adopted a form of 'auto-colonization' in discourse that blurred the line between the former domain of AS and the domains of disciplines. Or, it created a new, unilaterally Western approach of the former object of AS.

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

The effectiveness and legitimacy of such an enterprise has been presented and analyzed in an impressive number of volumes. With time, the voice of an important part of AS- language and literature/culture studies- became less and less audible. If some of the strategic interests that had informed AS disappeared, or were, at least, revamped in the new historic context, AS simply fell victim to an increasingly instrumentalized attitude that, paradoxically, made all the parties involved meet halfway. Not only US universities and research institutions changed their priorities. The intellectuals from post-Communist countries, too, took pride in their linguistic skills and knowledge, their capacity to function comfortably within the Western discourse. This may seem to have little to do with the gradual demise of AS, and the decreased interest of the students for the curriculum offered by the field, yet the internationalization of education, that begin to set in in the 1990s contributed to it, undoubtedly.

The mobility of students and researchers/public intellectuals form those countries, transformed the object of AS in a polymorphic, plurivocal object and, therefore, less easy to analyze or learn about through the same homogeneous approach. Maybe it sounds cynical but, leaving aside the critical languages/cultures programs, Eastern Europe began its journey as an apparently predictable region of a politically homogeneous Western Europe. Why, then bother to study and understand Eastern Europe in its regional specificity, any longer? The Western theoretical mind moved on, laboring under the illusion of synchronicity, driven by an even increasing belief in the existence of a globalized (i.e. homogeneous) culture, at least in Europe. After almost two decades since the advent of the new millennium, and after countless accounts on globalization and its effects in all fields and walks of life, there are probably very few readers of a cardinal article published in 1998 by Fredric Jameson "Globalization as a Philosophical Issue". There he wrote:

> As for Europe, more wealthy and culturally elegant than ever, a glittering museum to a remarkable past- most immediately the past of modernism itself- I want also to suggest that its failure to generate its own form of mass cultural production is an ominous sign(…) I happen to find the effort, stimulated by the EEC, to conjure up a new European cultural synthesis, with Milan Kundera substituting for T.S. Eliot an equally ominous, if more pathetic, symptom.(…) By the same token, the former socialist countries have seemed largely unable to generate an original culture and a distinctive way of life capable of standing as an alternative (to globalization seen as Americanization, my note). (Jameson 1998: 67)

Jameson's words sound alarming and, at this historical moment, utterly incorrect. One may wonder what his millenarist fear has in common with

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

language/national Studies teaching and AS. In my opinion, three important elements are mentioned in this worried account on the prevalence of the US-based model of culture in a global age:

a. Europe, animated by a sense of "internal guilt" tried to invite the "other Europe" to the podium, and generously share with it its perpetual stereotypically assumed glory.

b. the cultures of Europe abandoned the pluralism of the nation-state era or the ambitious original constructs and became a part of an ossified Western Europe, resplendent with the glitter of Great Works. Thus, Eastern Europe, its languages and cultures became a willing and sometimes self-proclaimed subaltern of the new (and old) Europe. The failure to produce alternative cultures means that not even an apparently unified post-isms Eastern European voice could be heard. Consequently, a geopolitical approach, the object of AS, lost its object and, mainly, its interest. The new world was not interested in generating otherness, when it could have received only nods of approval and admiration.

The geographic and geopolitical argument has not been abandoned altogether, as we can see reading quite a significant number of recently published studies about AS and Language/ Culture teaching. Even the fact that researchers spend time reflecting on AS, after 2010 sends the message that the field is not dead. It may also mean that the field is in great need of being redefined within the larger context of global world/global city. In our attempt to redesign the teaching of languages ,I think that AS, and the lessons that we learn from it, together with the recent accounts on creating "cityscapes"/ language-scapes in language and culture teaching models can help us find a convenient and authentic manner to familiarize our students to Eastern European languages and cultures and to bring back a zone of Europe that does have its specificity, beyond the stereotypical interpretations of the various theories of ethnicity and post-communism. For one thing, the post-1989 and post-1996 events, and then the orange revolution made it clear that there is no homogeneous post-Communism. On the other hand, based on a former set of stereotypes, specific to the Cold War era AS, the events in the Eastern European countries were interpreted in a homogeneous manner, in lack of a finely-tuned analysis of the complexes, fears, and pre-Cold War problems. As we all know, after the interest for AS decreased dramatically, many US academic programs had to convert to discipline studies or to place an extra burden on instructors and researchers, to teach 'what was requested' from that region, all this at the expense of a much needed analysis and revamping of the field.

There is one more argument that pleads in favor of a reconsideration of AS in relation to language and culture studies within the theoretical and practical framework envisaged by our universities: languages and cultures of the former "Soviet" satellites did not make it to full programs in US universities. Languages and cultures in Eastern Europe claimed their individuality, post-Cold War, while some of the old inertia has led to a continuation

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

of the administrative practices, while the approach of the object of study has changed. For example, there are very few reasons to teach Romanian language within a Slavic Department at Columbia, as it happens in other US universities, as well. It is, after all, a Romance language. The Romance Languages and Cultures Dept. expressed little enthusiasm, if any, to have another 'addition' to their offer, or to advertise the offer constantly and coherently, unless there appears a student interested in Comparative Romance Languages Grammar or in learning all of the languages of the Romance family. Such cases are rather rare, and, as I argued above, students prefer to use their language and culture knowledge towards a more lucrative career in law, political science, or sociology. I believe that this practical reason, that situate our languages and cultures in a position when they haven't managed to represent themselves autonomously, why not return to the lesson of AS and see how we can learn from the past and teach for the future?

2. A Brief 'Ancient' History of AS and the Place of National Studies

In 1973, a hefty monograph (number 17 in the series) of the American Academy of Political and Social Science appeared- Richard D. Lambert- Language and AS Review. Prior to this, Charles Jelavich (Jelavich, 1969) had published an equally impressive volume of studies on the direct relation between AS and the study of languages and literatures. In four years, Jelavich's optimistic conclusion, and his set of solution for a correct and useful definition of AS were somehow contradicted by the reality of the programs, especially of the language programs in US universities that offered AS. If we leave aside the complaints of the students who wanted "less grammar and translation" in the language classes (as per the method *du jour* then), we see that some of the concerns are still in effect today for what then called "the uncommonly taught languages"- "the area specialist needs more than a nodding acquaintance with the language", "2/3 of area specialists have no language skills, combined", or

> In the early days of relatively superficial research and writing in these areas, it was at least conceivable that one would consider himself a Latin Americanist, a South Americanist(…) and, by the then current standards, have a sufficient knowledge of all or most countries of the region to have his opinion taken seriously. This was especially true for those world areas which were dominated early by the Orientalist-style textual studies that sought to illuminate the great classical civilization as a whole. (Lambert, 1973: 86)

Even from this early statistics on AS we see that the cultures in focus did not all enjoy the same status: the center (Russia) enjoyed an Orientalizing

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

approach, simultaneously with its own 'Orientalizing' view on its 'satellites'. The apparent homogeneity, which we attach today to AS, and which we invoke in order to explain the demise of the field did not exist, in fact, either inside the 'block', or in its analysis performed by the US academia and political institutions. I will not include the statistics on enrollments in language studies of the area, as they showed in 1973. I will just say that the numbers are startlingly similar to what we have today in the less commonly taught languages of the area, among which Romanian. The same applies to the retention rates once the students completed the first level, which is "the nodding acquaintance with the language". One other important remark that I found in Lambert's study concerns the risks of substituting the study of language with the study of other topics of the area/one culture in the area. This may lead, he feared, to the illusion of becoming 'a specialist' just by getting acquainted to a language that very few study.

As I mentioned before, this still creates one of the concerns of the language/ culture instructor, who is torn apart between the need to teach their own culture in 'insider's' terms, and the reluctance, lack of time or of practical interest on the part of the students, who become 'specialists' in the region or in a national culture of the region by transferring knowledge from other classes, where an apparent similar theoretical 'parlance' is used: neo-Marxian theories in political science, the discourse of 'Orientalism', the reductive approach of the West vs. Communist ideologies. All this is history, or intellectual carelessness, one may say; since the heyday of AS, the geopolitical landscape has changed significantly, while the paradigm of thought simply records AS as one of the many particular, political-turned-academic needs to know and/ or create the 'Other'. Even the Other has lost some legitimacy, or at least, is comfortably tucked among the many folds of theoretical and ideological veils, that shift just in time to catch up with our increasingly fast world.

And yet, the new significant studies in AS that oblige us to reflect on the field beyond the confines of the West vs. Eastern Europe and to agree upon the need of a complex view of the field, and, consequently of RS.

I maintain that only in the critical acknowledgment of the complexity of AS we can define a recognizable, individualized field of RS, out of which its respective sub-fields (history, literature, political science, etc.) can draw their coherent theoretical and methodological roots.

3. AS exists and Romanian Studies (RS) may find its voice within

One may argue that it does, but has ceased to prove its relevance to our… area. It is thriving in the Asia Pacific, where important studies are being published constantly, but that is…a different part of the world; it has a different past and it deals with much different contemporary concerns. Although

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

these are somehow valid counter-arguments I would launch an invitation to take into consideration at least some recent research (Gibson-Graham, 2004, for example) that can offer quite a number of reflection points for our area and our language/ culture teaching projects. In an analysis on the status of AS after poststructuralism, J.K. Gibson-Graham wrote that: "After poststructuralism, AS seemed to have continued its decline into academic disrepute and theoretical disrepair", the reason invoked frequently being "Eurocentrism". The truth is, the author admits frankly that it was not Eurocentrism that caused this (as we may also understand from Jameson's eulogy, briefly presented here) but the 'theoretical vacuity': the field has constantly been driven by "a narrative of capitalist development". This 'constant' in AS made the field loses not only its appeal to students, researchers and instructors but also to find itself in a tautological discourse. The mechanics of teaching the languages and cultures of non-capitalist, non-Western countries ceased to cover a fluid reality of multiple identities and dissolved AS into a number of thematic/ discipline studies. Gibson-Graham proposed a table, on the differences between thematic and AS. His thorough examination of the two fields illuminates a number of sub-fields that we may reexamine in language and culture teaching. Thus, thematic studies are characterized as: general/ universal/ abstract/ nomothetic/ theoretical/ social scientific/ quantitative/ hypothesis testing/ economic/ contemporary/ the West/ developed/ modern, whereas the AS are specific/ particular/ concrete/ ideographic/ empirical/ humanistic/ qualitative/ case study/ cultural/ historical/ the rest/ underdeveloped/ premodern. Reading his two series of characteristics, we may feel outraged as, during our contemporary times, it appears hard to coin 'the underdeveloped', 'the rest' (as opposed to a West-o-centric West!) the premodern, without showing lack of sensitivity to a culture, or a group, for that matter. Nevertheless, we wonder whether these differences describe a current and ongoing situation, beyond the soothing assurance that the globalized world will, ultimately, erase differences, traumas and complexes, whatever those may be.

Some of the aforementioned differences may prove useful for our attempt to disseminate less commonly taught languages and cultures, among which Romanian, with a global consciousness. While 'the rest' and 'premodern' may appear incompatible with the new paradigm of thinking, as we will see below, they may offer topics for reflection inside the methodological and content complex that inform our syllabi and effective teaching materials. A critical reflection can help us provide teaching materials and projects that introduce the cultures and languages that we teach in a manner that is neither 'West-o-centric', nor 'nationalistic', as many actual scholars, both Romanian and non-Romanian, suggest. The transitional, non-conflicting relations that will inform the definition of a field of RS can be better understood by a J.K. Gibson-Graham's list of possible solution that may help bridge the gap between the thematic studies and AS, and may help us in language and culture

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

teaching, and in defining a contemporary field of RS, as well: "eschew progress-embrace the specificity of the place; embrace in-betwenness (apud. D. Chakrabarty, 1998), that is subaltern and diasporic voices; eschew economic essentialism and embrace the importance of culture representations".

As far as RS are concerned, one may easily see that the 'transitional' areas of the field can be approached, with a more authoritative voice, if we reconsider and redefine the main dichotomic and or stereotypically regional approaches. In a study on national identity in Romanian Studies, C. Iordachi and B. Trencsényi (2003) argue that RS was defined under a dichotomic approach: on the one hand the autochtonist discourse, that comes directly from the Romantic identity complex proposes a field that is characterized by narrative continuity, in a rather evolutionist manner. On the other hand, the Westernizers adopt the plurivocal discourse of modernity, and not without relevance for our discussion, a Marxian outlook on RS. The analysis of the two authors relies heavily on Romanian and Western historiography, as well as on literary/cultural studies, both by Romanian scholars and by non-Romanians, or Romanians who live (lived) and created abroad, thus being legitimately associated with a *Western* voice. The lengthy demonstration of the authors, who believe that protochronism and its Romanian and Western accounts (i. e. Verdery) made a turning point in the definition of RS leads to the conclusion that RS should not rely only on historiography, as "the cultural studies, anthropology, ethnography went well above the head of historiography" (Iordachi and Tercsényi 2003: 446-447). If we examine the conclusion of the authors, we can easily see that they recommend a return to the AS, without really naming it. In their view,

> as a consequence of this blurring of "external" and "internal" perspective, the traditional narrative of the conflict between Westernizers and autochtonists collapses, being replaced by a complex social and intellectual landscape of various cultural configurations, permanently rearranged according to the lines of the actual conflict. (Iordachi and Tercsényi 2003: 453).

Although they identify the 'weakening' of an ideological conflict among the two directions in historiography and, consequently, in RS, they still maintain that such a conflict exists, and only the recourse to the approaches in other fields would promote a 'European' type of RS. In my understanding, the reconciliation of the two conflicting theoretical and analytical approaches that had informed Romanian historiography and RS should be done in view of a supra-national identity, the "European" one, as per the authors' conclusion.

From Jameson's loving but concerned look at Europe at the turn of the 21st century, to Gibson-Graham's reassurance of the non-existent danger of

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

a new Eurocentrism, as we traverse a moment of 'theoretical vacuity', we see that the two historians still believe that the 'in-betweenness' left by the former conflict still needs an overarching label, that of 'European', in the absence of which the field of RS does not seem to find its voice and legitimacy. Is the 'European' the new AS? And where, in this transitional conceptual, does RS stand? Moreover, what should it include, as an object of study and how does this object should be approached?

A possible answer seems to come from an unlikely place, an article on geography and AS. Usually, historiography and political science inform the field, and yet, the new 'culture-scapes' that the AS should be aware of offers a lot to consider.

4. Culture-scapes and Geography in recent AS

In an apparent eulogy, triggered by decluttering the office of a deceased AS scholar, James Sidaway(Sidaway, 2012), analyzes the status and future of AS. Published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, the article may appear of marginal interest for our field. However, some of the author's reflections and considerations elicit our attention and bring forth confirmations and further reasons for pedagogical pursuits:

> (…) as an invitation to reconsider the discipline's relationship to AS and knowledge and representation of places, three intertwined pathways are presented here: the status of geographical knowledge in the aftermath of the critique of orientalism and associated post-colonial departures; debates about language and translation; and attention to the situatedness and operation of perspective in geographical imaginations. (Sidaway 2012: 985)

As we, and the author in question very well know that these have been "configured and articulated by the term globalization"(Sidaway 2012: 985), we should further reflect how spaces after the post-structuralist, post-traditional AS can develop a new AS and can help us define RS. "Eastern Europe", Sidaway quotes Le Rider (2008) "was no longer seen as a meaningful category. It was increasingly overwritten with the resuscitated label of Central Europe". In other words, the old reading methods, including the way in which interest for the languages and cultures of the area have been subjected to a new "framing difference" (Elden 2005). To this, the constant adjustments of local and global have led to a multiplication of perspectives, reading methods, curriculum readjustments that sometimes fails to focus on the commonalities of the area.

We may argue that the political changes in the region may have permanently affected the object and methodology of AS. However, we should not

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

ignore Lewis and Wigen's (1997) important consideration that may help us, as instructors and researchers, reframe our particular disciplines over "a metageography":

> Every global consideration of human affairs, they wrote, employs a metageography, whether acknowledged or not. By metageography we mean a set of spatial structures through which people gain their knowledge of the world: the often unconscious frameworks that organize studies of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science and even natural history.

Following this, we may say that a revisitation of AS, with application to the languages and cultures of Eastern Europe that incorporates at least some of the notions presented above may help in providing coherence and meaning to our programs and may lead to the increase of the potential students' interest. Lewis and Wigen's "metageography" can translate, in today's context, as what Jan Kubik (Kubik 2015) called the principle of "contextual holism", "a set of approaches based on a successful combination of generalization and contextualization". The author identified five principles that inform contextual holism: "relationism (weak structuralism); historicizing; constructivism; focus on informality (formal-informal hybrids); and localism" (Kubik 2015: 354).

Caught between a plurality of theoretical approaches that would imply choices and the creation of its object in compliance with the chosen theoretical path(s), RS cannot ignore, as I argued elsewhere (Momescu, 2015), a regional determination that been part of a certain type of self-representation, that is Balkanism. AS itself, if true to the recent theoretical acquisitions, should not ignore this sub-field. In the approaches on Romanian culture, Balkanism has enjoyed, so far, two types of approaches: the pejorative approach, that made Balkanism an overarching and imprecise label for historical failures or shortcomings in collective identity; the 'literary approach' (see M. Muthu), in which Balkanism is examined as an esthetic category, generated by a 'certain post-Yalta evasiveness', in which certain Byzantinism and localism come together. However questionable this definition of 'Romanian Balkanism' may appear, we see that this esthetic category keeps its connections with politics, in the tradition of AS, and also with a certain localism. Therefore, this 'internal use Balkanism' that was not a product of the West but mostly a unifying identity complex meant to meet the West on recognizable grounds, as I argued in my 2015 study must be part of the new RS, of the new 'contextual holism', announced by Kubik. Only in this manner we can cover a realistic object of RS, going beyond the old stereotypes in AS and RS, alike.

Kubik provides yet another list of sub-fields and topics that can be considered by RS, in our attempt to define its field and to identify the correct methods to approach it:

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

> This is an area of potentially fruitful collaboration between the students of culture (e.g. literature, film, theater, everyday life), who often examine the formation and preservation of cultural "climates", including various forms of collective identity, and political scientists examining the emergence of different types of post-communist polities and problems with consolidation of democracy. My own work on the politics of memory […] contributed to this area. One of the main goals of our project was to charter a via media between the preservation of rich texture of case studies and the "abstracting" search for patterns. (Kubik 2015: 360)

The RS, then, become a culture-scape of the metageography defined before; in other words, the object of this complex culture-scape, understood in its widest acceptation, it should focus on all of the topics and fields above. The dialogue between such a particular field and the new AS should be carried on in theoretical terms that do not give up the old certainties of 'national' identity, but analyze them in full faith and consciousness of the 'contextual holism'. Memory, historiography, ethnography and the language study itself come together in this new AS, seen as a new *science du langage* in the global age.

What are, then, the methods that one should consider in approaching the new RS? At a first glance, given the Protean object of the field, one may say that 'anything goes', which will deepen, even more, the fears of those who see the disappearance of the old certainties in the teaching and study of Romanian language, literature and history, three of the traditional topics of the RS. The fear a new, even more dangerous relativism that will pervade the new RS is not justified, in my opinion. The new metageography can help us isolate 'spaces', individual 'culture-scapes' that can be examined each with its appropriate tools. I see here liberation from the old deterministic and sometimes hypocritical Marxian approaches that forced a complex object of AS into interpretation grids sometimes contradictory to the accepted ideology. The best example here is the way in which 'local' Balkan Studies, historiography and thematic studies placed the Eastern European identity under Marxian theories, in order to speak about Communist totalitarianism and the failure of the left. They did so in order to escape the label of theoretical retardation and to speak in a critical "parlance" recognizable by their Western interlocutors, while placing those field under a schizoid approach.

This is why I believe that a punctual method, in accordance with the subfield, or theme studied under the new RS, will solve all of these controversies and underlying conflicts.

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

References (general and used in the paper):

APPADURAI, Arjun, 2000, "Grassroots globalization and the research imagination", *Public Culture*, 12, pp.1-19;

BIELIĆ, Dušan, Obran SAVIĆ (eds.), 2002, *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Cambridge, MIT Press;

CAP-BUN, Marina (ed.), 2008, *Studiile românești în lume/ Romanian Studies around the World*, București, Editura Universitară;

CUMINGS, Bruce, 2014, "Biting the Hand that Feeds You: Why the Intelligence Function of American Foundation Support for AS Remains Hidden in Plain Sight", *Global Society*, 28, 1, pp.70-89;

FRIEDMAN, Jonathan and Cynthia MILLER-IDRISS, 2015, "The International Infrastructure of AS Centers: lessons for Current Practice from a Prior Wave of Internationalization", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19 (I), pp.86-104;

GIBSON-GRAHAM, J. K., 2004, "Area Studies After Poststructuralism", *Environment and Planning*, 36, pp. 405-419;

IORDACHI, Constantin and TERCSÉNYI, Balázs, 2003, "In Search of a Usable Past: the Question of National Identity in Romanian Studies, 1990-2000", *East European Politics and Societies*, 17, 3, pp. 415-453;

JAMESON, Fredric, 1998, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue", in Fredric JAMESON and Masao MIYOSHI (ed. by), *The Cultures of Globalization*, Duke University Press, pp. 54-77;

JELAVICH, Charles, 1969, *Language and Area Studies: East Central and Southeastern Europe. A Survey*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press;

KLINKE, Ian, 2014, "Area Studies, Geography and the study of Europe's East", *The Geographical Journal*, 81, 4, pp. 423-426;

KUBIK, Jan, 2015, "Between Contextualization and Comparison: A Thorny Relationship between East European Studies and Disciplinary 'Mainstreams'", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 29, 2, pp.352-365;

LAMBERT, Richard D., 1973, *Language and Area Studies Review*, Philadelphia, Monograph 17 of the American Academy of Political and Social Science;

MOMESCU, Mona, 2015, „Studii balcanice și regionale- minime precizări teoretice", in Mihaela FULEA, Angelo MITCHIEVICI (ed.), *Dialog cultural* în spațiul sud-est european, București, Editura Universitară, pp. 5-15;

MUTHU, Mircea, 2002, *Balcanologie*, vol. 1, Cluj, Editura Dacia;

SIDAWAY, James D., 2013, "Geography, Globalization, and the Problematic of Area Studies", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103, 4, pp. 984-1002.

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)

Lect. univ. Mona MOMESCU
N. Iorga Chair for Romanian Language and Culture,
Columbia University, New York
Ovidius University, Constanța

Ph.D in Romanian Philology (University of Bucharest, 2002), lecturer of Romanian language and culture at the Romanian Language Institute/ Columbia University, lecturer at Ovidius University of Constanța.

Most relevant publications: *Canon, identitate, complexe* (Editura Universității din București, 2008), coeditor and contributor to *Idolii forului* (with Sorin Adam Matei, București, Corint, 2010), studies on Romanian Studies and Balkan Studies, contribution with papers to distance teaching of Less Commonly Taught Languages, curriculum design for Romanian in hybrid teaching.

BDD-A26177 © 2017 Editura Universității din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:36:45 UTC)