

# **From Solo Research to Collaborative European Studies**

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We are all here today to honor Bela Maday. Many of us have quite personal reason for being here, too, in that Bela has played a critical role in our development as "Europeanist anthropologists." Given our purpose I decided to talk about trends toward "cooperative" or "collaborative" research between American anthropologists and our European colleagues for two main reasons.

First and foremost, Bela Maday has been a major proponent of such cooperative ventures for a good many years. In his foreword to the East European Quarterly issue on "Anthropology in East-Central and Southeast Europe" in 1970 he wrote, "it is gratifying to note that efforts toward communication and cooperation between the scientific communities of East Europe and American colleagues have increased in recent years" (p. 240). Bela's strong encouragement of cooperative efforts is certainly not limited to East-Central Europe, although he has had a particularly important influence upon those of us doing fieldwork in countries such as Hungary and Yugoslavia.

For example, during the spring 1971 semester when I was studying the cultures of Eastern Europe for the first time in a graduate course Bela offered at American University, he introduced me to Professor Milovan Gavazzi, Professor of Ethnology at the University of Zagreb, who was a visiting professor that year at Indiana University in Bloomington. Bela invited Professor Gavazzi to our class and- of course- to a later social gathering. This was my introduction to the absolutely critical "social network" aspect of being able to "get down to work" in Yugoslavia. In later years, as I began field work there, Professor Gavazzi was both a gracious host and an important link to other professionals in the Zagreb community. Somewhat later, Bela similarly introduced the American University students to Professor Tamas Hofer who, in turn, has played a major role in the fieldwork of many people here today. Among us, I am sure we would have scores of such examples where Bela has been instrumental in getting us off on the right start in our European research.

My second reason for selecting this topic comes directly out of my own experience working in Yugoslavia. In 1973 I set out to do my dissertation fieldwork in that country. I planned to study culture change since World War II in the small town of Vela Luka on the island

of Korcula. The study was designed largely from my own perspective on a research question I thought worth exploring in that setting: the impact of macro-level changes in the society upon young people's socialization and decision-making during the post-World War II era of Yugoslavia. I had not paid especially careful attention to paving the way-on both a conceptual and practical level-to carry out the project under the sponsorship of colleagues in Zagreb until I arrived there. Not surprisingly, in hindsight, I encountered difficulties in obtaining official approval to do the research, approval which is absolutely necessary in many European countries. This particular experience provided a productive jumping-off point for the manner in which I have worked more recently in Yugoslavia. I see the model of fieldwork under which I was operating in 1973 to be what has been called the "solo," "lone ranger," or "lone wolf" researcher. I reentered the Yugoslav research arena beginning in 1976 and particularly in 1980 as an "alcoholism researcher," and I set out my work using a different strategy. At the risk of implying political subterfuge, I refer to this as the "collaborative" approach. In this context, collaboration means to "work together, especially on some ... scientific undertaking" (Webster's New World Dictionary). I encompass, first, intercultural and, second, interdisciplinary cooperation within this concept. For my work in Yugoslavia since 1980, this approach has entailed intercultural cooperation and communication between the American tradition of anthropology and that of colleagues in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. My style of working in Yugoslavia since 1980 can be characterized as follows: First, I have planned new research ideas in conjunction with the interests of colleagues in that country, even when I have planned to conduct the study more or less on my own. Second, I have considered seriously ideas for research and other activities which originated among colleagues in Yugoslavia, and much of my work in the last five years came out of such suggestions. And third, I have made a serious commitment to trying to be an effective intercultural and interdisciplinary communicator. My success in this area is mixed, I know, but I have placed a high priority of pushing the boundaries of understanding between cultural traditions of research in Yugoslav and American anthropology.

The need for improved communication between American and European anthropologists was exemplified in Bela Maday's 1968 *Current Anthropology* article on "Hungarian Anthropology: The Problem of Communication." Many of the reasons for our then limited knowledge about the "remarkable progress in anthropological activities in Hungary" (p. 180) during the 1950s and 1960s on the part of American anthropologists were noted by Bela Maday:

This intellectual ferment has gone virtually unnoticed in the United States, apparently because of difficulties in communication between Hungarian and American anthropologists. The reasons for this poor state of communication doubtless include. (a) language difficulties, (b) divergent disciplinary needs, (c) differences in the classification of various subdisciplines and their practitioners between Europe and the United States, and (d) international political tensions (1968: 180). To broaden my understanding of trends in collaborative research in the more recent years, I have conducted a small survey of American anthropologists who have done fieldwork in a variety of European countries. I sent a letter in which I addressed six issues to twenty anthropologists. The response has been overwhelmingly positive in that I have heard from almost everyone in one form or another (mostly through lengthy letters). Those anthropologists responding to my survey questionnaire have conducted fieldwork in Scotland, Norway, Finland, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. Half of the 19 respondents began their fieldwork in the 1970s; 25% in the 1960s, and 25% in the 1980s.

The question addressed are:

- (1) When you began doing fieldwork in the country in question, how much were you in contact with anthropologists-ethnologists there, and what kind of role did they take in the way you conducted the study?
- (2) Was this contact a help or a hindrance or some of both to your work at the time?
- (3) How has the nature of your professional ties with colleagues in that country changed since then, if at all?
- (4) What have been the advantages and disadvantages of joint projects carried out with anthropologists?
- (5) How has anthropology as a discipline changed in that country since you began working there?
- (6) Do you have any special suggestions to make to graduate students preparing to do fieldwork in that country, especially regarding individual and collaborative research projects?

During their initial fieldwork in Europe, over half of these 19 anthropologists had no or minimal contact with anthropologists-ethnologists in their country of study. The reasons for this are diverse: in Greece, for example, in the late 1960s and 1970s, there were literally almost no Greek anthropologists. A similar situation characterized the Basque country during this time. This has, of course, changed considerably over the past two decades. Second, some of these American anthropologists - who were mainly doing dissertation research - found colleagues outside anthropology-ethnology who had scholarly interests which fit more squarely within the research traditions of these Americans. Linguists, historians and ethnohistorians, social historians, geographers, political economists, sociologists, political scientists, demographers, folklorists, etc. often became the important professional contacts.

Third, occasionally the American anthropologist already had a clear-cut plan for research including location, went directly to the region of study, established the local contacts necessary to work there, and did not need to go through any official scholarly or legal channels to conduct field work. In some European countries, this would be impossible to do since official approval is necessary and to obtain official approval it is necessary to get the cooperation of a scholarly sponsor.

A fourth reason has to do with differences in the discipline of anthropology-ethnology in the United States and various European countries. Many of the respondents commented on this factor as having complicated, at one time or the other, productive discourse over the goals and results of anthropological study and methods of fieldwork. Looking in Europe as a whole, we see considerable variability in (1) the nature of anthropological study-how the field is defined and subdivided and named; (2) methods of collecting data, especially the contrast between the United States ideal of becoming immersed in a local community for an extended period of time versus short forays from an urban-university center to the rural areas; and (3) prevailing theoretical perspectives.

Fortunately these differences have been the focus of discussion in several publications and symposia. One respondent noted the 1968 article by Tamas Hofer in *Current Anthropology* on "Anthropologists and Native Ethnographers in Central European Villages." These discussions, I believe, reflect a genuine interest for anthropologists-ethnologists to understand more clearly each other's perspectives on the discipline, methods, and theory within Europe itself and between American and European colleagues. I suspect we all recognize at least some of the

deterrents to easy and productive cooperative work. While I have considerable enthusiasm for collaboration as a style of working, I am far from oblivious to the difficulties and potential drawbacks. The rest of this paper is devoted mainly to describing the experiences of survey respondents in cooperative efforts.

A whole host of advantages of collaboration for American anthropologists doing fieldwork in Europe were noted by the respondents, including: (1) getting the necessary documentation; (2) generally facilitating the research and opening necessary doors; (3) providing overall guidance and orientation; (4) copy editing of questionnaires, interview schedules, manuscripts, etc., written in the host language; (5) finding written and/or archival sources and other published documents; (6) friendship; and (7) professional brainstorming.

Cooperation exists on many levels, from relatively informal chats between colleagues to elaborate multi-national, multi-institute funded projects. Those of a more organized nature encompass (1) joint symposia and conferences; (2) joint publications; (3) teaching or studying in educational settings in the other country; (4) organizational activities; and (5) bilateral, sometimes multinational research projects. These American Anthropological Association meetings include, for example, a two part symposium convened by the Nordic Anthropologists. In 1975, the International Conference Group on Portugal was established. Many examples of joint publications were identified in the letters. In recent years, a binational project on the changing family in northwestern Portugal, the application of ethnographic field methods to landscape planning in Vienna, and the Hungarian-American joint Project in Ethnography and Folklore have been underway, just to mention a few. In my own experience, the 1988 Congress of the international Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Zagreb is a prime example of a major cooperative international venture between anthropologists. Many of us here today had a central role in that endeavor.

And now, how do we advise our graduate students going to Europe for the first time to do fieldwork? Almost everyone recommended making some serious contacts with anthropology/ethnology colleagues, as both a matter of both practical and ethical considerations: "The single anthropologist working alone hopefully will become something of the colonial past" (Robert Ulin). Several people distinguished - and I think wisely - between initial fieldwork and later research in a given country. Completing a piece of research which reflects the student's interests and American anthropological training is a critical step toward becoming experienced

enough to handle collaborative arrangements effectively: "One must approach collaboration with caution and clear understanding of mutual role expectations. Ill-conceived or loosely-conceived collaboration can become a minefield of broken promises, damaged feelings, and crushed expectations. This can be a particularly devastating for a graduate student" (William Douglass). Developing an identity as a proven anthropologist is important in being taken seriously and treated as a colleague by European anthropologists.

At the same time, the graduate student would do well to take the anthropological traditions of the country of study seriously. "On the whole, I would encourage them to think through a non-colonial mentality before going to the field and to work, from the beginning, with the teachers, resources, and colleagues who must be treated every bit as seriously as any immediate American university influence" (Gary McDonogh).

One big help to reach this balance between autonomy and connectedness is to spend one or three months in the country before making the field trip itself (perhaps a year in advance). Several respondents recommended this, and I wish I had done so myself. This, of course, can be a big boon to language learning, which was specially noted as highly important by several respondents. Reflecting such thinking, Eugene Flammel's advice was to: (1) be absolutely fluent in the language; (2) learn to find out something your hosts are truly interested in; (3) do not push or be in a hurry; (4) don't be a scientific colonialist; and (5) publish there in their language. In closing, I think Bela Maday would concur with Andris Skreija's exhortation to anthropologists entering European fieldwork: "Above all, listen! If people tell you to 'zig,' don't 'zag'."

## Notes

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