

STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND STRATEGY IN INTERWAR ROMANIA.
A POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF ANTON GOLOPENȚIA'S
STRATEGIC THINKING

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ABSTRACT

The research question that this article poses is whether new light could be shed on Anton Golopenția's geopolitical writings by employing political sociology. Specifically, the article is interested in illuminating some of the reasons that prompted Anton Golopenția, as a philosopher, sociologist, and bureaucrat of a low capacity state that emerged in the aftermath of WWI, to get involved in both theoretical and practical geopolitics. To this end, the article employs a "relational-strategic approach" that places emphasis on structure, agency and strategy and aims at avoiding methodological monism. The article employs case-study research, works with both primary and secondary data, and reaches the conclusion that Golopenția's geopolitical thinking tends to be specific to a low capacity state that needed solutions to survive in a Hobbesian security milieu. From this perspective, Golopenția's geopolitical thinking, both in its theoretical and practical form, equates strategic thinking.

Keywords: geopolitics, political sociology, the Sociological School of Bucharest, low capacity state, interwar Romania.

INTRODUCTION

The research question that this article poses is whether new light could be shed on Anton Golopenția's geopolitical writings by employing political sociology. Specifically, the article is interested in illuminating some of the reasons that prompted Anton Golopenția, as a philosopher, sociologist, and bureaucrat of a low capacity state that emerged in the aftermath of WWI, to get involved in both theoretical and practical geopolitics. The hypothesis that this article puts forward is that a scholarly attempt that aims at deciphering Anton Golopenția's strategic thinking needs to pay heed to at least two contextual structural variables. First,

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interwar Romania's low capacity state that had emerged in the outskirts of late empires, such as The Ottoman Empire, The Russian Empire, and the Austro-Habsburg Empire, in the aftermath of WWI, and that was pulled quickly into the orbit of newly-formed, revisionist empires, i.e. The Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Second, the dependence of interwar Romania's academic field on the political field of a comprador structure, that is, the interwar Romanian state. According to Boia, in 1938, almost half of Romania's university professors were members of a political party in an attempt to benefit from political protection. At the same time, most writers used to write eulogistically about Carol II of Romania (Boia 2022, 83).

In this particular context, Golopenția's geopolitics set itself apart from German geopolitics that was dominated by geographical determinism and imperial designs. The former resembled rather a "policy sociology" (Swartz 2013) that was earmarked for a neutral Great Romania, which eventually ended up losing territories in 1940 due to behind closed-door geopolitical negotiations that involved the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. It is beyond the scope of this exploratory article to bring into discussion Golopenția's personal traits. Rather, of interest is to reveal the factors that could have "constrained and structured" (Muller 1987, 9) Golopenția's strategic thinking. To this end, the text pays heed to the institutional context of interwar Romania, as a better understanding of a particular context may deliver "explanations that are of general applicability" (Goodin and Tilly 2006, 23), which, however, come at the risk of complicating the account.

Methodologically, the occurrence and evolution of Golopenția's strategic thinking could be investigated at the intersection of history and biography, in order to understand the "structure of opportunities" (Mills 2000, 9) that occurred through the interplay between *troubles* (ibidem), that is, character of individuals, and *issues*, i.e., historical structures that transcend the personal milieu of the individual. Such a methodological approach is deemed "methodologically suspect" by Weaver (2010, 651). The reason for this is that, academically speaking, to jump directly from (geo)economic and (geo)political processes to academic texts may prove itself unfruitful. The solution that Weaver puts forward lies in an approach that couples three levels of analysis. That is, interactions of scholars with policymakers, interaction of scholars with a particular circle of specialists, and, finally, the interaction of scholars with different university disciplines (Weaver 2010, 653). As it is beyond the scope of this exploratory article to delve into the details of the three-pronged approach that Weaver comes up with, I have chosen a middle road between Mills and Weaver. Specifically, the methodological approach that this article rests on is called the "strategic-relational approach", it was coined by Bob Jessop (2007), and brings together structure, agency and strategy. This approach is premised on the fact that structural constraints, that is, rules, resources and vulnerabilities, operate selectively. Which means that structural constraints are not absolute. They are "temporally, spatially, agency – and strategy-specific"

(Jessop 1996, 124). As a consequence, structural constraints allow individuals to come up with strategic calculations regarding their interests and identities. Strategy, in this case, is tantamount to instilling degrees of autonomy into the structurally-bounded interest and identities, so that the individual gets additional room for manoeuvre relative to structural constraints. In sum, the strategic-relational approach works from the premise that individuals – exactly as nation-states – act within structured contexts whereby structure and opportunities are unevenly distributed (Hay 2002, 116).

The trouble with political sociology, at least in an initial phase of development, was that it was too structure-oriented. Unlike 19th century sociology, with its emphasis on rapid social change, anomie and overurbanization, the 20th century sociology tends “to see structure everywhere” (Tilly 1984, 19) in order to have a better grasp on the “long-term structural change” (Tilly 1984, 147) that usually occurs through the formation and integration of national states into the worldwide capitalist system. To Tilly, the development of capitalism and the formation of national states “dominated all other social processes and shaped all social structures” (Tilly 1984, 15). While political science looks at political parties as independent variables, political sociology treats them differently. In the understanding of political sociology, political parties are rather manifestations of “social stratification, the solidarity structure of the society, its socio-economic and socio-cultural cleavages, its degree of heterogeneity and of integration, its level of economic growth and the like” (Sartori 1969, 201). In short, political sociology could approach political parties as dependent variables, while social structures are viewed as independent, albeit distal, variables. Broadly speaking, structure stands for either institutions or social relations (Bernardi et al. 2006). Structure understood as institutions refers to cultural or normative patterns that regulate collective expectations about the proper behavior. In the second case, that of structure defined as social relations, the emphasis is placed on “the tissue of social relations that connects individuals, groups, organizations, communities and societies” (Bernardi et al. 2006, 164). The above may be hardly illuminating and, therefore, I tend to employ the concept of structure with the sense of rules, resources and vulnerabilities (Jessop 2007) that could leave their mark, albeit a distal one, on social action. There are two reasons for which I have employed the “strategic relational approach” (Jessop 2007) that this article rests on. First, I have no intention of falling into the trap of “methodological monism” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 15) that posits the ontological superiority of either structure or agency. Second, structure and agency are not separated ontologically.

As a method, the article employs a case study research (Howard 2017). The data that I use come mostly from social documents. Specifically, I gathered data from primary sources, that is, different articles that Golopenția wrote in the field of geopolitics. I also use as a primary source of data Golopenția’s countless letters that, to date, have been published in at least six volumes. Arguably, I also employ

secondary data that stem mainly from scholarly literature on interwar Romania. The first section of this article deals with Golopenția's main geopolitical ideas so that the reader gets conversant with them from the very beginning. The second section deals with the structural constraints that may have prompted Golopenția's interest in geopolitics. The third section deals with agency, that is, Golopenția's attempt to chart his own course in the field of interwar Romanian sociology. The last section brings into analysis strategy, that is, Golopenția's attempt to come with a type of "policy sociology" that coupled theoretical and practical geopolitics.

GEOPOLITICS, POLICY SOCIOLOGY OR GRAND STRATEGY? THE MAIN STRANDS OF ANTON GOLOPENȚIA'S STRATEGIC THINKING

This section addresses Anton Golopenția's theoretical geopolitics so that the reader could get conversant with some of his main ideas. Specifically, this section focuses on two articles that Golopenția published in the late 1930s. The first article, titled *The Contribution of Social Sciences to the Management of Foreign Policy*, was published in 1937 in *Romanian Sociology*, the main scholarly journal of the Sociological School of Bucharest. The second article that this section concerns itself with is called *Notes on the Preoccupation That Bears the Name Geopolitics*. It was published in 1939 in a small book called *Geopolitics* whose authors were Ion Conea, Anton Golopenția and M. Popa-Vereș. Golopenția's practical texts on geopolitics were published after the beginning of World War II, once Romania lost Transylvania, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. These texts along with Golopenția's sociological research in Bessarabia and Crimea will be addressed in the last section of the article, which delves into Golopenția's strategy to survive through science amid the institutional uncertainties of interwar Romania. Specifically, this section seeks to find support for the statement that Golopenția's geopolitics is pretty different from interwar German geopolitics and at the same time redolent of modern strategic thinking. First of all, as argued below, Golopenția's focus on "the concern called geopolitics" (Conea et al. 1939, 105) has nothing to do with the main concepts that German geopolitics had advanced. Second of all, with its emphasis on an integrated approach on a given state's potential that is earmarked to inform the Romanian elites on the resources and vulnerabilities of a specific state, Golopenția's geopolitics resembles both "policy sociology" and modern strategic thinking.

Golopenția drew on Kjellen, whom he cited in his 1936 Ph.D. thesis (Golopenția f.a., 15). But despite the fact that Golopenția borrows to a large extent Kjellen's integrated perspective on the state and that, broadly speaking, geopolitics concerns itself mainly with great power politics, one runs into trouble finding the influence of German geopolitics on Golopenția's strategic thinking. The latter has nothing to do with concepts such as *Lebensraum*, *Grossraum* or *panregions*

(Cohen 2009, 21). At the same time, one will run into trouble finding in Golopenția's geopolitics recommendations shaped by either Social Darwinism (Guzzini 2012, 19) or a "militarist and determinist vision of foreign policy" (Guzzini 2012, 13). The only point where Golopenția's strategic thinking draws closer to German geopolitics is its concern with the state. This, however, is not a trait of German geopolitics, but rather of Kjellen's understanding of geopolitics. In this regard Golopenția notes that, unlike Kjellen who had paid heed to the empirical study of states, General Haushofer employed geopolitics in an attempt to regain the territories that the German Reich had lost in the aftermath of WWI (Conea et al. 1939, 99–100). Therefore, Kjellen's mostly geographical understanding of geopolitics suffered significant mutations in the political milieu of an interwar revisionist Germany. Also, Ion Conea rightly notes that interwar German intellectuals who concerned themselves with geopolitics "betrayed Kjellen, that is, they twisted and falsified his principle and perspective" (Conea et al. 1939, 18). Kjellen's geopolitics was influenced by political geography and examined whether a scholar could come up with patterns or even laws regarding the impact of geography on political events (*ibidem*). In contrast to Kjellen, whose purpose was to turn geopolitics into a social science, German intellectuals argued that "geopolitics wants and must turn into the geographical conscience of the state" (Conea et al. 1939, 20). One can easily notice that a significant gap emerges between geopolitics as a science, that is interested in establishing patterns and laws, and geopolitics that turns into – the dominant – security theory or "strategic subculture" (Dumitrescu 2023) of a given state. In the latter case, intellectuals who concern themselves with geopolitics seek to shape the – dominant – security perceptions of a given state, and, thus, geopolitics acquires a militant character that has nothing to do with social research. Golopenția even holds that German geopolitics, understood as a "myth-type geopolitics" that justified the territorial claims of interwar Germany, "is not yet at play in Romania" (Conea et al. 1939, 106). Interestingly, though, he does not exclude the possibility for this type of geopolitics to make its way in interwar Romania.

In Golopenția's view, "the concern called geopolitics" (Conea et al. 1939, 105) is geared towards exploring "the potential of states" (Conea et al. 1939, 104) that occurs at the intersection of "all constitutive factors of a state: territory, the people, population, its economy, its social structure, its culture, the way it is governed, its political milieu" (*ibidem*). Based on the above, geopolitical research is not only geographical or economic. Geopolitical research "is simultaneously geographical, demographic, economic, social, cultural, political" (Conea et al. 1939, 105). In short, geopolitical research stands for an integrated research of a given state's potential. Yet Golopenția barely clarifies what "the potential of states" stands for, despite the fact that he tends to equate it with the "concrete structures of states" (Conea et al. 1939, 106). In a different article, in which Golopenția seeks to understand whether social sciences could bring their

contribution to a given state's foreign policy, he argues that social sciences, instead of geopolitics, should explore the "relatively permanent structure" (Conea et al. 1939, 113) of both foreign states and the co-nationals that find themselves beyond the borders of the Romanian state. In this case, Golopenția clearly draws on Gusti's sociology of the nation, as he maintains that the structure of either a group of co-nationals or a foreign state tends to refer mostly to the conditioning factors of its current state, that is, cosmic, biological, psychological and historic determinants. In addition, a particular attention should be given to the political environment of a given state. Two aspects are worth mentioning at this point regarding Golopenția's perspective. First, social sciences, and not geopolitics, need to explore the processes that alter the structure of either a foreign state or the co-nationals beyond the borders of interwar Romania by comparing the structures of the social units under investigation at two different points of their existence. In other words, social research that is supposed to inform a given state's foreign policy needs to be simultaneously sociological, diachronic and comparative. Second, in order to establish the state's political potential at a certain point in time Golopenția draws on Kjellen and couples the political traits of the territory, the government's authority, movement of the population and its economic and social state (Conea et al. 1939, 115). Data on the above are to be extricated from "political monographs" (Conea et al. 1939, 115). Based on the above, it is pretty clear that Golopenția's view on geopolitics is – to a large extent – tantamount with social research and has nothing to do with geopolitics understood as a political myth, that is, the prevalent meaning that German geopolitics held in the interwar era.

Geopolitics and social sciences for whom? Michael Burawoy makes the difference among professional, policy, critical and public sociology (Swartz 2013). Of these, policy sociology delivers data for extra-academic clients, such as governments, corporations and foundations that are interested in particular topics. In contrast to the above, professional, critical and public sociology tend to be rather internally-oriented, and deal mostly with theoretical and methodological aspects that are of interest for the practitioners of sociology. Arguably, Golopenția's view on geopolitics understood as scientifically-based external information comes closer to policy sociology. He argues that geopolitical research, with its informative character, is earmarked to the governing elite. Notably, geopolitical research is premised on the perspective of the Romanian state and what comes under scrutiny depends largely on what the governing elite considers to be of importance for the political milieu of the Romanian state. Indirectly, Golopenția defines the Romanian interwar state as a state with "limited interests" (Conea et al. 1939, 105), which pays heed to exploring the neighbouring states but also the great powers. In this vein, geopolitics is supposed to deliver research-based external informations and, thus, becomes part and parcel of an "integral sociological research of the nation (based on the meaning that professor Gusti gives to the term)" (Conea et al. 1939, 106). In other words, by delivering research-based external data, geopolitics was

supposed to complement the social research that the Sociological School of Bucharest had already carried out in Romania. Yet, argues Golopenția, the Sociological School of Bucharest had paid no heed to the political environment of the Romanian state, that consisted of “the groups of Romanians outside the border” (Conea et al. 1939, 116), the neighbouring states and the great powers. In this vein, Golopenția shows that interwar Romania’s sociology had been exclusively inward-oriented.

Geopolitics understood as policy sociology also resembles grand strategy. From a military perspective, grand strategy is tantamount with war planning. From an international relations perspective, grand strategy stands for a “meta-strategy”, that is, a holistic vision on a given state’s security theory and security practice. Grand strategy has nothing to do with a grandiose plan. Rather, “grand” refers to an integrated or comprehensive approach that employs simultaneously military, economic, political, and academic resources that allow a given state to fulfil its internal and external security objectives (Balzacq et al. 2019) In my view, Golopenția’s view on geopolitics is related with the academic dimension of grand strategizing. As argued above, social sciences that are supposed to offer data to political incumbents should explore comparatively the transformations that particular states’ – especially the ones that were part and parcel of interwar Romania’s regional environment – social structures have gone through. In this vein, the incumbents could get a better grasp on those states’ political potential at a certain point in time. Notably, Golopenția’s view on geopolitics is premised on the “perspective of the Romanian state” (Conea et al. 1939, 105). Arguably, this has little to do with public, professional or critical sociology. At the same time, this is not only “policy sociology” (Swartz 2013) at its best. It also stands for a fundamental principle of grand strategy, which argues that the reason a researcher explores the strategies of other states for is directly related to the objective of improving his/her state’s strategy (Biscop 2021). Golopenția was aware of the fact that both neighbouring states or great powers could “intervene in the life of a nation” (Conea et al. 1939, 111). Also, he stressed that a given nation’s agency on a particular territory is particularly reliant on its state and political leadership (Conea et. al 1939, 110). Unlike Conea who had paid heed especially to the geopolitics of great powers, Golopenția broadened the scope of social research that was supposed to offer information to the political elites of Great Romania. In Golopenția’s understanding, geopolitics was to explore especially interwar Romania’s neighbouring states, many of which had revisionist ambitions. In other words, without discounting the importance of Great Powers in the field of geopolitics, Golopenția’s geopolitics shared mainly a regional interest. Thus, exactly as in the case of modern strategy, Golopenția’s geopolitics was supposed to offer a given state’s political elites daily, systematic data on their regional environment.

STRUCTURE

As already argued in the introduction of this article, this section has nothing to do with any kind of “methodological monism” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 15) that posits the ontological superiority of either structure or agency. On the contrary, in line with the strategic-relational approach that this article rests on, and also in line with Bourdieu’s “primacy of relations” (ibidem) view, this section is premised on the fact that structure is difficult to fathom outside agency and strategy. In short, the purpose of this section is to frontload three structural influences that, to a certain extent, may account for Golopenția’s propensity to geopolitics. In my view, two of these structural influences stand for “transhistorical invariants” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 78), that is, relations between structures that tend to cover the long-term, while the last one refers to an institution endowed with a strategic program for social reform. Specifically, this section pays heed, first, to interwar Romania’s low capacity state and, second, to its persistent imperial security environment. Third, it takes into account the influence that the Sociological School of Bucharest exerted upon Golopenția’s strategic thinking.

In my view, what has been missing so far from researches that have dealt with democracy in interwar Romania is the question of the state. In the remit of both political sociology and political sciences, it makes little sense to address the quality of democracy while ignoring the quality of the state institutions. A low capacity state, as it was the case of the interwar Romanian state, leads directly to a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky 1997) or a “middle-quality institutional trap” (Mazzuca and Munck 2020). In the latter case, the interplay between an imperfect democracy and a low capacity state reproduces a vicious institutional cycle that turn democracy, at best, into a formal reality (Schmitt and Radu 2023, 21). The quality of transport infrastructure (Dumitrescu 2018; Haynes 2003, 10), “Romania’s military performance in 1916” (Haynes 2020, 112), the inability to draw cadastral maps of the new territory and to swiftly produce different types of bureaucrats for the newly-acquired territories (Magno 2023, 95), an underdeveloped fiscal capacity (Jowitt 1978, 92–93) that persists even nowadays are different instances of a low capacity state. It comes as no surprise – although this is a detail that tends to be completely overlooked in most researches regarding interwar Romania – that newly-formed states in the outskirts of former empires had to deal with vulnerabilities in terms of both tangible and intangible assets. To a large extent, different empires have systematically subverted the hardware and software capacities of wanna-be power centers. While tangible institutions are made up of “armies, police, bureaucracies, ministries and the like”, “intangible institutions” refer to “national traditions, symbols, shared historical memories, and common cultural points of reference” (Fukuyama 2014, 185). Interwar Romania, as a newly-formed state in the outskirts of former empires, lacked both tangible and intangible institutions. Therefore, it is loughable to expect

such a low capacity state to deliver good governance, turn into a functional democracy, or be effective in modernizing Transylvania, Bessarabia or Bukovina in just two decades, against the background of resistance of both local minorities and other nationalizing states, such as Hungary and the Soviet Union. My point is that Romania's low capacity state faced in the interwar period the impossible task of simultaneously building both hardware and software capabilities (Azar and Moon 1988), that is, in broad terms, the state and the nation. If one deepens the political and institutional analysis of the interwar Romanian state, one could come up with a different conclusion. Interwar Romania was not just a low capacity state. It was rather a "comprador structure" (Böröcz 1999) or even an "oligarchic captured state" (Marandici 2021), that was directly instrumentalized by both the King and businessmen from his intimate circle to earn significant amounts of money (Deletant 2024, 66). Unsurprisingly, these businessmen paid almost no taxes. For these, the peasants were to be held accountable. Clearly, the interwar Romanian state represented an imperfect "technology of organisation" (Clapham 1985, 5) that the Sociological School of Bucharest addressed it in order to improve it.

Another structural reality that tends to be overlooked by the researchers who delve into different social and political problems of interwar Romania refers to the new imperial regional environment that swiftly emerged in the aftermath of World War I. Some historians rightly note that interwar Romania's postimperial dimension is discounted (Schmitt and Radu 2023, 29). However, equally discounted are also the newly-formed empires that had a huge influence on the economic and institutional development of the interwar Romanian state, such as the Soviet Union and the Third Reich. My point is that interwar Romania had to deal with the "coloniality of power" (Quijano 2000), that is, political and institutional hierarchies that survived the demise of the Ottoman, the Russian and the Austrian-Habsburg Empires. At the same time, interwar Romania had to cope with the strategic pressures that both Moscow and Berlin exerted on Bucharest. Despite a limited capacity of negotiation with both the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, Romania pursued an interesting hedging strategy under Nicolae Titulescu (Haynes 2003). However, once Titulescu was out of office in 1936, Bucharest followed a neutrality strategy in a Hobbesian security milieu. Unsurprisingly, neutrality did not pay off. In contrast to a Kantian or Lockean security environment, in a Hobbesian milieu state actors tend to perceive themselves as enemies, and violence between such states has no limits (Neumann 2024, 57). In my view, interwar Romania's Hobbesian security milieu could have also had an impact on Golopenția's decision to turn to geopolitics.

At the same time, one should not discount the fact that the strategic expertise that the Sociological School of Bucharest tried to provide at the time could have also impacted Golopenția's propensity to geopolitics. In this regard, at least two aspects are worth emphasizing. First, Dimitrie Gusti's intention to turn the Sociological School of Bucharest into an epistemic community that could exert

scientific and political leverage on the incumbents of the interwar Romanian state. Second, the strategic view that the Sociological School of Bucharest employed regarding social research. Broadly speaking, epistemic communities consist in a network of professionals with different scientific backgrounds. These professionals tend to adopt common normative and causal beliefs, they share the same notions of validity of research, and usually get involved in a particular policy enterprise (Haas 1992, 3). Epistemic communities provide different types of knowledge: “political/symbolic knowledge” (Kourtelis 2021) that informs the decision-making process; “instrumental knowledge” (Kourtelis 2021) which shapes policy making under uncertainty; “conceptual knowledge” (ibidem) that redefines social problems in line with the interests of decision-makers. In theory, epistemic communities wield significant leverage on the political incumbents especially in the case of conceptual knowledge, that could impact policy more significantly than instrumental knowledge. How influential epistemic communities become varies from case to case (Löblová 2018). Dimitrie Gusti, the founder of the Sociological School of Bucharest, placed particular emphasis on the education of social will. In reality, social will was political will and it was exerted by different types of elites, whom Gusti intended to educate, as social will was the most important factor in the nation-building process (Gusti 2008, 34). Both sociological and geopolitical research were earmarked for the state’s incumbents. Regarding the strategic dimension of the Sociological School of Bucharest, Dimitrie Gusti published a monograph of the Danube river in 1904. In roughly the same time span, Kjellen, the Swedish scholar who coined the concept of geopolitics in 1899, pointed out to the importance of monographs for exploring different nation-states (Didă 2012, 40–41). Also, other members of the Sociological School of Bucharest, such as Mircea Vulcănescu, took an interest in foreign policy and international relations, along with geographers turned into sociologists, like Ion Conea. Moreover, the monograph approach that the Sociological School of Bucharest employed as its main method of research implied “an integrated research of the nation” (Golopenția 2016, 21). This approach led to a complementarity between inward-oriented sociological research and outward-oriented geopolitical research (Didă 2012, 38).

AGENCY

This section delves into a three-pronged agency, an instantiation of which represents Golopenția’s geopolitical ideas. Specifically, this section argues that Golopenția had to deal with at least three types of structural constraints or dependencies, that he was aware of and, as a consequence, tried to chart his own course. First, the Sociological School of Bucharest was heavily reliant on the interwar state and the interest groups that used to manage it. This comes as no

surprise, as different scholars have already stressed the dependence of the academic field on the wider political field (Golopenția 2016; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Second, the Sociological School of Bucharest revolved around Dimitrie Gusti's ideas and projects, many of the latter being perceived by Golopenția as unenforceable. Therefore, not only that Golopenția sought to salvage the monograph movement but he also strived to leave his intellectual mark on the research theory and practice of the Sociological School of Bucharest. Finally, Golopenția's security perceptions proved themselves adequate in capturing the Hobbesian character of interwar Romania's security environment and also with respect to the great powers' understanding of Romania.

Broadly speaking, while structure stands for context, agency is tantamount with action, political conduct and ideas, the latter being important for understanding how actors understand particular contexts. Specifically, agency "implies a sense of free will, choice or autonomy – that the actor could have behaved differently and that this choice between potential courses of action was, or at least could have been, subject to the actor's conscious deliberation" (Hay 2002, 92–93). The question of agency becomes more interesting when applied to small states that, due to their different types of vulnerabilities, tend to display little or just degrees of agency. Therefore, when it comes to small states or low capacity states, a category that interwar Romania fell into, agency represents their ability to "seize their own history" (Baldacchino 2018), which, broadly speaking, stands for these states' ability to chart an independent course in a strained regional security environment.

The academic field in interwar Romania was heavily dependent on the political field and the Sociological School of Bucharest made no exception in this regard. Dimitrie Gusti played the role of a political entrepreneur by holding different public positions – President of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company, President of State Monopolies, Minister of Education – that allowed him to help either directly or indirectly his main collaborators. Yet, Gusti's political activity, in the absence of which the Sociological School of Bucharest may have never occurred, left its mark on his scientific activity. Therefore, as of 1932, different authors have noted the crisis that the monograph movement started going through (Rostás 2015, 25). Gusti got appointed the head of the "Prince Carol" Royal Cultural Foundation in 1934. In a letter sent from Berlin, Golopenția notices that from the newly-acquired position Gusti could support some of his collaborators, especially Henri H. Stahl. At the same time, indirectly, the reader gets the feeling that the "cultural work" that Gusti was supposed to manage at the Foundation stood in sharp contrast with the monograph campaigns that had already been carried out. Stahl argues that, as of 1934, the Sociological School of Bucharest was not the same due to the cultural work that it got involved into (Rostás 2000, 281). Specifically, this cultural work made the Sociological School of Bucharest even more dependent on the political field of interwar Romania. With

more emphasis on “cultural action” and less on social research, Gusti’s work at the Royal Cultural Foundation became less and less appealing for former participants at the monograph campaigns, such as Mircea Vulcănescu and Xenia Costa Foru (Rostás 2000, 96). Vulcănescu, one of the most important members of the monograph movement in interwar Romania, was not even answering to Gusti’s letters in 1935 (Rostás 2015, 82). In 1938, in a letter to his wife, Golopenția expresses the concern that the “Prince Carol” Royal Cultural Foundation was to be turned into *Straja Țării*, a youth movement that was directly linked with the political field of interwar Romania. And which, as Golopenția indirectly maintains, had nothing to do with scientific research (Golopenția 1999, 244).

Besides being concerned with the Sociological School of Bucharest’s dependence on the interwar political field, Golopenția was interested in charting his own course within Gusti’s School. Data delivered by the letters Golopenția sent to his wife and colleagues in the 1930s show that Gusti’s view on the sociology of the nation, that was supposed to deliver academic expertise to political incumbents, was pretty divorced from reality as long as monograph research dealt primarily with the popular culture specific to Romanian villages. In Golopenția’s view, academic research had to significantly broaden its object of study in order to deliver strategic data to political elites. Therefore, in a letter dated August 1936 that he sent from Leipzig, Golopenția stresses the fact that academic research needs to cover the Romanian villages and their inherent social problems. But, at the same time, monograph research was also to delve into interwar Romania’s cities, interwar Romania’s neighbouring countries and, also, the great powers (Golopenția 1999, 203). “I have to put forward my interpretation of social sciences understood as a bundle of operations that aim at easing the governing process of states (Golopenția 1999, 204)”. Therefore, at least at face value, Golopenția was less concerned with Gusti’s utopia of combining cultural work with academic research (Rostás 2000, 201) than with a kind of public or policy sociology that was supposed to help the government of interwar Romania’s low capacity state. Notably, in an intellectual dispute with Mircea Vulcănescu, who argues that science needs to be done for the sake of science (Golopenția 1999, 212), Golopenția comes up with a more pragmatic view. “It is not my intention to do science for the sake of science, but science that is useful to the nation, and if I would be able to support all initiatives that aim at a better integration of the nation, I brought my contribution to all these initiatives” (Golopenția 1999, 230). Besides criticising Gusti’s sociology of the nation for not being up to its task, that of providing reliable data on both local and international contexts to political incumbents, Golopenția confesses being fed up with Professor’s “gigantic plans” (Golopenția 1999, 213) of carrying out 15 000 monographs in four years. In a couple of letters written in 1937, Golopenția maintains that he is not sure of sticking with Gusti anymore, as the Professor manifested himself as either picky or jealous when Golopenția presented the work of contemporary German sociologists

to undergraduates who were preparing their dissertation. "I do not take him seriously anymore; in this vein his countless plans do not affect me anymore" (Golopenția 1999, 238). Without parting ways with Gusti, Golopenția came up with two novelties that Gusti eventually accepted. First, the concept of partial monograph, that was to explore not an entire social unit but rather specific social problems of that unit, such as the demographic vulnerabilities of certain villages (Stahl 1981, 360). Second, Golopenția's view that sociology needs to have a public profile and offer data for different public policies. Golopenția sought to build upon Gusti's monograph tradition so that Romania's social problems could be looked at from a broader perspective, a South-East European one (Stahl 1981, 362). At the same time, and in line with Gusti, Golopenția's policy sociology was supposed to train new bureaucrats for interwar Romania.

By delving into Golopenția's hundreds of letters that have been published by his daughter, Professor Sanda Golopenția, I have sought to understand his security perceptions and whether these were related to interwar Romania's security dilemma. Caught between the revisionist empires of the moment, that is, the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, Romania eventually lost territories to both of them either directly or indirectly in 1940. In a 1935 letter sent from Leipzig to Petru Comarnescu, Golopenția holds that the interwar period got more and more dangerous for small states like Romania. Therefore, "we have to become more interested in our neighbours" (Golopenția 1999, 55). In another letter that he also sent from Leipzig, but this time to his future wife, Golopenția presents the strategic view of a German official that he met in Löwenberg, and according to whom Germany should become the new hegemonic power in South-Eastern Europe by sidelining France. The Romanians, Bulgarians and Hungarians that attended that particular meeting came up with the same conclusion: "we believe that our countries need to get rid of masters, instead of just changing them" (Golopenția 1999, 148). In another letter that he sent to D. C. Amzăr in 1935, Golopenția draws attention to the prevailing principle of what he imagined to be geopolitical research, namely to explore and understand Romania's neighbours, that is, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Poland. "We really don't know anything about them: try to become a bridge" (Golopenția 2004, 19). Otherwise, "peoples with imperial ambitions from the East and the West will strangle us soon" (Golopenția 2004, 19). He also notes that solidarity with Romania's neighbouring states could occur by knowing these states. In a different letter to D. C. Amzăr, he also holds that "it's a pity we know so little about our Turkish neighbours (...)" (Golopenția 2004, 17).

STRATEGY

The solution and, at the same time, the strategy that Golopenția adopted to get through the narrow opportunity structure that interwar Romania's academic field offered, was resistance through science. Notably, the type of science that

Golopenția envisioned was to a large extent tantamount to Gusti's science of the nation: "Willy nilly, I have to follow a certain road: the one of scholarly activity that is to be truly useful to our nation (...). (...) I have strived to do what seemed to me necessary before that: to understand our situation, our place in the world, in this century, then to understand the meaning of science, what is needed particularly in sociology" (Golopenția 1999, 189).

What the Sociological School of Bucharest had to offer in the mid-1930s was, above all, deep uncertainty (Golopenția 2010, 27). This hardly comes as a surprise considering that even the political field was plagued by uncertainty at the time. Gusti's tenure at the Ministry of Education was rather unsure, as Golopenția maintains in a 1932 letter that he sent to Ștefania Cristescu (Golopenția 2010, 63). The same aspect is mentioned in a 1933 letter, that he also sent to Ștefania Cristescu. Gusti was on the brink of resigning from the Ministry due to a shrinking budget (Golopenția 1999, 89). Notably, in the same letter, Golopenția holds that the so-called monograph researchers were forced to deal with a "crisis of authority. Professor, who has got involved in many activities, has sort of lost his prestige. <The monograph movement> feels itself betrayed" (Golopenția 1999, 89). Despite being loyal to Gusti, as he clearly confesses in April 1933, Golopenția takes a different tack in June 1935. "We cannot expect too much neither from the monograph movement nor from the Professor that could pave the way for both of us" (Golopenția 1999, 103). In other words, Golopenția advises his future wife to come up with a life strategy that should not revolve around Gusti anymore. Golopenția notices that also Henri H. Stahl was disappointed with Gusti, as the latter failed seemingly to live up to the task of leading and organizing the monograph movement (Golopenția 1999, 108). Yet, in a letter dated August 20, 1933, Golopenția urges his wife to still support the monograph movement. "We owe it, that is, the monograph movement, a lot" (Golopenția 1933, 109). One year later, he confesses his future wife that "Monograph was alive only in the thought and deed of Stahl" (Golopenția 1999, 150–151). Faced with deep uncertainty, both Anton Golopenția and Ștefania Cristescu, his future wife, got involved into "a life of incessant, pauseless life" (Golopenția 2010, 31). Golopenția's doctoral scholarship in Germany was another way of dealing with uncertainty.

In a letter that Golopenția sent to Gusti in October 1935, he confesses that, based on his experience at the Ministry of Public Education, Arts and Cults, sociology needs to be militant. "Exploring the reality of a given people at a certain time is the necessary premise of the good organization of that people's state" (Golopenția 1999, 282). At the same time he is aware that "Science and politics cannot be made together. This does not mean that they cannot be done separately" (Golopenția 2004, 17). Yet, one year later, in a letter that he sent to Gusti in October 1935, Golopenția asks whether science can be coupled with the "direct action of morally weaponizing the people?" (Golopenția 1999, 285). Golopenția is adamant that science could play a significant role in the life of the

nation. At the same time, he maintains that he is ready to give up on science for a couple of months and get involved into cultural action. In a letter from 1935 that he sends to Ștefania Cristescu he argues that “some deeds for the country in the realm of science” (Golopenția 1999, 181) would be one way of fulfilling his destiny. It is noteworthy that, in 1938, Golopenția identifies himself as a scholar, and not as a bureaucrat (Golopenția 1999, 242). Yet he wants to get involved into a social science that is less concerned with solving theoretical problems and more with solving different social problems of the country (Golopenția 1999, 283).

The practical geopolitics that Golopenția got involved into after the start of WWII was part and parcel of his strategy of survival. As already argued, unlike his pre-war geopolitical writings that had mainly dealt with epistemic aspects, Golopenția’s geopolitical thinking became rather practical once World War II broke out. In line with his pre-war geopolitical project that aimed at investigating especially the groups of Romanians from the newly-acquired territories in 1918, Golopenția’s practical geopolitics was focused especially on Bessarabia, Transylvania and the Quadrilateral (South Dobruja), that is, territories that Romania lost as of June 1940 as a consequence of the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. In the first issue of “Geopolitics and Geohistory”, a geopolitical journal that was first published in 1941 under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Golopenția offers different kind of data that could be considered of geopolitical relevance. For instance, roughly 83, 7 per cent of the population that Romania lost in 1940 identified itself as Romanians according to the 1930 census (Golopenția f.a., 548). Besides pointing out that in Transylvania, “in the ethnic zone called secuime” (Golopenția f. a., 555), the ethnic Hungarians represented roughly 80 per cent of the total population, Golopenția adds that in both Transylvania and Bessarabia, territories that had been acquired by Hungary and the Soviet Union respectively as of 1940, ethnic Romanians formed the “indigenous population” (Golopenția f.a., 560), as the latter were clearly dominant in the rural areas. This showed that ethnic Romanians have never been part of a colonization process, adds Golopenția. Notably, he maintains that Bessarabia and Bucovina could turn into a “bulwark of Europe” (Golopenția f.a., 562) in the prospect of these provinces reuniting with Romania. In such a case, Eastern Romania should be “ethnically consolidated” (Golopenția f.a., 562), an aspect that foreshadows Golopenția’s sociological research in Crimea after 1941, an aspect that is also part and parcel of Golopenția’s practical geopolitics.

An important strand of Golopenția’s geopolitical writings once Romania had lost Transylvania and Bessarabia deals with Hungarian intellectual propaganda. It is difficult to say whether Golopenția’s concern with Hungarian soft power regarding Transylvania had anything to do with the influence of Hans Freyer, who coordinated Golopenția’s Ph. D. thesis in Leipzig. Fact is that, starting with 1938, Hans Freyer moved with his family to Budapest. At the

University of Budapest, Freyer held the position of visiting professor in German cultural history (Muller 1987, 305). As of 1941, Freyer became the head of the Deutsches Wissenschaftliches Institut in Budapest (Muller 1987, 309), a position that allowed him to promote the German culture in Hungary, offer scholarships, cultivate links with Hungarian intelligentsia, “as well as to transmit information about such circles back to the Foreign Office” (Muller 1987, 310). Notably, two articles on Hungarian propaganda were part and parcel of the first issue of the “Geopolitics and Geohistory” review. In the first article called “<Siebenbürgen> or Transylvania in the View of Hungarians”, Golopenția offers a review on a book on Transylvania that was published in August 1940, that is, before the Second Vienna Award, by a Society of Hungarian History. Broadly speaking, the book under review restated the already classical narratives of Hungarian government on Transylvania: the Latin continuity in Dacia was called into question; emphasis was put on the thesis of Romanian immigration to Transylvania in the 12th and 13th centuries; the Romanian state was considered unfit to carry out a good administration for Transylvania (Golopenția f.a., 570). Of the abovementioned narratives, Golopenția tackles the immigration thesis with a special focus on an allegedly significant 18th century immigration of Romanians from both Moldova and Țara Românească due to the new fiscal and social regime that the Phanariots imposed between 1711 and 1820 (Golopenția f.a., 573). According to Golopenția, this narrative does not hold as 18th century Romanians tended to migrate to more tolerant polities, that offered more fiscal, administrative and religious freedom. Moreover, in the territories controlled by the Ottoman Empire, Christians were exempted from the military service. As this was not the case in Transylvania, adds Golopenția, Hungarian nobles were afraid that Transylvanian ethnic Romanians could be tempted to migrate out of the province. Golopenția concludes that the narrative according to which Transylvania witnessed a significant Romanian immigration in the 18th and 19th centuries had nothing to do with reality (Golopenția f.a., 579).

CONCLUSIONS

The “strategic-relational approach” that this article has employed, with its emphasis on structure, agency and strategy, may be particularly useful in the case of sociological investigations of intellectuals whose letters, diaries or mémoires have already been published. Thus, the researcher gets a direct access to primary data and insights into factors that have “constrained and structured” the thinking and scholarly choices of the intellectual(s) under investigation. In the particular case of Anton Golopenția, whose countless letters have already been published thanks to Ștefania and Sanda Golopenția, the “strategic-relational approach”, as a methodology of research, has proved itself fruitful.

Regarding Golopenția's geopolitical thinking, the article has found support for the statement that it was pretty different from German geopolitics. Golopenția's geopolitical thinking was impelled neither by imperial designs, such as *Lebensraum*, *Grossraum* or *panregions*, nor by social Darwinism. At the same time, Golopenția's geopolitical thinking was not meant to turn into a substrategic culture and, thus, to shape the security perceptions of political incumbents in interwar Romania. At least not in an militant vein. Simultaneously, it would be mistaken to deem Golopenția's geopolitical thinking completely devoid of political elements. The reason for this, exactly as in the case of Gusti's sociology of the nation, is the request for policy sociology, a particular type of expertise that was meant to help the incumbents of a low capacity state in a Hobbesian regional security environment. From this perspective, Golopenția's outward-oriented geopolitics that was meant to complement Gusti's inward-oriented sociology of the nation strongly resembles strategic thinking. Broadly speaking, the purpose of strategic thinking is to examine the strategy of other states and great powers in order to improve a given state's strategy. And this was exactly the purpose of Golopenția's geopolitical thinking, whose strategic dimension is quite obvious. Based on the data provided by this exploratory article, Golopenția's strategic thinking, despite the integrated profile that it borrowed from Gusti's sociology of the nation, cannot be considered tantamount to grand strategy. The latter brings together political, economic and military aspects. This article has not found the military preoccupations of Anton Golopenția whose strategic thinking, as a consequence, cannot be considered an instantiation of grand strategy.

Finally, the article has noted a significant difference between Golopenția's prewar geopolitics, which was rather theoretical and concerned itself mainly with epistemic aspects, and the contour of his geopolitical thinking once WWII broke out. The latter was rather practical and concerned itself especially with debunking the Hungarian intellectual propaganda on Transylvania. Part and parcel of Golopenția's practical geopolitics could be also considered his researches in Ukraine and Crimea after 1941 and his involvement in plans about population transfers that have eventually never taken place. This shift from theoretical to practical geopolitics opens a new research path that could delve into the structural constraints of the time, that is, the dependence of Romania's academic field on the political field, a low capacity state, and a Hobbesian security environment dominated by two empires that made Romania lose territories immediately after the beginning of WWII. Notably, and this is another aspect that merits further research, Golopenția's scholarly dissidence within the Sociological School of Bucharest could have improved the monograph movement by making it more pragmatic and, thus, improving the capacity of political negotiation of interwar Romanian sociologists with the political field.

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