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ROMANIA

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At the Movies: A Mystery Robbery In 1959 Communist Romania

By Cristina Merrill

FEBRUARY 13, 2006

BUCHAREST, Romania – To calm jitters, on most nights restless souls here retreat to their favorite locales to be seen and entertained. A seemingly endless array of options awaits the young at heart. Keeping up with revelers means tracing thick clouds of cigarette smoke all over town that crisscross at puzzling turns, and sometimes in the darkest of places. This must be the mirage of spasmodic hope in transition, a sign that city dwellers, mostly twenty-somethings or the newly rich of a certain age, have no (more) patience for sleeping. No wonder *Time Out* is soon launching a Bucharest edition. The “obsessive guide to compulsive entertainment” is a natural for this city on the edge.

The turnover in movies and plays, which feeds the insatiable appetite for novelty, is astounding. Last year, for example, this correspondent saw Oscar nominee Maia Morgenstern (chosen for her role as Mel Gibson’s mother in *The Passion of Christ*) in two different plays in one week. About a dozen movie theatres, from the gigantic to the truly independent, churn out countless flicks every week. True to Romania’s reputation as a paradox of extreme pain and pleasure, stories of pervasive poverty, high corruption and dangerous living (just ten days ago a Japanese businessman was bitten to death by a stray dog while a close friend of mine nearly died in a bloody mugging attack a week ago) are balanced with reviews of world-class classical concerts, international film festivals or frequent appearances made by star actors, producers (Francis Ford Coppola, for one) or renowned techno DJ’s. Heavenly desserts are sold on every corner, transition drugs to numb or renew a broken spirit. Bucharest not only ranks among the cities with the highest rate of dog-bites per capita (at 70-plus a day), it also has the largest movie complex in the Balkans.

Despite the odds, Bucharest’s flourishing cultural life is one throbbing vein that Communists couldn’t infiltrate. This is one legacy of still-recent history, when people escaped dreariness all around them by cultivating a rich inner existence. Then, as now, arts choices (also thick make-up and high stiletto heels) ran in inverse proportion to people’s satisfaction with their lives — but now there is a twist: Though Romanians have their freedom, they use any pretext for delectation they can find in order to escape not just from financially difficult present times but also from their past. Denial runs deep in this society, frustrated by a desire to forcibly keep up appearances to avoid confronting the dark and nebulous parts of a heritage it still doesn’t understand.

Efforts made by some to bring focus to unpleasant times in Romania’s recent history are met with criticism at best, and often with indifference. Raised by elders who understandably shun talk of the last regime, the young generation seems all too eager to seal the open wounds of the past. They justify this detachment by saying that since they never really knew Communism they are not responsible for explaining it. The pain their parents and grandparents suffered is enough, they say. “I am sick and tired of depressing TV shows and movies about the

[1989] Revolution and how bad it was under [dictator Nicolae] Ceausescu," said Adi Diac, a twenty-something advertising copywriter here. "What I'd love to see now is better fiction flicks, maybe a Romanian version of *Snatch*." Youth is the same everywhere, and Adi is probably no different from his Western counterparts in his preference for style over matter (in America we have burgeoning "role models" like Paris Hilton). The difference in this part of the world, however, is that young people cannot afford the luxury of being escapist. Since it can be argued that their older relatives are too shell-shocked to deal with pain, the responsibility of making sense of Romania's labyrinth of history falls on the shoulders of a generation raised in democracy.

A movie about a Bonnie and Clyde hold-up in a Communist country

A provocative step in what I consider the right direction has been taken by 39-year-old movie director Alexandru Solomon, whose prize-winning documentary, "The Great Communist Bank Robbery," seeks to shed light on a fascinating event that *allegedly* took place in the Communist Romania of 1959: the robbery of one of the branches of the Romanian State Bank. His project is a masterful modern investigation of an unlikely affair that has remained clouded in mystery and intrigue. What is believed to have transpired is that on July 28, 1959, weeks before Romania was to celebrate with pomp and circumstance her 15th-year anniversary of Soviet "liberation" from fascism, four masked men and a woman followed in a taxi a bank truck carrying money from central headquarters and robbed the driver at gunpoint. In a Bonnie and Clyde-type



Documentary filmmaker Alexandru Solomon says Romanians still display "a resistance to wanting to understand what happened in their past, choosing instead to transfer their share of responsibility into conspiracy."

hold-up, they made off with the equivalent of about \$1 million in Romanian currency today. But "a bank robbery in Romania in the 1950s looked like fiction," the narrator says in Mr. Solomon's movie. And fiction it might as well have been, since those who said they witnessed the hold-up could have been watching the reenactment, turned propaganda movie, made by authorities a few months later. And even if it happened in reality, the bank robbery and subsequent Party movie could have been staged just to set an example.

Was there a real robbery? Nobody knows for sure. Mr. Solomon, in fact, believes a robbery did occur (though the "criminals" might have been set up), but declines to state it as a fact. He is adamant about his intent to make an objective documentary, a type of endeavor still hard to pull off in Romania. "I haven't been able to find that uncontestable truth. I can only piece together sources of information in an honest way, allowing the spectator to draw his own conclusions."

A difficult part of his undertaking, according to him, was getting the people he interviewed for the movie to see the larger picture or allow for something other than the remembered truth they held on to for dear life. In this, he said, they are typical of Romanian society at large. "We are not used to putting information in con-



On July 28, 1959, the accused robbers followed a car filled with money that had exited from then Romanian State Bank, pictured here.

text. Take newspapers. They are full of opinions and essays, not sources of information.”

Mr. Solomon’s movie could teach a lot of journalists here about how to piece together a proper nonfiction story. He uses the voice of a narrator for basic facts, but the real tale is told through interviews — many of them with completely different points of view. In one of the more poignant parts of the movie, he interviews Gheorghe Enoiu, the secret-police chief investigator on the case, a man once known as “the executioner” and who, witnesses say, used to torture people into confession. He looks guilty without help from Mr. Solomon’s directing: he speaks defensively, sometimes aggressively, but deflects any blame. (In my interview with Mr. Solomon, the director said that Mr. Enoiu interpreted the movie interview as an investigation and a humiliation and reacted as if “he needed to continue in a dominating role”). Mr. Enoiu avoids discussing how the six admitted their guilt (the propaganda movie didn’t go into this either), but a different former investigator says on-camera that denials were never recorded; only (forced) confessions were. “Maybe he was beaten,” Mr. Enoiu says about one of the accused. “I don’t know,” he ends, laughing.

A fascinating, if tragic, testimonial comes from the daughter of a bank employee, who talks in the movie about how her father was picked up under suspicion for questioning (her mother was taken away as well, and badly beaten). He never returned, and his wife got a call later from someone who said that her husband had died of stroke but had been given a Christian burial. The family never found out where he is buried, if he was even buried at all. The daughter seems all too reconciled with something that in a normal society would be unthinkable and punishable by law, namely having a parent die under brutal questioning *and* not even know for certain whether he



Gheorghe Enoiu, interviewed for Mr. Solomon’s movie, was the secret-police chief investigator in the 1959 bank robbery.

was properly buried. Where is the indignant cry for justice? Probably buried under decades of repression.

“I realized that since I couldn’t get a linear explanation from people as to why they did what they did, I sought to confront them with the responsibility in this case, once again, so that could ask themselves how and why they took part in something like this,” Mr. Solomon said. “I wanted to show how the mechanism of manipulation and propaganda functioned, and how, in fact, we are handicapped after 50 years — we do not have solutions anymore, things are so complicated that we have the responsibility to ask questions, although I don’t think we can swear that we know what really happened.”

The result of his efforts is a powerful and yet true-to-fact documentary. Viewers are left to draw their own conclusions. A good test of his success is the fact that opinions about what really transpired that day in 1959 differed wildly among the movie-viewing public following the release of “The Great Communist Robbery” late last year. Cristian Ghinea, political analyst and journalist for a respected weekly here, said that he and his best friend had opposing opinions after seeing this “exceptional” movie together. “I was convinced that the accused did not rob the bank car, while my friend was convinced that they did. Arguments supporting my view appear in the movie: They couldn’t use the money, it was illogical, it would have been considered suspicious to have large sums of money under Communism. But arguments for the robbery are there as well: It is said that robbers had a plan to help Zionists in Israel. That’s the beauty of it, [the movie] doesn’t force conclusions down your throat, at least as long as nothing is certain.”

Six people were arrested within two months (the five robbers and an accomplice), and following a quick trial, the men were condemned to death and supposedly executed (though some believe they were never killed). The woman was sentenced to life in prison, was freed under amnesty in 1960 and later emigrated to Israel, where she died in 1977. Among the few known facts: The six arrested were all former members of the Communist establishment, and Jewish.

While some Jews made it to the top of the leadership in the first years of Romania’s Sovietization, most were purged by increasingly paranoid Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who has often been called the last Stalinist leader in Eastern Europe. The man who succeeded this dark character in 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu, obviously didn’t stray too far from the Dej pattern. Had he lived, Mr. Gheorghiu-Dej would have had plenty to learn from his machiavellian seedling.

Usettled by a series of international events that he interpreted as threatening to his monolithic authority (such as Stalin’s death in 1953 and

the Hungarian Uprising in 1956), Mr. Gheorghiu-Dej instigated a wave of high-level repression, which included anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaigns. In fact, in the year leading up to the robbery, the top brass had launched thousands of interrogations that encouraged denouncement and demanded renewed loyalty. Many Jews were caught up in this (they were considered to be untrustworthy elements because of their ethnicity), despite an unofficial practice of awarding them exit visas to Israel in exchange for money or investments from the Israeli government. The Dej government didn't always keep its word to send Jews abroad, keeping applicants on the edge or worse, denying them approval.

Communism historian Vladimir Tismaneanu, professor of political science at the University of Maryland (and most recently author of a terrific book about Communism in Romania, "Stalinism for Eternity"), said that the party had been "shocked" by the waves of Jewish emigration from Romania. He is convinced that whether the robbery was committed or not, the propaganda movie was a clear "anti-semitic and infamous document" of warning to Jews. In fact, he says, an opinion piece published in the main Communist newspaper *Scanteia* (The Spark) in January 1959 constituted the "most virulent anti-Zionist attack since the death of Stalin." The movie made after the so-called robbery was designed to serve as admonition to Jews, or a kind of "infernal pedagogy," that French historian Annie Kriegel has written about, according to Mr. Tismaneanu.

State-run papers did not write cover the crime, but Bucharest residents became aware through word-of-mouth that something unusual had happened. For one, secret police combed the area, making hundreds of arrests. Mr. Solomon explained from his research: "At first they went to all the factories in the neighborhood. They investigated women inside the maternity [a maternity ward was located across from the location where the bank branch was robbed], they took for questioning people waiting for the tram nearby. They worked in concentric circles, starting with people who hadn't showed up to work that day; after that they made arrests based on facial characteristics, such as mustaches [witnesses had described one of the robbers as wearing a mustache]. I know of people who had a mustache and were taken to the police, to find that all those inside the particular questioning room had a mustache."

What stirred people's imaginations even more, however, was the propaganda movie that the Party put together a few months after making the arrests to reconstruct the theft, with the prisoners playing themselves. It is believed that the captives were promised clemency in exchange for agreeing to play in the reenactment, simply called "The Reconstruction." Since the movie was most likely created to instill fear in potential dissenters, only Party members officially had access to private screenings (but as with everything in Romania, rules are often broken, and the less privileged but connected also

sneaked in). The only published accounts of the robbery (including interviews with informers and other sources and police files), and of the trial, are stored at an institute for such secret files, the National Council for the Study of Secret Police Archives.

For his movie, Mr. Solomon studied some 27 volumes, containing more than 10,000 pages, from these files. He interviewed more than 100 people who were somehow involved (bank tellers, inquisitors working for the secret police, and descendants of the accused, most of whom lived abroad). "As youngsters eight or nine years old, they suddenly found themselves children of infractors," said Mr. Solomon. "They did not want to believe that their parents did something of that sort, but somehow they have assumed culpability."

To him, the joy of making the movie derived not only from the journey into fact-finding, but also the challenge of piecing together a rich fabric of stories and anecdotes, not all necessarily accurate, that were spun out of the unusual event. Because so few facts about the case, or the so-called robbers' intention, are known, the event has become a legend that continues to feed countless conspiracy stories — in a way perpetuating the ignorance that Communists enforced in order to control the truth.

A weaving of extraordinary phantasms

"Society then functioned on the basis of rumors," said Mr. Solomon. "Rumors took the place of the nonexistent press, and the more things were kept secret, the faster rumors circulated." The story came in a bewildering variety of beliefs, kept alive until today. For example, some people believe that the robbers were not killed but instead were sent to Siberia and are now working on the Soviet nuclear program. Others suppose that the thieves were sent abroad as spies; another version has it that what witnesses saw the day of the alleged theft was none other than the *filming* of "The Reconstruction." Mr. Tismaneanu, in an e-mail to me, said that he thinks they were not executed but that he couldn't say more. "Enough for now," he wrote, mysteriously.

Mr. Solomon said that the whole story has become a "weaving of extraordinary phantasms," a creature with many heads, typical of a repressed society: "You start at the base with a fact that is completely inexplicable; you also have rumors and over that a layer of the period's propaganda which tries to control everything. But the effect of this propaganda on people was something like "It's not possible, they are lying to us, everything is a lie, which in turn fed even more the rumor mill. The same goes for the reaction to the Revolution [in 1989 that toppled Ceausescu's regime]: everything was a conspiracy, it was all controlled from somewhere in the universe, there is a puppeteer somewhere who called the shots."

Making a connection to the present, Mr. Solomon said that Romanians still display "a resistance to wanting to

understand what happened in their past, choosing instead to transfer their share of responsibility into conspiracy. Had each of them assumed his share of blame, things might have been more clear, though obviously more painful and more complicated.”

Lena Boiangiu, Mr. Ghinea’s boss at *Dilema Veche* weekly newspaper, agrees. She was 20 years old at the time the propaganda movie was released, and because her then-boyfriend (now husband) worked for the studio that made it, she was allowed to sneak in to see it. But she doesn’t recall feeling very strongly about the event, or the fact that a Party-sponsored, staged reconstruction had happened. “I was just a little thing. We didn’t pay attention to these stories. In those times whether you knew or you didn’t know the truth was the same thing. Couldn’t influence anyone.” She did say that the instinct for self-preservation might have played a part in her 1960 tacit response to the movie (later she said she gave it more thought).

Her biggest regret apparently is that it took almost 45 years, until Solomon’s movie, for someone to give an



Journalist Lena Boiangiu, who saw the 1960 party propaganda movie about the bank robbery when it was released, says that people felt powerless under Communism: “Whether you knew or you didn’t know the truth, was the same thing.”

objective and genuine account of the bank robbery, though she worried that Mr. Solomon is the exception, rather the rule among the younger generation. “People aren’t used to putting information in context and digesting it, or making choices. Our press is full of scandals and gossip. Young people are not good with history, which is especially damaging when you come from a small country. History is understood through Ceausescu’s slogans. Romanians need to cultivate fact-based journalism.”

By their very nature, repressive regimes such as the one that dominated Romania for more than four decades are able to operate through force and restrictions on freedom, including the ability to choose — and by spreading misinformation. Fear works in strange ways, creat-

ing a culture of denunciations and scape-goating, a culture of weak people. Coincidentally, at the same time I was doing my reporting on the “Great Robbery,” I went to see another recent movie based on a true story known here as the “Anca case.” The discovery, in the summer of 1977 in several corners of Bucharest, of the remains of a young woman named Anca who had been sexually assaulted and butchered, sent police investigators on a frantic chase to find the criminal. Ceausescu himself ordered them to do everything they could to solve the case (investigators in the 1960 bank robbery were also told the same), and fast. Thousands of homes were searched, hundreds of suspects brought in, investigated and beaten. Several key officers were brought onto the case, for Ceausescu’s benefit.

A chance connection, a phone number listed in Anca’s address book, led to the arrest of a man who had indeed asked Anca out on a date. Somehow investigators decided that this was the man, and then spent the next six months torturing him into confessing. To add to their “proof,” they fabricated evidence at the scene of the crime, intimidating witnesses — even his wife — to testify against him. His parents killed themselves from shame. The man under arrest was given 24 years in prison. However, less than four years later, the real killer was found. The innocent man was freed, on condition that he not divulge what happened. He asked for and received a small sum in compensation for his suffering, the equivalent of about \$120,000, minus the amount authorities said he owed *them* for money spent on his incarceration (about a sixth of the proceeds). Mr. Ghinea, who likens the case to that of the bank robbery, said that Mr. Solomon’s movie is about the same “oppressive system that is incapable of reacting in a legitimate way to solve a plain criminal event.” He added: “The movie shows how a system designed to terrorize large masses of people fails when faced with an ordinary police investigation. It’s like using a hammer to do brain surgery.” (More on that in the following newsletter. Unfortunately, surgical procedures are literally done butchery-style in hospitals today, 16 years after the end of Communism.)

A Balkan story, à la Dostoievsky and Conrad

But the bank robbery was no straightforward crime. The actors in the bank robbery, all Party members, were no ordinary people. Thus the motivation for the crime defies logic. Besides, Romanian law at that time punished by death anyone who stole more than 100,000 lei; the accused took 16 times the amount. They could not have freely spent the sum without being found out. “Why would a group of apparatchiks attack the system they had been fighting for?” Mr. Solomon’s narrator asks. The movie lays open, objectively, all the probable causes — each a fragment of the bigger story that was life under Communism.

One of the possible answers that Mr. Solomon offers is that the group wanted to help the Zionist movement

abroad — but no plans to do so were uncovered, and Romanian currency was useless abroad. Another was that they were raising money to buy their way to Israel — but that is not feasible either, given that Party members were almost never allowed to leave. Revenge as a motive is also probed: informers provided testimony that the robbers needed the money in order to kill a top Communist leader and known anti-Semite. In another version, the six knew they had no way out (they had even acted to preempt a purge of Jews at high levels of the party) and robbed out of desperation. “They didn’t have a reasonable solution, so they chose an unreasonable one,” Mr. Solomon said. “It’s a combination of Dostoevsky and Joseph Conrad with Balkan and Middle-Eastern elements.”

For each character, Mr. Solomon offers a simple and factual introduction, as well as fragments from “The Reconstruction.” “Reconstruction hides more than it reveals,” the narrator in Mr. Solomon’s movie says. Alexandru Ioanid had been a top Communist leader until months before the theft — when he had been dismissed from his role as head of the Criminal division of the secret police. More, he was related through marriage to the feared Minister of Internal Affairs, Alexandru Draghici. In the propaganda movie, he was described as a “swindler, capable of doing anything to maintain his luxurious lifestyle.” His brother, Paul, also a Party member, was head of studies at the military academy, in the aviation department, and had been part of the Romanian team that worked on the secret Soviet space program. The Party movie had him as a “fake intellectual, a corrupt and rotten element.”

Igor Sevianu, aviation engineer, had been a police

lieutenant until 1951 but was unemployed at the time of the presumed theft in 1959. He had participated in hand-to-hand combat in WWII that chased Germans out of Bucharest in August 1944. He and the only woman to be involved in the robbery, Monica Sevianu, were married and had two children. Ms. Sevianu had been married before and had spent time in Israel before returning in 1948. According to Mr. Solomon’s objective narrator, “her period abroad was viewed negatively by the Securitate and had led to her husband’s dismissal.” In the propaganda movie, he is depicted as “rotten element who had opportunities to work as an engineer but preferred to earn money with a machine gun.”

Haralambie Obedeanu had been a journalism professor until the previous year and had worked at the leading Party paper. In the Party film he is portrayed as a “gangster disguised as a journalist.” Finally, Sasa Musat, a former Communist youth leader and foreign agent, had recently been expelled from Bucharest University, where he served as history teacher and party executive. In “The Reconstruction,” he is said to be an “adventurer” who “could have made a living with his teaching diploma but preferred to use guns.”

Communists had a real phobia about people who didn’t busy themselves with the mindless work that the system provided in preparation for building the “New Man.” The term “adventurer” was used especially in reference to intellectuals (and Jews), an obsession with Romania’s frustrated blue-collar and poorly educated Communist leaders, first Dej, then Ceausescu. By the time the regime collapsed, top party leaders had become as



In his movie about the bank robbery, Alexandru Solomon uses fragments from the propaganda movie made by the party, also about the presumed theft.

bourgeois in their pursuit of superior education as the same people they had derided, with the exception that the Communist schooling system was one based on Party connection and corruption, not merit. Their educational model was not a solid or a useful one for learning; it did not actually educate properly in the way of the West — rote memorization, whose fruits I am observing in Romania today, does not inspire creativity or leadership, only subservience. After the Revolution, coal miners who were summoned by then President Ion Iliescu to quash student protests shouted the slogan, “We work, we do not think.”

The mentality is changing, fortunately, but not fast enough. Mr. Solomon said his own experience with schools here, thanks to his third-grade son, confirms it. “There is lots more to do in schools; that is the first place that disseminates prejudices. In school they are taught by the same staid formulas. It’s dangerous. I try to get him to resist absolute teaching.” He said that it is vital, especially for Romanians, not to take what they hear for granted. “We still chew on many prejudices and prefabricated truths, some from Communism. Over the last fifty years so many layers of lies and manipulation have been imposed on us that it is almost impossible to find the way to the real truth. But what we can do is question the past, and that is a duty.”

Romania is not yet fertile soil for documentaries

From research to production, it took Mr. Solomon four years to make the documentary. He couldn’t find financing in Romania but was fortunate to be accepted into Discovery Campus, a training program for European non-fiction filmmakers. This is a non-profit organization based in Germany and funded by a consortium of European-Union companies, including media and film as well as public institutions. During the year that he spent getting guidance and networking with international film experts, Mr. Solomon was able to fine-tune his script as well as shape it in a way that corresponded to this Western outfit’s rigorous standards of, a seal of approval — which in turn helped him get the funding and distribution he needed. A year and a half later, the movie was released by *Arte* Channel, a French-German co-produc-

tion and has since been shown around Europe, where it won a prize for historical films at a French festival.

Mr. Solomon said the Romanian market is not yet ready for homemade documentaries. Competition is fierce: No more than ten movies are released here every year (usually fewer), almost all fiction. Nonfiction movies are not considered a good career move here, in part because over the years they have been made as shorts and used as teasers to introduce main feature-fiction films. The old cinematography law, in fact, required documentaries to be no longer than 20 minutes, which not only limited the artistic scope of directors but also handicapped them when it came to movie awards (they almost never won.) But together with colleagues from an association of moviemakers here, Mr. Solomon lobbied the government last summer to amend the law, so that longer nonfiction could be allowed.

Choosing the right topic for nonfiction is tough as well. His pitch to Romanian movie authorities was met with skepticism. “‘A movie about Communist Jews? That’s the last thing we need,’ I heard they were saying about my movie.” He finally got it released here at the end of last year but because of poor planning from the distributor, it played only for a few weeks, and mostly in malls (not the right target audience for the movie, which is better suited for smaller film houses). Because there are no movie agents here in the Western sense, he ended up doing his own publicity by calling personally on media outlets to review his film.

Mr. Solomon is hoping for a time in the near future when directors will have an easier time than he had — he wants, in fact, to encourage young directors to discover the appeal of making movies based on truth. He has invited himself to be a speaker at two universities, one for political science and the other for sociology majors. He plans to show the movie and hold discussions. “The idea is that on the one hand we will need to have documentaries made in this country, and on the other that future documentary filmmakers will not necessarily come from the mainstream movie world, which doesn’t place value on this type of work, but rather from the social sciences.” □

Current Fellows and their Activities

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Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • **INDIA**

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Logic at Rutgers University, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • **FRANCE/MOROCCO**

An editor for the *New York Times* Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • **ROMANIA**

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceauscescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • **IRAN**

A journalist and researcher for the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Nick finished a Master's program in Comparative and Regional Studies (Middle East/Central Asia) at American University in Washington DC before beginning a two-year fellowship in Pakistan.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • **SYRIA/LEBANON**

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • **GERMANY**

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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