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Authors: Ștefan Dorondel, Stelu Șerban

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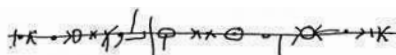
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A Missing Link: The Agrarian Question in Southeast Europe



Ștefan Dorondel

*Francisc I. Rainer Institute of Anthropology Bucharest &
The Institute for Southeast European Studies Bucharest*

Stelu Șerban

The Institute for Southeast European Studies Bucharest

Recently, The Journal of Peasant Studies has released a special online issue called “40 Classics in Peasant Studies” in order to celebrate its 40th anniversary. Among the 40 classic studies on world peasantry, just one deals with peasantry in South-Eastern Europe and this pertains only to Russia. Browsing the journal further does not help too much; studies on Southeast European peasantry are scarce. This collection of articles seeks to fill this void. The argument of this collection relies on the social history of South-Eastern Europe itself, widely neglected in peasant studies. The attempts of the communist regimes to modernize the countries in this area, mainly through collectivization, expropriation and forced industrialization, have not lead to disappearance of the peasantry from any of these countries. Compared to West-European countries (which comprise around 5 per cent)¹ peasantry is much alive in countries from South-Eastern Europe, accounting for about 55 per cent of the total employed population in Albania (Ministry of Agriculture 2011), to 29 per cent in Romania² and 21 per cent in Bulgaria.³ Not only the historic importance of the peasantry and its contemporary economic and social relevance make the agrarian question framework still relevant for this part of the world, but also its political stance. The post-socialist de-collectivization and the land privatization, the de-

industrialization of those countries and the return of the unemployed or pensioners back to the countryside may give us new ways of looking at the agrarian question. Therefore, the papers gathered in this issue will first explore the historical aspects of the agrarian question in Southeast-European countries. One of the questions we will address is “how peasants from this part of the world experienced the penetration of capitalist relations at the end of the 19th century up to collectivization?” Secondly, the papers will address the postsocialist agrarian question (Hann et al 2003), that is, the way in which the political economy of the postsocialist states has re-shaped rural economies and politics. The novelty of our approach is that we pay attention to social processes which have unfolded over more than a century, covering the modern history of these countries. It starts with the social reform of the new nation-states in the mid-19th century and culminates with the postsocialist land reforms. Nevertheless, in regard to this latter point we distinguish between the reforms that took place before and after the countries had gained their national independence. The land reforms, as well as various electoral and law reforms of the Tanzimat period, triggered changes at the basic levels of future Balkan national-states. Yet, only after these states won their independence, the peasantry as such became the target of state reforms. It is important

1) www.euro-found.europa.eu/eiro/2005/09/.../cs_agriculture_ro_trans.doc (accessed 16.07.2014).

2) www.insse.ro/cms/files/statistici/comunicate/com.../somaj_2012r.pdf (accessed 16.07.2014)

3) www.mzh.government.bg/.../R_A170-Prelimin... (accessed 16.07.2014)

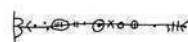


to outline this distinction as the peasantry had started to become the political and civic foundation of these new states, ever since the countries gained the national independence. The approach we favour is one that includes the historical perspective of *la longue durée*, as well as the one of sociocultural anthropology and political economy.

Due to its interdisciplinary frame this volume aims to methodologically challenge the traditional historical approach of social issues in Southeast-Europe. Journals such as *History and Anthropology*, *Annales*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Ethnohistory*, *Slavic Review*, base their publishing policy on the requirements for articles bringing in the same theoretical frame concepts from both history and social anthropology, in an attempt to look for broader and deeper analysis of complex historical episodes. Historians initiated this type of methodology after the Second World War, being inspired by the *Annales* School (Krech 1991: 349). In its turn, anthropology changed in the 1960s from studying the “people without history” (Eric R. Wolf), to the people from the new states that appeared after the crash of the colonial system. The “new” people proved to be not at all so “archaic” or “primitive” as the anthropologists previously thought. Their history was, in fact, a mix of local and / or oral tradition, life biographies and “national mythology”. Therefore, social anthropology has become historicized and “has reassessed the anthropological relevance of the distinction between past and present, present and future. It has increasingly regarded these distinctions as both an epistemic and existential watershed...The wider world, currently overrun with the passions of regionalism, ethnicism, and nationalism, and in the throes of both modernization and development, has made history the privileged ground of individual and collective identity, entitlements, of *la condition humaine*.” (Faubion 1993, 44). At present, the dialogue of history and anthropology becomes more regional because the attention paid to the details of the local history / histories makes the approach to the

case study easier. In this vein, a good example is the evolution of the historiography of Southeast Europe (Brunnbauer 2004). To the mix of anthropology and history we add the political economy perspective which offers a wider view on larger forces, such as national and international markets, determining local evolutions.

By placing the agrarian question in Southeast Europe in this interdisciplinary matrix, we bear in mind one more thing. The classical approaches of the agrarian question take for granted the existence and effectiveness of the national / centralized states. It is supposed that the peasantry is more or less homogenous and able to positively react to the agrarian policy that the central governments design. Still, a closer look at the local histories of the peasantry in South-Eastern Europe, in the vein of Eric R. Wolf and John W. Cole’s perspective (see below), brings to light very different contexts, traditions and policies that have shaped the life of Balkan peasants over the last two centuries. Furthermore, the import and acclimatization of the national states in Southeast Europe meant, among other things, tracing very rigid and threatening state boundaries across the areas that once had a solidarity coming from a common local history, the same ecological niches and an intense local migration. These areas, that are now “cross-border” called in the EU regional policies (for instance the Carpathian or Balkan Mountains, the Danube or Timok river valleys) hosted in the past intense ethnic, religious, economic contacts and exchanges. The national states did not succeed in erasing this legacy from people’s memory as it has developed over time. In this respect, we aim in this volume to give an equal place to the national states and to the cross-border areas.



The Agrarian Question and its Theoretical Roots

1899 was an important year for the history of social and political ideas: two important

works which questioned the fate of the thickest social class of that time – peasantry – were published. The context in which these two important works came out was the booming of capitalist economy in Europe and the penetration of these relations in the countryside. The two authors, Karl Kautsky (1988[1899]) and Vladimir Ilich Lenin (2000 [1899]), were concerned with the effects of capitalist economic relations on European peasantry, the social differentiation which would result and the final effects of this process: the transformation of the peasantry into a rural proletariat or a bourgeoisie. This matter was defined by Kautsky as the “Die Agrarfrage” (the agrarian question). Both of them had few concerns for a scholarly, theoretical answer; they were rather interested in solving a crucial matter of very practical relevance for the European societies of their time. Moreover, they were interested in possible ways for their parties to gain power in countries with large peasant populations (Byres 1991; see also Banaji 1990). As Engels (1993[1894]) stated in 1894, the political program of the socialist parties all over Europe had to address the issue of the peasantry, which was an essential factor of production and of political power. Engels gives the example of the socialists from Denmark, a country with one single city, Copenhagen, which had to rely almost exclusively on propaganda in rural areas. This social class was important for the socialists at the end of the 19th century not only because it was the largest social class, but also because the important economic and, thus, social transformations taking place within. Moreover, there were no other political forces which took so large number of population seriously into consideration. As Kautsky (1988[1899], 2) himself notices in the preface of his book, the German Social-Democrat Party (SDP) theoreticians were interested in researching development in industry rather than in agriculture. Nor had his two mentors, Marx and Engels, left solid theories on the understanding of the European peasantry in the 19th century.⁴ Thus,

he felt compelled to write what Lenin (2000 [1899]) coined as the most noteworthy work of political economy of those times.

Kautsky explores the social and political situation of the German peasantry and intends to help the German SDP to formulate a policy for agriculture and a strategy to deal with the peasantry. He was interested in the role of pre-capitalist and non-capitalist forms of agriculture within a booming capitalist economy. As Alavi and Shanin show in the introduction to the English edition of this book, Kautsky’s important contribution to understanding peasant economy is that he conceptualized peasant production as part of capitalist economy and society. Peasant production is based, according to Kautsky, on family farm and mostly on family labour. Thus, most of the peasant production is not destined to the market, but to the self-consumption. However, focusing on family farms, Kautsky finds several peculiarities which are specific for peasant production. The over-exploitation of its own labour and the tendency towards under-consumption are the ways in which the surplus value is extracted by larger external oppressing forces (Alavi and Shanin 1988, xvi). For Marxists like Kautsky, the major feature of capitalism was the extraction of surplus from oppressed people by voracious capitalists who seek to accumulate more capital.

Lenin was a different kind of intellectual. He was a “professional revolutionary”, as Bernstein (2009) calls him, a member of the Bolshevik Party interested in the prospects of revolution in Russia. Lenin was primarily interested in the agrarian question from a political perspective – he intended to establish a strategy for his party in order to attract the peasantry on its side (Bernstein 2009). Lenin’s study (2000[1899] called *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* appeared independently from Kautsky’s *Die Agrarfrage* and questioned the impact of capitalism on Russian agriculture. He was primarily interested in the outcomes of penetration of the capitalist relations in rural areas. Lenin was convinced that the

4) For the ambivalent attitude of Marx vis-à-vis peasantry, from despal to the hope that it would become the ally of proletariat, see Duggett (1975) and Coulson (2014), among others.

three categories of peasants - rich, middle and poor - would be swept from history and eventually transformed by capitalist relations into a bourgeoisie (mainly petty bourgeoisie) and rural proletariat. As for the middle peasants, they will either join one category or the other (mostly the rural proletariat, though) (Bernstein 2009). He followed Engels (1993[1894] who also thought that the peasant is inevitably doomed and he will be turned into a future proletarian.

The most critical issue for Kautsky, Lenin and other Marxists economists was the social differentiation of the peasantry. In a capitalist society, as the one described by Lenin in his work, one cannot talk anymore of a single class of peasants. In a commodity-based economy, even that of Russia at the end of the 19th century, the peasant is completely subordinated to the market; one cannot conceive the peasant class as undifferentiated. In the conclusion of the second chapter, Lenin emphasizes the inherent contradictions of a commodity economy: "competition, the struggle for economic independence, the grabbing of land (purchasable and rentable), concentration of production in the hands of a minority, forcing of the majority into the ranks of the proletariat, their exploitation by a minority through the medium of merchant's capital and the hiring of farm labourers". He then defines the differentiation among the peasantry as the sum of all these economic contradictions. The outcome of differentiation among peasantry under the pressure of capitalism is the polarization of rural society in two classes: the rural proletariat, those who will lose the land and will be turned into a landless class which offers their labour, and a class of capitalist farmers.

Lenin considered that the emergence of property inequality was the starting point of the whole process, but the process is not entirely confined to property differentiation. He, Weber and later scholars (e.g. Hart 1986) emphasized the forms of labour organization as an important part of the differentiation process. The labourer is not exploited on a purely economic level: she /

he is not confronted with an employer as she / he would be in a contractual relationship, but with a small-scale territorial lord (Weber 1979[1894]). Looking back through history, Weber (1979[1894]) has pointed out that the penetration of capitalist rule forced entrepreneurs to work with commercial principles. The outcome was the transformation of a landed aristocracy into a class of agricultural entrepreneurs.

Since late 19th century, agrarian differentiation was at the core of theoretical debates among peasant studies scholars. It was later defined in a more nuanced way as the social process involving the emergence or sharpening of differences within the rural population (White 1989: 19-20). Differentiation among the peasantry should not be simply reduced to an increasing income inequality among peasants. As White (1989) emphasizes, it is not about whether some peasants become richer than others, but about the changing relations between them in the context of the development of commodity relations in the rural economy. This is a cumulative process of change in the ways in which a person or a group of persons from a rural society gain control over productive resources and often have differentiated access to land. Often, the investigators of this process focus on the mechanism of extraction of surplus from the rural economy (ibidem: 20). Authors such as Gledhill (1985, 51), for instance, argue that the differentiation issue is about escalating tendencies towards class polarization, not whether some peasants become rich. He draws attention to the fact that the concept of peasantry is not a static one, emphasizing, at the same time, the importance of politics for the transformation process of agrarian systems.

White (1989) also adds an important analytical distinction. He distinguishes between the process of differentiation itself and various aspects of that process: the causes, the mechanisms and the indicators (or symptoms) of differentiation. For theoreticians from the late 19th century a major cause of differentiation is the expansion of the com-

modity economy. Even if rural agrarian societies were never egalitarian societies, being, as Scott (1998) points out, divided by gender, class, ethnic or kin groups, the penetration of market relations radically changed the access to resources. Even in socialist countries and despite the emphasis of socialism on the equality of all social strata, there remained differences between rural groups based on closeness to political power.

White stresses the following mechanisms through which the changes in social agrarian relations occur:

“...the resumption of tenanted land by its owners and a variety of other mechanisms of partial and total dispossession of land and other production resources; on the other side are the various alternative forms of disposition of agricultural surpluses by the rural elite.” (White 1989, 26)

Among symptoms of differentiation White notes the following:

“distribution of owned and operated land, frequency and form of tenancy relations and the direction of operated land; flows through tenancy between landownership groups; family-exchange and hired labour use; and investments and incomes of men and women in different groups or classes in different activities.” (White 1989, 27)

The agrarian question is not only about the differentiation of the peasantry but also about the transformation of a whole society on the route to capitalism. This transformation was termed the capitalist agrarian transformation. Depending on the history of the area, of the economic, politic and social structures there are several historical paths for agrarian transformation. Byres (1991) has considered five paths. One is the English path (which started in the 15th century with the enclosure of the demesnes and vacant plots, in which the medieval state played an important role). Following Marx, Byres shows that the emergence of a rural bourgeoisie in England took place through the expropriation of peasants from the large landholdings and their replacement by capitalist tenant farmers. This process led to

the formation of a class structure composed of landlords who leased out his land and earned a rent, a class of capitalist farmers that gained access to the land through rental and a class of rural wage workers originated in the disposed peasantry (see de Janvry 1981, 106). The entire process facilitated the capitalist industrialization (Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay 2010b, 259).

A second path is the Prussian transformation of feudal lords, the junkers, into a capitalist class. The large feudal estates were transformed into capitalist enterprises. The difference between the English and the Prussian way is that, while the agrarian transition through the English path develops from below, the Prussian path is a transition from above (as Lenin put it). In the first case, peasants dispossessed of their land have to sell their labour to urban employers – farm and non-farm enterprises –, whereas the petty commodity producers are pushed to turn into emerging agrarian capitalists (Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay 2010b, 257). In the second case, there is “an internal metamorphosis of feudalist landlord economy”, especially in the northern part of Germany (Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay 2010b, 259). A third way is the American path where the capitalism emerged predominantly from the peasantry. What makes the difference here is the absence of a dominant class. The American path is also characterized by the mixed model of capitalism from above (the case of South) and capitalism from below (the case of North) (Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay 2010b, 260). The fourth path is the French one, in which class struggle plays an important role and the landlords are eliminated through violence and revolution. In France, the centralized state extracted the surplus by taxing the land and competing with the landlords. The fifth path is the Asian path in which the feudal landlords turned into a capitalist class. The 1946 agricultural reform played an important role in Japan, as well as the state which massively extracted the surplus from the peasantry via taxation. This model looks pretty much



5) In an excellent overview of the agrarian question debates and theories, authors Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay (2010a and 2010b) find seven paths of capitalist agrarian transition. The Asian path described by Byres is analytically split into the Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese path

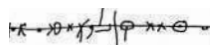
like the Prussian one – an agrarian transformation from above – excepting the key role of the Japanese state for the agrarian transition to capitalism.⁵

It is obvious that all these theories, based on Marx and Lenin's writings, consider the state paramount in the transformation of agrarian relations. Regardless whether the state passes laws, as in the English case (see also Hay [1975] for more details), whether it is expansionist, as in the American case, whether it is a competitor for the feudal landlord extracting the surplus by taxation, as in the Japanese case, the state played an important role in transforming the agrarian relations. Many scholars view the end of the process of agrarian differentiation, no matter the historical path, as being the same: a minority of small producers getting rich and, eventually, becoming bourgeois and the majority of peasants becoming poorer and poorer, eventually becoming proletarians (Lenin 1977; de Janvry 1981).

The Marxist approach is still vivid among social scientists. However, there is an important shortcut which has been, in our opinion, overlooked when engaging this approach. In the Marxist perspective, the peasantry has no agency at all. They are not proper actors of history, but rather a manoeuvred, indistinct and amorphous mass of people who have nothing to say or do other than obey the oppressors and the implacable market forces. Other authors (like Scott [1985]) have shown that the response of the peasantry to oppression has been either open revolt – quite rare along the history though – or everyday forms of resistance (disobedience, crop theft, etc.). But what if the peasantry simply found ways to adapt and use these forces in their own interests? A first argument against the Marxist view is that, although the classics of Marxism (based on Marx himself) had doomed the peasantry to vanish, peasants stubbornly persisted throughout the 20th century. Southeast Europe is, from this point of view, as this collection of papers shows, a good example. Countries in this part of the world still have a consistent and vivid peasantry. A second

argument is based on the theory of “the rational peasant”. Capitalist relations were not just a curse, but represented opportunities as well. As Popkin (1980, 432) has shown, the extension of markets can be an opportunity for poorer peasants against large landlords and patrons who may try to prevent the peasants' involvement in market relations. Thus, large landlords try to maintain their control of economy and, consequently, of the power of patron-clients relations. Commercialization, argues Popkin (1980, 462), can be good in certain historical conditions as “the shift to narrow contractual ties with landlords increases both peasant security and its opportunity to market benefits”. Moreover, not only does the state play a predominant role in the agrarian transition, as shown above, but poor villagers may take advantage of certain state policies to make their way up on the social ladder. In Romania, some poor peasant used the state-imposed socialist ideology in the countryside to escape poverty. Although authors such as Mungiu-Pippidi (2010) criticize the poor peasant takeover of the local political power against the old elite, this move shows that the poor spotted an opportunity and took advantage of it. In Vietnam, the source of accumulation was not necessarily only the land, but the availability of off-farm jobs (Watts 1998). Access to off-farm jobs allowed poor villagers to escape poverty and patron-client relationship and offered them the chance to change the social relations and their social status, which they immediately seized (see also Dorondel 2007).

These few examples prove that the peasantry is not an amorphous mass of people who suffer injustice without any reaction, but people who seek ways to escape their economic condition and who immediately react once they see an opportunity to do so.



The Agrarian Question Today

The readers of an anthropological journal would certainly ask why this excursion into a subject which seems to have been over for

a while now. Why should a matter analysed mainly by a group of political economists concern sociocultural anthropologists? Moreover, is this an actually acute issue or it is just a matter of social history? The answer is neither straightforward, nor simple. More than a hundred years ago, the leftist intellectuals announced the death of the peasant (Engels, Lenin). Eric Hobsbawm, the prominent Marxist historian, declared: “the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us off forever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry” (Hobsbawm 1994, 289). It is true that – he continued – there are three regions of the world which are still dominated by a large peasantry: sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and China, admitting still that this population comprises half of the world.⁶

Questioning the relevance of the agrarian question in the 21st century, one of the most prominent scholars of agrarian issues declared this chapter closed (Bernstein 2011). He based his statement on a few historical facts. First, he says, the period from 1910 to 1970 is the “golden age” of agrarian reforms throughout the world. Even if this has not ruled out differentiation among peasantry, it has changed agrarian relations. Moreover, Bernstein (2011, 452) suggests that the land reforms and the post-Second World War restructuring of capitalism resulted in the disappearance of “predatory landed property as a significant and political force by the end of the 1970s”. Secondly, the collectivization in many parts of the world, such as China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union also changed agrarian relations: the large farms were expropriated and, even if not divided and distributed to small peasants, collectivization developed in the “logic” of the classical agrarian question. In this case, the peasant dispossession of land was not pursued by the capitalists, but by the state itself. This may be considered as the equivalent of the formation of large-scale farming which contributed to the industrialization of those countries by the state-extracted surplus (cf. Verdery

2003). Thirdly, argues Bernstein, since the 1970s the stark process of globalization has changed the agrarian relations through the integration and regularization of agriculture, capital and labour into a new set of global relations. Thus, the classical agrarian question – the formation of classes in agriculture and how the agrarian transition contributes to the accumulation required by industrialization in a certain society and a certain historical moment (Bernstein 2011, 451) – does no longer make sense, considers Bernstein. In fact, as Bernstein put it, it is not that the agrarian question is not relevant anymore, but the agrarian question in close connection with the “peasant question” makes little sense nowadays. He bases this rift on the fact that today’s agriculture is not reducible to a set of relations between landed property, agrarian capital and labour as it used to be in the 19th century in an époque “of the formation of modern capitalism on a world scale” (Bernstein 2011, 454). The integration of the agricultural relations into the industrial ones, the integration – at a global level – of capitals, commodity chains and technological changes challenges the “classical” agrarian relations and transforms them. It is true that there are also other modern authors emphasizing the need for a conceptual framework in which the institutional arrangements governing access and control over resources and people in rural areas should be linked to the larger economic and political forces. Kautsky himself was criticized by today’s scholars that he conceived capitalism as isolated from its international evolution and the growth of modern industry (Banaji 1990, 291).

So, if the peasantry is largely dead, as Hobsbawm argues, and globalization has radically changed the agrarian relations, should we keep using the “agrarian question” as an analytical framework? Our response: definitely yes. But let us not jump to any conclusions yet. First, as Hobsbawm (1994) acknowledges, the peasantry is not dead yet. It is true that the urbanites had overtaken, for the first time in global history, the rural population in 2007, but a

6) To these regions one should add Latin America, Southeast Europe and Central Asia.

significant part of the population still lives in the countryside and is involved in agriculture (Borras Jr. 2009). Moreover, as statistics show, the percentage of the poor is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (idem, 7). Ironically, as Borras Jr. points out, those who produce food lack the minimum of livelihood in many parts of the world. Secondly, as Daniel Thorner (1986, xi) in its introduction to the English translation of Chayanov's The theory of Peasant Economy has emphasized:

"the problems that are plaguing economies in countries like Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Nigeria, India and Indonesia bear striking similarities to those that were the order of the day in Russia from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 down to the collectivization of agriculture at the end of the 1920s."

Indeed, the discussion over the future of the peasantry in former colonial countries, the questions on the nature and the future of the peasantry, their role in food production and how they will respond to the programs of modernization and globalization are very much of the same nature, de Janvry (1981, 95) argues, with the debate in Russia or in Germany at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. The process of agrarian differentiation unfolded in the second part of the 19th century was still very present in the 1980s and the outcome of the land reform in many parts of Latin America was questioned by social scientists (de Janvry 1981; de Janvry, Platteau, Gordillo, Sadoulet 2001; Thiesenhusen 1989; 1995).⁷ The land tenure system, the unequal distribution of income and high poverty are just a few of the issues debated by social scientists and are all directly linked to the process of social differentiation – and, thus, to the agrarian question. The neoliberal policies, very active throughout Latin America, have asked for the agrarian reform, but in a way which privileges the economic and political elite, whereas the poor remain outside the grid (Wolford 2005; 2007). The economic and social turbulences in Asia were also the subject of investigation and have contribut-

ed to renewing peasant studies. The renewed tradition of peasant studies emphasizes, by contrast with their classical authors, not only the local actors and the local conditions of agrarian differentiation, but also the importance of external, global factors. Finally, an argument against the disappearance of the "predatory landed property as a significant economic and political force" as Bernstein (cited above) puts it, is the process of de-collectivization unfolded in post-socialist countries. As many scholars have pointed out, the breakup of collective farms and the privatization of the land and forests have shown that predatory landed property is still a core issue for these countries with a high political and economic significance (Hann 2003; 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi 2010; Verdery 2003). The present volume brings new evidence for this stance.

But how are all these themes issued from the political economy perspective analysed by social anthropologists? We find useful to theoretically frame this volume with the works of Eric Wolf (Cole and Wolf 1974; Wolf 1982). Krech (1991, 355-358) outlined the Eric R. Wolf's attempt to place social anthropology in the broader perspectives of political economy and social ecology. In regards to political economy, Marx's works were the main source of inspiration for Wolf. And yet, he takes up only the basic premises of Marx's theories and some of his concepts. For instance, Wolf agrees that political power structures the economy both in regards to the modes of production and access to resources (capital, labour, technology). Another premise Wolf takes from Marx's works is that labour imprints the structure of the entire social life (Cole 1985, 111). However, he does not provide a general theory about the capitalist progress and its extinction through socialism success, like Marx and his followers did, but analyses the "capitalist mode of production" which emerged in North-Western Europe and spread throughout the world. Wolf aims to guide the reader through the world history. It is not one single history, but numer-

7) There is a huge amount of literature on this subject. We only quote a few more prolific authors, some of them already classics, who have given a general account on the land reform and its outcomes in Latin America.

ous stories about the success of capitalism, its rejection or reshaping, and, last, but not least, its failure (Wolf 1982).

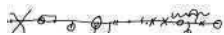
In fact, the appeal to Marx's works has a "transactional" function as Wolf aims to outline the place peasant societies have all over the world. They are not stubborn and conservative isolated populations, but represent a lifestyle with its own logic. The peasants fall into broader social stratifications, and, thus, have a history, but this history is their own, hard to assimilate, still open to transformation. In this sense, Wolf has opened the field of peasantry research with the methodological tool of social anthropology, his contribution to what was later called rural / peasant / agrarian studies / études rurales, which is hard to deny.

Furthermore, the idea of history we aim to introduce in the theoretical frame of this volume is closer to Wolf's perspective on history. An answer to this matter could be found in the book Wolf authored with his student, John W. Cole, about the "hidden frontiers" in the rural areas of the Alps (Cole and Wolf 1974)⁸. The work is the outcome of the anthropological field research the authors made in two Tirol settlements on the Italian – Swiss border. Despite the similarity in the ecology of the two settlements, their structure of power and authority and their ethnic structure strongly differ. Different kinds of histories, such as personal, local, diplomatic, economic – all of them out of the national canons – are investigated in order to delineate the reasons for the differentiation.

These sorts of histories undermine the basic theoretical canons, either universal or national, through the multiple histories of political economy. However, as we have outlined above, it is not about a linear evolution or subduing history to economy. Rather, by following Wolf, we see in the "capitalist mode of production" an ideal type in the Weberian sense⁹, as we highlight its overlapping with local political economies that are very different and resistant. Therefore, Wolf delineates and analyses two other modes

of production: kin-ordered and tributary (Wolf 1982). While the first covers the political economy of the peasants, the second relates to the pre-capitalist state whose rulers had very limited economic interests: to collect taxes for a few "public" expenses (wars, for instance). The real economies, especially those with an important number of "rustics" (Creed and Ching 1997), could be the best approach in a frame that hybridizes the three ideals types.

Wolf's conceptualization of modes of production is particularly suitable to theoretically frame the agrarian question in Southeast Europe, because the capitalism emerging in this area in the 19th century, which was imported from Western Europe, overlapped with peasant and "tributary" traditional economies. Can we, thus, consider the resilience of this model up to nowadays? The existence of a strong rural familial economy, the powerful category of "peasant-worker" inherited from socialism, whose members oscillate between peasant and farmer, the weak or captured states, are topics that seem to combine different features of the three types of economy.



The Agrarian Question in Southeast Europe

To attempt to delineate the commonalities of the agrarian question in South-Eastern Europe in historical perspective is a risky undertaking. As social anthropology takes for granted its origin in Marxist criticism on the advent of capitalism, related research topics could be circumvented. For instance, the postsocialist agrarian question is easy to trace given the common legacy of socialism (Hann et al. 2003). Anthropologists and social historians mention different dates and stances in their attempt to conceptualize the agrarian question and invite to nuanced stances. On the one hand, except for the issue of chronology, it seems that the first land reforms were strongly based on the principle of social justice. In addition, these

8) Amongst the numerous echoes this book has triggered see (Davis 1980) and (Smith 1997).

9) See also Chirot (1976; 1989)

reforms were implemented as soon as the new states began to appear on the map as a result of the struggles for national liberation by the imperial “yokes”. Therefore, the principle of social justice has changed its face and became a way for ethnic marginalization, like in the interwar period in Yugoslavia and Greece, or in Romania in the case of Northern Dobroudja after the inclusion of the province in 1878 into the Romanian state. Thus, we could say that, on the other hand, beyond the principle of social justice, one could suppose that the role of the first reforms and of the others that followed was meant to transform the peasants into “citizens” (Weber 1983[1976]) whose loyalty to the new states would be unquestionable (Schöpflin 1993). The role of the state as legitimating the new structure of land tenure was by far more important, as, at the beginning, the state owned the great part of the land. This happened in Serbia and Greece, the first new states that, at the beginning of 19th century, broke the mono-coloured map of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

In Greece, for instance, before the independence war, the greatest part of the land was owned by around 65,000 Muslim notables, who were dispossessed of 721,000 ha after the emergence of the new state (Pavlovitch 1999: 59). Still, despite the intention of King Otto’s regime to create a smallholding class, the most part of the land belonged to the state (one to two thirds of the entire arable land). The Church that became autocephalous owned about one quarter of the land, while the big owners had only 5 percent. The rest belonged to the peasants (Progoulakis and Burnova 2001). The Romanian state proceeded in a similar way after the transfer of Northern Dobroudja from the Ottoman Empire to the Romanian principalities in 1878. One of the first issues the state had to deal with in order to organize Dobroudja was landed property. In 1882 the Romanian parliament passed a law which aimed to extend the Napoleonic Civil Code, already in practice in the Principalities, and put the keepers of miră¹⁰ into full property against one third of their lands that

passed into state property. Thus, by 1885, a little over 40,000 ha of arable land was put into full property on the tapiu basis for the native settlers of the province, whereas between 1885 and 1897 the government managed to distribute the remaining surfaces, between 200,000 and 500,000 ha (Todorov 2007; Ionescu 1928). The main beneficiaries of this policy were the Romanian ethnics, for whom the colonization of the province changed its ethnic structure. After 1900, the percentage of Romanian ethnics reached almost a half of the region population (in 1878, according to various sources, they covered almost one quarter, even less, of the province population [Karpát 1986, 281]).

In autonomous Serbia, Obrenovich’s 1830 land law gave to the peasants as much land as they could work, aiming to weaken the power of local notables (Pavlovitch 1999, 54). Consequently, an important number of Serb peasants migrated from the provinces surrounding the principality. Obrenovich settled them in the region of south Belgrade between Timok and Morava, giving each family around three ha of land. This policy continued after his withdrawal from power in 1839, during the Karageorgevich rule and, by the end of 1860, between 15 and 20 percent of the Serbian principality was formed of migrants (Lampe and Jackson 1982, 116-117). The same happened much later in the Bulgarian principality that granted the autonomy in 1881 (Crampton 1981; 1990; Lyberatos 2011, 152ff). Therefore, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the exception of Romania, big properties were virtually inexistent. In Bulgaria, landowners with more than 100 ha represented 0.1 per cent of the total number of landowners and had 3.8 per cent of the agricultural land, while in Serbia this category covered only 0.3 per cent of all landowners and had 0.1 per cent of the rural land. The big properties remained only in Romania, as the 1864 land reform gave landowners more than half of the land they had previously owned (Lampe and Jackson 1982, 185).

Still, the new land owners were far from

10) Miră meant the greatest part of the land that people cultivated in the Ottoman Empire. According to the traditional code of laws, the Sultan had the full property over the miră, but transferred the right of using these lands to local notables, who, in turn, leased it to the peasants. The further mentioned tapiu was the document issued by the Ottoman administration which acknowledged the peasants’ right as leaseholders of miră.

the capitalist exploitation of their newly-acquired lands. On the one hand, the reason was, as Holm Sundhaussen outlined it, the lack of any propensity to the capitalist ethos. The land owners missed the motivation and competence to rationally exploit their lands, grounding instead on patterns as “self-subsistence” (Chayanov 1986) and “limited goods” (George Foster) (Sundhaussen 1989, 52ff). Thus, while the capitalist economy started to spread in Southeast Europe in the mid-19th century, the logic of peasant economy resisted and hindered the establishment of capitalism. On the other hand, the low growth and productivity of agricultural economy in Southeast Europe should not be attributed to the peasant’s “(i)rational work of the land”. The factors of spatial economy (H. Thünen) show that the isolation of the Balkan farmsteads from the market considerably lowered the value of their products (Kopsidis 2012, 11-12)¹¹. In addition, the rural economy in each Southeast European country was open to the commercial exchanges to various degrees. For instance, due to the traditional merchant skills, but also to the particular rural – urban differentiation, in the interwar period, the Greek peasants got access to the markets for their products more easily than the Bulgarian ones (Mouzelis 1976, 93ff). Other circumstances intervened too. In Romania, for instance, at the beginning of 1900, although the large landed property (above 100 ha) was 48 percent of the arable land, the peasants’ equipment to work the land (ploughs, carts, horses, oxen, machines, etc.) was much more numerous than that belonging to landowners (Mitrany 1930, 268-9). Thus, the peasants worked not only their own land, but were hired to also work the landlords’ properties.

Actually, although in the entire Southeast Europe the capitalist mode of production had been imported along with broader plans of state modernization, for the eve of the 20th century we should emphasize its coalescence with the peasant, ‘kin-oriented’ (following Eric R. Wolf) mode of produc-

tion. The state or, better said, the elites that took the power in the new states were, at first glance, responsible for this confusing mixture of modernization programs: on the one hand, opening the gates for the western capitalist market, on the other hand, implementing reforms that rescued the traditional, peasant-driven economy. Still, the wicked governance of the native ruling elite should not be blamed for this mixture. At least partially, the geopolitical circumstances explain some patterns that lasted until the interwar period. The territorial and demographic instability, for instance, was a general feature of the area. In Bulgaria, for instance this is the main reason of the absence of *chifliks* in Eastern areas (excepting Dobrodzha), though the conditions for their functioning were even more favourable than in regions like Kustendil and Macedonia (FYROM) where these were numerous (Crampton 1981, 170-173). And, indeed, during the two Russian – Ottoman wars (1806-1812 and 1828-1829) the movement of the Bulgarian population fleeing the northern part of the country played an important role¹².

The idea of social justice was one of the main features of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe. Steadily, this idea came to be opposed by what interwar-period scholars called the “agricultural question”. That happened by the end of the 19th century, after having established in each Southeast European country a political institution that provided stability within national borders (with Yugoslavia in a special position). The experts, who had all been educated in western universities, attempted to make the politicians aware of the fact that simple land redistribution to an important number of peasants does not automatically turn them into farmers. The agricultural production was low in comparison to western producers, and international market competition systematically disfavoured the agriculture from Southeast European countries. Crises as that of the currant¹³ in Greece (Progoulakis and Burnova 2001; Aroni-Tsichli in this volume) had their roots in the inter-

11) This is a problem some countries from Southeast Europe still face. See for instance Stahl (2012) for postsocialist Albania.

12) The estimations go around 16,000 families (Velichi 1964, 298), 500,000 persons (John Lampe quoted in Pavlowitch 1999, 66) colonized in Wallachia and Russian provinces of Bessarabia and Cherson.

13) Currant vineyard or Corinthian currant is a Greek variety of grape. After drying, its fruit (*stafilai*) gives a pre-eminent known Greek product which is mainly consumed as a dried fruit or used for the preparation of food and pastry (for example, the famous English pudding).

14) These new political forces appeared by the end of the 19th century in Balkan countries that had an extended right to vote for peasantry as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria. However, the right to vote did not mean a full empowerment of the peasantry. Several factors as the illiteracy, isolation of rural areas, the clientele networks, drastically narrowed the effect of the universal suffrage.

national market and shook the national economies, leading to enduring economic and political changes. Nevertheless, the economy of Southeast European countries decisively stepped on the way of capitalism, the integration of these economies in the global market resulting in irreversible processes. Thus, in the Romanian Principalities the market orientation to export cereals, unrestricted after 1829, drastically changed the landscape of the countries. The primeval forests that covered more than a half of Wallachia in the 1820s were almost entirely erased to make room for cultivable fields, a fact that also changed the local economy from animal husbandry to agriculture (Mihăilescu 1924). In the same vein, in Bulgaria, the international market demanded for the development of cereals, cotton and tobacco production, which made the country start growing them (Lyberatos 2011, 161ff; Jackson and Lampe 1982). All these factors made the economies of these countries to be more and more dependent on international markets which were dominated by Western countries. The great hope of local experts was put in a modern organization of agriculture, in land reforms and the organisation of agricultural schools and institutes for higher education in agronomy. The quest for a rational agriculture is visible in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century when the first school for agriculture was founded (Lyberatos 2011, 168ff). It was a pressure to professionalize the rural economy and turn peasants and the large landowners - as in the case of Romania (Mitrany 1930, 80) - in modern entrepreneurs.

A third component of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe stems from the field of politics. On the one hand, the Liberal elites that put the countries from this area on the way of modernization in the 19th century were reluctant to give peasants a certain political role. Letting the peasants quiet in their "bucolic" life - as did the pro-Liberal Serbian governments - or crushing them with taxes and even cynical disregard - as was the case of the Prime Minis-

ter Stambolov in Bulgaria - or using them as labour force, but anyway, being open to improve their way of life as in the case of Romanian Liberals (Mishkova 2006; Stokes 1989), meant denial of any political power for the peasants. On the other hand, the fact that peasants were not politically empowered does not mean that the interest for them was lacking. But the political support came from outside the political establishment, from various radical voices and forces that tried to find their place on the political stage¹⁴. In fact, this radicalism overlapped with the rebellion potential that exploded in violent uprisings, as in the cases of Bulgaria and Romania. The 1850 Bulgarian , as well as Romania's 1907 "last European jacquerie" (Lyberatos 2011, 153; Chirot 1976, 150-153; Roberts 1951, 16) are telling expressions of this subdued trend.

It has been argued that the main ideological source of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe was Marxism filtered through the extremist and anarchical Russian intelligentsia (Ionescu 1969, 99-106; Mitrany 1951, 108ff). Marxism also, as this looked at the end of the nineteenth century, came in the Austro-Hungarian Empire area via its reworking by Austro-Marxists like Edward David, being abundantly quoted by the Romanian peasantry ideologist Virgil Madgearu in the interwar period (Rizescu 2005, 16). The anti-western and anti-modernization ideas were mixed with anti-capitalist ideas brought over from western leftism (Müller 2000, 66). However, these Marxist couches of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe should be carefully analysed. In Constantin Stere's works (Romanian pre-war peasantry ideologist) Marxism is so extensively changed that it arouse heated polemics with Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, an orthodox Marxist (Ionescu 1969, 100-105). In the same vein, the Bulgarian leftists filtered their Marxism through their contacts with Russian intelligentsia and through "field" fights in post-1880 politics (Pundeff 1971). In fact, before the First World War, the appearance and political success of parties like Nikola

Pasich's Radical Party, or Alexandr Stamboliski's Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, is widely due to their charismatic leaders. After their leaders disappeared, the parties faded away, though some of their forefront politicians, as Milan Stojadinovic, who became Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, successfully continued their career¹⁵.

In the interwar period, the political content of the agrarian question conflated as the peasants gained the right to vote. The mass politics and mobilization brought the peasantry-oriented parties to power, either immediately, like in Bulgaria and Serbia, or later, as in Romania (in 1928, but with almost 80% of votes). Still, it could be said that the agrarian question politically turned into a kind of "pragmatic populism" (Ionescu 1969, 106ff), neither capitalism, nor socialism, whereas the peasant parties envisaged a sort of "green" political ideology (Mitrany 1951, 115ff; 131ff). In fact, by taking over the government, the peasant parties became aware and also had to cope with serious problems, such as the rural – urban and industry – agriculture divides (ibidem, 136), or the low productivity of the peasant exploitations. However in Romania, the last country to have a more balanced land ownership¹⁶ before the First World War, the distinction between the social dimension of the agrarian question and the economic aspects became clearer. The subsistence agriculture should have been transformed into farms based on capitalist cultivation of the land (Gormsen 1945; Roberts 1951, 63).

Nevertheless, the mainstream of agrarian policies in the interwar period ignored this reasoning. Instead, ad-hoc policies were drafted, like the cooperative system through which governments hoped to successfully integrate the peasant economy into the wider industrialized and urbanized national society. Paradoxically, in order to forge these new agrarian ideologies, theories of "subsistence" (based on Alexandre Chayanov's work) were used, as economist Virgil Madgearu did in Romania (Madgearu

1936; Ionescu 1970, 110ff; Müller 2000, 65-68). Capitalist tools like market integration and capitalization through small credits, were fully misused, a situation that recalls the abovementioned confusing mixture. There was, in fact, a mixture of capitalism and traditional economy¹⁷.

Actually, in the interwar period, in all Southeast European countries the agrarian question triggered the appearance of an ideology of "the social state" without relying on the institutions and policies the social state grounded in the modern states. For instance, the scholars outline the shift of the cooperative system policy that, instead of improving agricultural production and orienting it to the market, provided the disadvantaged rural population with a form of social assistance (Mitrany 1951, 110; Roberts 1951, 60-61). It has to be said that the issue of rural poverty was real, as the land the peasants had received after the successive land reforms did not provide them with a full livelihood. In Romania, for instance, in the 1930s the research on the income of peasant households had shown that only 58.5% of the household income came from agricultural exploitation (35.3 per cent crops and 23.2 per cent cattle breeding), the rest being gained from small businesses (Golopenția 2002: 315-316).

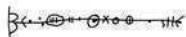
Thus, one may say that none of the five agrarian transformation ways Byres has outlined (1991) is suitable to analytically explain the capitalist transformation of countries in Southeast Europe. The state was too weak to lead the transformations as in the cases of Japan and France. The English path based on enclosures is considered a special case. The American case is also rather special due to the historical conditions under which it developed (the conquest of the West, the establishment of new settlements, etc.). A certain similarity with the case of Prussia may be taken into consideration, if we refer to the transformation of noblemen into a more or less capitalist class. But peasants were not transformed into either wage labourer or small capitalist farmers. When

15) We thank Jovana Dikovic for bringing this important point to our attention. Though the prewar Agrarian parties withered away by the end of the 1920s, their main personalities switched parties, though still seeking to remain committed to their original ideas, i.e. agrarianism.

16) Due to a large land reform which levelled the ownership structure as in the other Southeast European countries (Mitrany 1930).

17) Sociologist Henri H. Stahl analyzes the ways in which foreign timber companies gained access to the forests of the commons in Vrancea region, Southeast Romania at the end of 19th century (Stahl 1980). The French Code Law the Romanian state introduced within the frame of the broader modernization program was used by the foreign timber companies to obtain property rights in the commons (see also Măntescu this volume). There were clashes between the foreign companies and the locals who used the forest according to the common law. The internal differentiation of the local society allowed foreign logging companies to exploit the forests for external markets and industry.

the communist regimes came to power, the peasantry from Southeast Europe had more or less the same features as at the end of the 19th century.



The Socialist and Post-Socialist Agrarian Question

The socialist period recovered all these aspects of the agrarian question. But except Greece, which was outside the socialist camp, in the other Southeast European countries the totalitarian essence of the new power violently oversimplified it. The interwar political mobilization to vote was replaced by the class-struggle hate that meant destroying the modest rural interwar differentiation and attempted to level the peasantry. Even in countries like Yugoslavia where the Marxist ideology had fewer grievances, the rural sector was abandoned as compared to a century before (Halpern 1963). The sole clear policy of the socialist governments, at least until the 1960s, was forced industrialization which extracted the demographic surplus from rural areas and headed to the new urban centres. However, as many scholars have outlined, including Jovana Diković in this volume, the new labour force was formed of neither peasants, nor fully industrial workers¹⁸. Worker-peasantry was, in Western Europe, the outcome of the industrialization of Europe in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. The industrialization marked the inclusion of significant parts of the rural population into the industrial sector. This is not the same process as the one which took place in late 18th century in which part of the peasantry was forced to leave its land and find employment in urban manufactories, a process largely analyzed by Marx (1983 [1925]). The worker-peasant whom we talk about here is a peasant who relies on both industrial wage and subsistence agriculture for his livelihood¹⁹.

In the countries of Southeast Europe, the big-scale industrialization process was

started by socialist regimes²⁰. Thus, this social group which appears in Western Europe at the end of the 19th century and early 20th began to rise up in Southeast Europe after World War II within the context of the rapid and forced industrialization (Beck 1976; Cole 1976). The dynamics of the worker-peasant as a social group is different from that of a peasant relying on land farming only or of a purely industrial wage-worker. Usually, in such families one partner would work in industry and the other one in agriculture. The spouse who works in industry is a part-time agricultural worker. Szelenyi and Kostello (1996) present the worker-peasant as a semiskilled industrial worker forced by the communist regime to float between industry and farming. They were those who ensured a market activity during socialism; very often these activities bordered on the illegal. The worker-peasant described by Szelenyi and Kostello was quite low on the social hierarchy. However, other authors present a different image of the worker-peasant, which also included skilled technicians and white-collar workers interested in exploiting the opportunities of rural residences, including the food surplus from gardening (Symes 1993). In Romania, the worker-peasant was rarely interested in market mechanisms since his household relied on farming in the collective farm or, later, on the supplementary plots received for private work and industrial wage (Dorondel 2007; Meurs 2002).

The worker-peasant continued to thrive in postsocialist countries although the heavy industry collapsed (Symes 1993). Decollectivization and the restitution of land to former owners have contributed further to the maintenance of such a hybrid group. In post-socialist countries, having one family member earning an industrial wage and another one working the land is a matter of subsistence in harsh economic times. Part of the wage is invested in different agricultural works, but the worker-peasant's investments are minimal. The labour force is ensured by the members of the household

18) One point should be cleared before going further: worker-peasants do not represent the totality of the peasantry in any Southeast European country. Although we do not have statistics to point out the percentage of worker-peasants within the peasantry we contend that they only represent a slim category.

19) The studies dealing with the worker-peasant in different parts of the globe are too numerous to be included here. This review would exceed the aim of this Introduction. For a comprehensive review, see Cavazzani and Fuller (1982); Cento and Comer (1993); Holmes (1989).

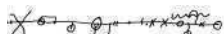
20) We do not want to imply that industrialization was started by the socialist regimes. The socialist regime, though, proceeded to a forced and massive industrialization after the Second World War.

and through work-exchange. Thus, rural ties remain essential for one who wants to be involved in a network of work-exchange (Kaneff 2002). The worker-peasant cannot work a too large plot of land. Buying or selling land is not a viable option. Therefore, it makes more sense to a worker-peasant to invest less money for a smaller plot rather than do bigger investments for larger plots, as from the very beginning the agricultural production is meant for household consumption only²¹. He is interested in working a large enough plot to cover the household needs. It is simply a calculus based on the capital the family has to plan for the next harvest and the available labour force.

The fact that rarely, if ever, hires available rural labour force, that usually have a small piece of land whose products are meant primarily for self-consumption, makes the post-socialist worker-peasants to stand as a particular figure in the problem of the agrarian question. They stand between better-off, large landowners and poor, landless people. They do not bring significant capital into agriculture, do not rent the land, in or out and do not use external labour force. Their relative independence from the market (since they do not produce for the market), their indifference to the landless or poor peasants (they do not hire them or rent in their land), their indifference to producing more (thus, not investing in technology and in social divisions of labour) sets them apart from the classical point of view of the agrarian question²².

One final observation before we present the papers which contribute to this volume. Today, the agrarian question also bears a political relevance for countries which are either part of the EU, such as Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, or are negotiating their accession, such as Albania, Serbia or Moldova. The new agrarian policy of the EU, which through its subsidies directed on rather large land owners (Fox 2011), creates a new type of differentiation. This new agrarian differentiation needs further investigation. Until we have such a social and economic

X-ray, we can only speculate on what the new differentiation will look like and how the peasantry will be affected. One thing we can be sure of: the peasantry seems to be an enduring social class.



The contributions to this volume

Before introducing the papers, we would like to discuss the structure of the volume²³. The first set of papers introduces a more general view of the agrarian transformations in Southeast Europe. This part encompasses the works of Giordano, Aronitsichli, Cartwright, Zhllima and Rama, and Angelova, having a more historical and political economy-based approach. Although all the papers have a general historical approach which supports particular findings from particular countries, the papers from the second part focuses predominantly on ethnographic fieldwork. The papers of Măntescu, Kuzmanova, Micu, Diković and Cash refer to particular case studies. In this way, the historical and political economy approach is intertwined with the anthropological lens. Frank Uekötter's Afterword is an attempt to open up the view as he puts the localized Southeast European peasantry into a global perspective.

Christian Giordano draws attention to the process of building the nation state and the link with the agrarian reform in Yugoslavia in the interwar period. As he aptly points, the ethnicization of land is absolutely essential for a deeper understanding of the agrarian question in Yugoslavia particularly, and in Southeast Europe more generally. In fact, as Giordano shows, agrarian reforms in Yugoslavia heavily emphasized the ethnic component. This paper shows that the land reform was not implemented to rule out the social and economic disparities and to modernize the country, but rather to transform a territory with a multiethnic component into one single ethnic country. This process started at the beginning of the 20th century, crossed two centuries and has

21) Verdery (2003) and Giordano and Kostova (2013) document the emergence of an entrepreneurial class who rents land from those who either cannot work it or have no interest in doing it. However, worker-peasants have no incentive to rent out their land, which is essential in providing food for the family. We thank Ger Duijings for drawing our attention to this aspect.

22) See Bernstein (2011) for more about the classical agrarian question and the way the concept can be applied to today's world.

23) We thank to one of the anonymous reviewers of the volume for drawing our attention to this issue.

marked the entire region. This analysis is also important to understand the current situation – the tensions between Turks and Bulgarians in Bulgaria, between Romanians and Roma in Romania, or, even the recent Ukraine crisis proves that ethnicity is still a pivotal matter in Southeast Europe.

The ethnicization of the agrarian question could be seen as a consequence of hurling the traditional SEE societies into the turmoil of social and political modernization. Other such new processes modernization brought about: the social mobilization and access of the peasant economy to the capitalist market. Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli outlines these two latter matters in her contribution. Following the territorial configuration of the Greek state, she also delineates the intricate growth of the agrarian question through the successive land reforms. Thus, if in the first half of the century, after having gained the independence, the goal of the state was to keep the peasants loyal to the royal power - a fact that culminated with the 1871 land reform, - ,after having added Thessaly (1881) and Macedonia (1913), a sharp conflict arose between the chiflik owners and the landless peasants. The state had to cope with the people's demand for a new land reform, and, thus, the big properties were redistributed between 1917 and 1923. This last reform was grounded on the principle of social justice. The analysis of the annexation of Corfu Island in 1864 and that of the currant crisis that occurred in Southern Greece at the end of 19th century illustrate the access of the peasant economy to the capitalist market. In this last case, the state had to intervene to protect the currant cultivators against the unequal exchange of their products on the international markets.

The last three papers of the first part of the volume explore the agrarian question from a political economy perspective in Romania, Hungary and Albania. The macro-level analysis is less sensible to local economic and social changes, but has the advantage of showing the "big picture". Andrew Cartwright explores the intersec-

tions between land tenure and the state's social security functions in rural Hungary and Romania. The topic is analyzed in the context of the urban-rural migration (but also migration in Western European countries) and the aging of the rural population in postsocialist countries. The land restitution (in Romania) and the voucher system implemented in Hungary made agricultural land a source of social security for rural inhabitants. As Cartwright shows in this chapter, the postsocialist state plays a central role in the post-socialist agrarian question due to its function in establishing agricultural policies. Moreover, the new EU agricultural policies and the global quest for new agricultural lands – and its corollary land-grabbing – sheds new light and show new insights into the agrarian question.

Zhllima and Rama's chapter focuses on the land reform in Albania. This article points out that the distribution of rural assets has decisively influenced the agriculture and people's livelihood in the countryside. Land tenure is, as in the previous paper, a central issue as well. The political economy approach is supported by the historical one: land tenure has suffered tremendous changes from the Ottoman times to the post-socialist years due to the attempts of various political regimes to improve the land tenure of the country. Despite the deep changes of social configurations in the Albanian countryside during these political regimes, the problems that plagued the country remained. This chapter shows that the agrarian question – as discussed at the end of the 19th century by socialist intellectuals – is still relevant today in Southeast Europe.

The land redistribution alone proved to be insufficient to improve the peasants' life standards and to modernize the rural areas. The agrarian policies found paths of further development in the professionalization of both agrarian economy and social intervention into rural life. Milena Angelova illustrates in her article these two axes by approaching Bulgaria's national program of village modernization known as the "model



village". Although the program took place between 1937 and 1944, its basic ideas date back to the beginning of the 1920s. One group of villages sampled on a national scale was chosen to apply measures of improvement regarding hygiene, public health, the appearance of households and to establish farming schools. The author emphasizes the sources of inspirations for this program, the United States and Germany, as well as the connections with the experts of nearer countries such as Italy, Czechoslovakia and Romania, which had already started similar programs.

The second part of the volume focuses on cases studies. We attempt to follow the way the agrarian policies the central governments implemented in various periods and countries affected the basic units of the rural societies: communes and villages. This kind of approach is based on anthropological fieldwork, but also brings to the foreground the government agrarian policies, and aims to outline the common people's reaction to these policies, either using them, or rejecting them and even rebelling against the government.

Liviu Măntescu's chapter focuses on the environmental aspects of the agrarian question. Approaching this issue from the perspective *a la longue durée*, he explores the importance of the forest for agrarian differentiation in a region called Țara Vrancei (The Land of Vrancea), from Moldova (Romania). Whereas for a long time the agrarian question had at its core land-based differentiation, Măntescu shows that, in some particular places, the forest played a central role in agrarian differentiation. The penetration of big foreign logging companies at the end of the 19th century, which bought forests from local peasantry for intensive exploitation, had important economic consequences for the relatively undifferentiated peasantry from Țara Vrancei. In addition to the penetration of the foreign logging companies, which changed the local economy and society, the legislation concerning the access to forest exploitation advanced by

the Romanian state at the beginning of the 20th century created further economic and social differentiation. Moreover, exploring the history of the access to forests from the 20th century up to the post-socialist period, Măntescu shows the persistence of the agrarian question in this region regardless of the political regimes. Agrarian differentiation based on access to forests had important morphological consequences for the natural environment, as Măntescu proves in this paper.

Except for Greece, the communist and totalitarian political regimes came into power in the other SEE countries after the Second World War. Still, despite the fastidious propaganda that claimed the deep separation from the "older" regime, the agrarian question remained. The next chapters in this volume deal with these matters, and also follow the manner in which the legacy of the socialist agrarian question was managed after 1990. In the vein of Milena Angelova's article, Aneliya Kuzmanova focuses in her paper on another social experiment that took place in the socialist period: the policies of rejuvenation in the half-deserted Bulgarian villages by the beginning of 1980s. Kuzmanova outlines the ways of coping with the overwhelming rural structure of Bulgarian society in the 1950s. Although the socialist policies of industrialization, urbanization and rural outmigration seemed to be successful, they reached their limits in the 1980s. These evolutions are analysed also in the field, in a village located in Southeast Bulgaria, where the authorities set back a "youth republic" in 1982. The official goal was to increase the village population by bringing in migrants who were provided with facilities (houses) and well-paid jobs in the local collective farm by the state. But there were also hidden aims, such as the change of the Bulgarian-Turkish ethnic balance, as well as unintended consequences that the author delineates. The fall of the socialist regime put an end to this experiment. The collective farm disappeared in a few years and, similar to the rest of the coun-

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try, the people had to return to their “rurality” or even into the “rural ghetto”. This epilogue proves the failure of the socialist modernization program of rural society, but also challenges and makes illegitimate the post-1990 neo-liberal policies.

The precarious state of the post-1990 rural areas in SEE resides in the the unsolved matters of agrarian question throughout the socialist decades. This is the argument of Cornel Micu’s paper. Like Kuzmanova, he also depicts the post-1990 rural life in grey colours, but traces back the origins in the long period of rural underdevelopment. The idea of land property, Micu emphasizes, was particularly distorted by the belated rural modernization as this thoroughly differs - even in our days - from the western concept of ownership. Whereas in developed countries land property has a strict juridical meaning, in rural underdeveloped areas land property represents both a “means of subsistence” and a “social connector”. Micu’s research focuses on a village located in the Brăila plain, Southeast Romania, but the field data are framed by the local history, as well as by the modernization history of the region from the mid-19th century until the fall of the socialist regime. The peculiar idea of property as means of subsistence explains that, even in socialist times, the agrarian policies of the government failed to transform the peasants into farmers.

The SEE peasantry changed over the socialist decades, but they did not become farmers, argues Cornel Micu. Jovana Diković makes the same argument in her article, stating in the title itself that Serbian villagers are neither peasants, nor farmers. Due to the discontinuities of the agrarian policies in the entire 20th century, as well as after 2000, the relation state – rural producers has been distorted and filled with distrust from both sides. Here the emphasis is not on underdevelopment and subsistence, as rural people are individuals with strategies and economic calculation, but on the government’s inability to draft reasonable

policies to coordinate and enhance the people’s individual plans. Diković relies also on the anthropological fieldwork she has done in one multicultural village from Vojvodina. The field data are framed by the local history and subsequent agrarian policies of the central governments in the socialist and post-socialist times, but the analysis focuses on the role of the intermediate power holders who have distorted the partnership between the state and local farmers. Thus, even after 2000, despite the effort of the central government to draft sound agrarian policies, the farmers paradoxically move far away from the state and are reluctant towards its policies.

Jennifer Cash’s article suggests that moral economy is part of the agrarian question in the post-socialist Republic of Moldova. Using historical data, she points out the peasants’ poverty under both Romanian and Russian rule (from the end of the 19th century up to the 1940s), the fragmentation of agricultural land and the low productivity of the agriculture. Peasants were rather engaged in self-exploitation, would limit their consumption and were satisfied with substandard housing. Postsocialism and its equal land distribution policy, after de-collectivization, have not helped efficient farming. Drawing on her fieldwork, Cash’s article emphasizes the fact that, despite the continuous poverty in rural areas, people still manage to survive. Moreover, she shows that the agrarian differentiation is hampered by a moral economy which imposes acts of generosity from those who have to those who do not.

As concluding remarks, we put the following question: are there any significant differences between the agrarian issue as it was framed by contemporary analysts (most of them working in extra-European settings) and its Southeast European version? The papers that compose this volume prove two points. The first point is that, despite the changes of the political regimes since the end of 19th century until today, the agrarian question is politically relevant and

theoretically valid. The second point is that the current features of the agrarian question have changed, at least as they manifest themselves in Southeast Europe; nowadays, they are quite different from those presented by the “classics” of the agrarian question, but also by contemporary political economists. Some of the chapters in this volume adopt a historical approach and have, thus, highlighted the resilience of the agrarian question from the 19th century onwards. One cannot understand the postsocialist land reform without looking at the history of land tenure. As in the case of Albania, despite the massive structural changes that took place in land tenure from monarchic times, at the end of the Ottoman rule, up to the neoliberal land reforms from the 1990s, the agrarian question was relevant in order to understand social history. Crossing ages and political regimes, the agrarian question popped up fiercely in the 1990s throughout Southeast Europe.

The second point of the concluding remarks does not contradict the first one. Yes, the agrarian question maintained its validity at the end of the 20th century. It does not mean, though, that there are no differences between the agrarian question as it was perceived and analysed by 19th century political economists and revolutionaries, and the current-day situation. The differences are made by the historical evolution of Southeast Europe, the importance of ethnicity for the new national states emerging in the 19th century in Southeast Europe; in addition, the movements of population from the 20th century had clear and serious repercussions on the formulation of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe. The ethnization of the land reform was clearly not an issue, either for the “first wave” of political economists interested in this issue, or for the contemporary analysts of the agrarian question. The transformation of the land into a national territory (which reinforced the ethnic ties, but also created bitter ethnic divisions [Kaneff 1998]), marked the agrarian question along the 20th century.

The movements of population, from Turkey to Greece, from Bulgaria to Romania and vice-versa gave the land issue a whole new meaning. Furthermore, the history of the state formation in modern times has deeply imprinted the content of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe.

The national state represents an important factor when analyzing the agrarian question in Southeast Europe. The state, as most of the papers in this volume clearly point out, represents a crucial factor for agrarian differentiation. The successive land reforms and the local elite, themselves representing the state at a local level, decisively marked the agrarian question at the beginning of the 21st century in Southeast Europe by mixing national ideals with agricultural policies. In this regard, the state as a “rational actor” is paradoxical, but it makes complete sense. On the one hand, the state was the main actor in introducing the capitalist mode of production. This was a part of the “modernization from above” model embraced by Southeast European countries from the mid-19th century. The state was the main actor in the process of modernization regardless of the fact that the “state” meant – at the time – only a handful of open-minded elite. It was rational, at the very beginning, to transform the segmented and multilayered peasant population in a homogenous body of citizens to be loyal to the new national states. The land reforms that the state put into practice aimed to obtain this mass of “citizen-peasants”. On the other hand, once the state bureaucracy became to be a sound voice and provide expertise for state policies, the attitude toward the agrarian question changed.

The Bulgarian governmental program of the “Model Village”, a program led by various experts in rural life, suggests the “rational” state attitude toward the agrarian question had undergone a change process. Bodies of experts, agronomists, sociologists, social assistants, hygienists, working in multidisciplinary teams had to improve the rural areas through state programs²⁴. Two



24) For more details on this, see Mușat 2011.

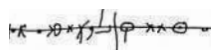
observations have to be made here. First, this kind of “rational” commitment represents much more than the mere increase in the productivity of the agricultural work. It is true that interwar land reforms levelled land distribution, which led, in a first phase, to the decrease of agricultural productivity. Nonetheless, the land reforms had to merge, at least in the eyes of the experts and bureaucrats, with wider social and cultural programs of changing rural life. Secondly, through these complex programs of change, the governments witnessed a kind of trust that the peasant populations were able to self-improve and self-emancipate. That meant the state had ceased to perceive the peasantry as a network of autonomous and self-sufficient communities, as Chayanov depicted them. Different modes of conceiving the peasant “rationality” were intricate in this change of the state’s attitude toward the agrarian question.

In the communist period, the state seemed to have lost the core place in responding to the agrarian question because the Marxist dogma expected the peasantry to disappear. The hazardous planning of economy and social landscape the state experts put in practice in the communist period totally failed. Still, the rural areas have changed after these experiments, and the scholars, social scientists and historians as well, have drafted new concepts that accurately explain these states of facts. The concept of the “worker-peasant”, for instance, has partially replaced the classical image of the peasant, though new frames of approaching the social behaviour of the worker-peasants are yet to be defined.

In present Southeast Europe there are contrastive patterns of conceptualizing the agrarian question. While the rural population is able to differentiate and act as individual actors, in some cases, in others, the rural communities resist as self-sufficient units. However, both perspectives have common features. Firstly, the withdrawal of the state from shaping the agrarian question. Either the state is captured by the cli-

enteles’ networks that intermediate the relation with the reluctant local entrepreneurs, or it simply escapes, leaving the place in the hands of the European Union agrarian policies and foreign entrepreneurs; it is rather obvious that the postsocialist state no longer holds the same position it had in the interwar period. The European Union is now playing a main role in drafting the agrarian policies. Still, the direction and frames of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe are rapidly shifting. New burning issues, which are not discussed here, such as land grabbing (see, for instance, Visser and Spoor 2011), the globalization of food production, the new green technology, such as the construction of inland wind farms (see for instance Măntescu 2012), all have an impact on a future theoretical discussion of the agrarian question in Southeast Europe.

As a final conclusion, the agrarian transformations in Southeast Europe could be considered a particular trajectory of a more general theory of the agrarian transformation. None of the five ways of transition from an agrarian society to a capitalist one as theorized by the classics of the agrarian question would perfectly fit the way Southeast European countries have transformed themselves. The long-lasting peasant mode of production mixed with the capitalist one, the role of ethnicity in agrarian differentiation, the movements of population, and the specific way of state formation, are all features that make the agrarian question in Southeast Europe a particular one.



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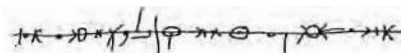
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The Ethnicization of Agrarian Reforms: The Case of Interwar Yugoslavia



Christian Giordano

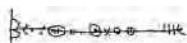
Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg

ABSTRACT

Land reform is a legal means for settling the agrarian question. In central and South-Eastern Europe where farming is a major occupation, such reforms have served to nationalize – ethnically homogenize – the nation's land. The analysis of such reforms in Yugoslavia during the period between the two world wars shows how land was systematically distributed in favour of those who were part of the titular nation while, at the same time, discriminating against ethnic minorities. Instead of settling the agrarian question, these reforms fuelled the conflict between ethno-national groups to the point of a quasi-civil war situation. The social memory of the discriminated groups is still today coined by these negative historical experiences, as the case of Kosovo show

KEYWORDS

Agrarian reforms, ethnicization, interwar Yugoslavia, nationalism, modernization



Introduction: “Staatsnation” and the “Purity” Myth

Both in Western and Eastern Europe the specific combination of territory, language, creed, citizenship and / or nationality, is generally perceived as an invariable and inviolable heritage of individual and collective “identities” (Conte 1995, 138). It is a widespread belief that can be traced back even to the most common aspects of everyday life. This belief reaches its political-institutional achievement in the concept of “Staatsnation” and its various practical applications that can be found, with few exceptions, throughout the Old Continent. The idea of “Staatsnation”, a German term of French origin as Stéphane Pierré-Caps aptly pointed out (Pierré-Caps 1995, 56), is based on the doctrine according to which each “nation” must have its own territorial State and each State must consist of one “nation” only (Altermatt 1996, 53).

This formula has guided the whole European history from the early 1800s on. In terms of territory, this motto, forerunner of such tragic events, can be phrased as follows; each “nation” has a right to its “land” which is under the monopoly of one “nation” only.

It is not surprising that the past two centuries have been marked by repeated efforts to make the single national territories more and more ethnically and culturally homogeneous, especially in Central and Eastern Europe where the principle of “Staatsnation” was applied much later than in Western Europe; that is, only after the downfall of the imperial “Vielvölkerstaaten”. The processes of “ethno-cultural re-composition” aiming at “ethnic purity” of national States have been carried out through a fearsome and ongoing series of boundary revisions, forced assimilations, expulsions, aimed and planned immigrations, deportations, purifications and ethnic wars, genocides, restorations and secessions. The Nazi detractors of the “schwebendes Volkstum” (Conte

1995: 54), the enthusiastic upholders of the Hitlerian "gardener State" (Bauman 1996, 43 ff.), and the "ethnic cleansing engineers" in the Balkans (Grmek, Gjidara and Šimac 1993), notwithstanding the use of different means, share a common end; the elimination of any "ethno-cultural heterogeneity" within the State where they live and act.

Although the above-mentioned phenomena refer mainly to Central and Eastern Europe, it would be a mistake to think that Western Europe has not been affected by similar shock waves of homogenization. In fact, through the "très longue durée" perspective there is the pressing sequence of the "Albigensian Crusade" (1208-1244), the "Massacre of St. Bartholomew" (1572), the expulsion of "marranos" and "moriscos" from Portugal and Spain (1492), the various wars of religion which bloodied Western Europe during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation (15th and 16th century), up to purifying attempts which later will be essential to the slow construction of future "Staatnationen" in this area of the Old Continent. Probably, it would be anachronistic to label these cases as deliberate "ethno-cultural homogenization"; however, avoiding the trap of evolutionary mechanism, it would be a good idea to keep in mind the "time lag" or, better yet, the "décalage historique" between Western and Eastern Europe rather than a presumed substantial difference.

Four main periods can be identified in the various processes of "ethnic separation" that concerned almost all the "Staatnationen" of Central and Eastern Europe over the last two centuries. Their virulence was laden with consequences for the structure of the entire continent.

The first period was predominantly in the Balkans, immediately after the creation of the first Nation-states in the 19th century. Vast sections of populations of Turkish origin or simply of Muslim faith were forced to leave the region. As administrators and civil servants of the Ottoman Empire, they did indeed represent the hated occupiers,

but members of social strata that had nothing or little in common with the ruling class were involved in the expulsion process as well. During the great "Crisis in the Orient", which led to the bloody Russian-Turkish war, from 1875 to 1878 alone a million and a half people were repatriated (Sundhaussen 1997, 87). Considering the times and the area involved, it was an exceptional movement of people.

The second virulent phase was between 1913 and 1925. It was characterized by the forced transfer of whole minoritarian ethnic groups and yet it was internationally recognized and guaranteed. In the diplomatic language of those days, it was euphemistically termed as a "population exchange". Some examples illustrate the "homogenization" strategies through "ethnic separation". Substantial groups of Albanians from Kosovo and western Macedonia were transferred to Turkey after the Balkan Wars (1913) mainly because of their religion. Particularly after the creation of the Kingdom of the Serbians, Croats and Slovenians, they were substituted by Serbian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Slovenian people with the intention of "re-Slavizing" the region. The so-called "population exchange" between Greece and Turkey was even more dramatic. It was decreed by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which ratified a series of reciprocal expulsions and hasty migrations caused by the Greek military catastrophe during the reckless campaign in Asia Minor. After the tremendous defeat, Greece was overrun by refugees from the coasts of Western Anatolia plus the Greeks from the Black Sea area and the Caucasus who, since 1917, had been fleeing from the repressions of the new Bolshevik regime. A country of 4,5 million inhabitants faced the arrival of 1,3 million refugees. At the same time, the "population exchange" provided for the departure of the "citizens of Islam faith", mostly Turkish, but also Albanians.

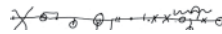
The third phase of "ethnic homogenization" includes the decade between 1940 and 1950 that was characterized by the Nazi



policy of annihilation, transfer and expulsion of whole ethnic groups or supposed-so and by Stalinist deportations and purges. Along with the holocaust of the so-called "transnational minorities" (Kende 1992, 13 ff.), that is Jews and Roma, there were massive population movements in all of Central and Eastern Europe which changed the ethnic map of this part of the continent considerably. 11,5 million Germans were expelled from the "Ostgebiete", while 3 million Poles, 2 million of which from the regions that became part of the Soviet Union after the Second World War, settled in Silesia and in the south of Eastern Prussia. Thus, Poland became an almost mono-ethnic country, quite consistent with the ideal of the „Staatsnation“. Even the treaties between Czechoslovakia and Hungary and between the latter and Yugoslavia, which provided for reciprocal "population exchanges" as well, date back to the same period, immediately after the Second World War. Finally, Stalin consolidated his conquests in the Western part of the Soviet Union through a policy of "planned", and often imposed, "mobility". On the one hand, this involved the deportation of populations considered "accomplices of the enemy", therefore "traitors of the great patriotic war" (Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, etc.), to Siberia or central Asia. On the other, it involved substituting them with more "reliable" immigrants, mainly of Slavic origin such as Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians (Conte and Giordano 1995, 28 ff.).

The fourth virulent phase of "ethnic homogenization", which can be called a "reversion to the Nation-state", is the wave of "political separations" that has been devastating Central and Eastern Europe over the past fifteen years. It can be traced back to socialist Bulgaria with the so-called solution of nationality problems. Actually, the solution was the expulsion and / or forced assimilation of "ethnic Turks" in the second half of the 1980s. The phase continued during the 1990s with the disintegration of the three countries born after the First

World War through a multi-ethnic and multinational "logic", namely Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. New and old nations, originated from this process, are all based on the "Staatsnation" principle. Therefore, the war in Bosnia is fully in tune with this tragic, yet century-old "logic" of „homogenization“. Given the historical background, it would have been quite surprising if the war had not broken out. The Treaty of Dayton, even with obvious formal differences, is nothing but a reissue of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) in which an "ethnic re-composition" project lurks behind a hypocritical façade. With the explosion of the conflict in Kosovo, the "humanitarian catastrophe" now has the bitter taste of an old "déjà vu" that follows the same persisting pattern of "ethnic homogenization". Aside from political modalities, one could even picture the final setting: the ethno-territorial separation of Serbians from Albanians. We cannot hope against hope, however, because further conflicts are at hand.



Land Reforms and „Ethnic Re-composition“

In very broad terms, a land reform implies a redefining of landed property rights through State legislative acts. From a sociological point of view, a land reform answers two needs: one of a political and the other of an economic nature, each with a specific type of landowner as R.P. Dore pointed out in his classic studies on land redistribution in Japan (Dore 1965, 487 seq.). In the first case, landowners monopolize domination structures deriving from conquest or feudalization processes. In the second case, they are mainly economic actors or in Marxian terms, they are the representatives of the "rural wing of the bourgeoisie" who might wield an indirect power due to their wealth and contacts with politicians and administrators of urban origin. Obviously enough, processes of expropriation and



land redistribution imply radical changes in the political asset of the society involved much more so in the first case than in the second one.

Territorial concerns and, therefore, the definition of land regime are basic duties that Nation-states claimed from the very beginning, almost with no exception. Hence, the legislative instrument of land reform is the cornerstone of any territorial policy that pursues a heightening of national cohesion and unity. The specific historical heritage of Central and Eastern European Nation-states that rose from the late disintegration of multi-ethnic empires (with few exceptions: Hungary) essentially determined land reforms with a strong disruptive impact on the preceding domination system, at least on paper. Some examples can better explain the reasons behind this choice. Poland and Romania of the „Old Kingdom“, after attaining their independence again, were confronted by powerful „autochthonous“ landowners with feudal or patrimonial backgrounds („Szlachta“ and „boyars“) who, besides their political privileges, had considerable economic means built upon the „second serfdom“ system. On the other hand instead, the Baltic countries had to recognize that the land was in the hands of a few „foreign“ families of feudal lords, mainly of German and Polish descent. Finally, Balkan Europe, which had just been freed of the „Turkish yoke“, took care to demolish the patrimonial aspects of the political-administrative structures inherited from the Ottoman Empire that guaranteed usufruct or appropriation of vast-landed property to officials.

In substance, therefore, land reforms in national States that attained a late independence were meant to reach the following goals:

- carry through an „act of justice“ mainly by retrenching the latifundist regime in order to apportion „the land to the tillers“. Land reforms were intended to find a solution to the „social question“, which, given the specific socio-economic situation in

Central and East Europe (as in several other societies as well), is above all an „agrarian question“.

- create an economic basis for the rise or growth of a rural „middle class“ or „fifth estate“ of wealthy peasants who could rapidly modernize agriculture, which in those days was considered indispensable to a successful industrialization policy. According to the socialist version of rural modernization policy, land reform is the cornerstone on which agricultural collectivization is based as Friedrich Engels states in his famous essay „Die Bauernfrage in Frankreich und in Deutschland“ (Engels 1977, Vol. XXII, 483 ff.). Therefore, the idea underlying this project is rather the formation of a rural proletariat.

- „nationalize“ the State's territory by „ethnicizing“ landed property: that is, apportioning it preferably to the sole members of the „entitled nation“.

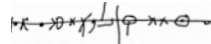
This last point, which generally is not officially stated in land redistribution policies, becomes the heart of reform actions, as in several postcolonial societies (Kenya, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, etc.) shaken by violent upsurges of fiery nationalism like the Mau-Mau rebellion in Kenya (Warriner 1969, 11 ff.).

As far as Central and Eastern-Europe are concerned, the exigency of a land reform rises at first as the need to resolve the „social question“ that, in this area, is more of an „agrarian question“, as already mentioned. From the turn of the century on, the indebtedness and impoverishment of the rural masses, usury, overpopulation and unemployment in the farmlands, emigration, a pulverized small and medium property, and the persistence of the latifundia led to further precarious living conditions in Central and Eastern-Europe's rural regions. A lame and, at times, entirely off-the-mark industrialization process, absolutely unable to employ the agricultural work force surplus, heightened an already dire, critical situation. Added to this is the international recession between the two World Wars, which

mainly encumbered agricultural produce prices and exports.

In most of Europe's central and eastern countries, these economic factors will create a widespread atmosphere of social tension that will often break out into bloody riots as the well-known one of the Romanian farmers in the Spring of 1907 (Castellan 1994, 51 ff.). This situation of endemic rebelliousness, reinforced by sweeping historical events such as the Russian Revolution, summons the phantom of Central and Eastern-European societies' "bolshevization" among the great landowners. Even the more conservative classes see the stringent need to bring forth a land reform that will abate frictions, protests and conflicts through land redistribution. Therefore, it is no coincidence that major land reforms with a Liberal background were undertaken in the period between the two World Wars. The two main goals of the reform process seem to have been an "equitable" property distribution and agricultural "modernization" (see Milena Angelova, this volume). For these same reasons, some Western European watchers and experts would be pleased by projects tending towards deep socio-economic changes in the backward rural areas of the Old Continent's central-eastern areas (Ancel 1930; Mirkovitch 1934).

However, under the influence of increasing nationalisms, this attitude will change rapidly and the "ethnicization" of the land distribution will become the main characteristic of several land reforms in this region. Thus, land reforms will turn into legislative actions of a more political nature than a socio-economic one aimed at changing the ethnic aspect of historically mixed regions neighbouring disputed, changeable, uncertain and essentially unstable boundaries. From this geopolitical point of view, due to the ethnic homogenization and re-composition processes involved, land reforms are conceived ever more often as a major remedy to the "variable geometry" of national territories which has always ailed Europe's central and eastern States.



The Agrarian Reform in Yugoslavia between the two World Wars

The century-old Ottoman domination in Europe ended in 1913 after the second Balkan War. The "sick man on the Bosphorus" held only a small territory, namely present-day European Turkey. Serbia and Montenegro united after WWI in the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians, which, in turn, became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, took over most of the "freed" regions; i.e. northern Macedonia and Kosovo. However, the Ottoman legacy was laden with problems. In the first place, Serbia and Montenegro faced an archaic social and economic system, a consequence of the breakdown of the original imperial patrimonialism based on the "timar" institution. The sultan, as absolute ruler and sole owner of the land, entrusted military commanders with collecting tributes and recruiting soldiers. In exchange for these bureaucratic duties, the sultan allotted them non-hereditary lands termed "timar". The "timar" included the "ciftlik": lands and real estate that the "timarian" could exploit directly for his family needs. Between the 16th and the 18th century, while the centralized power was waning, the military commanders seized inalienable property that belonged to farmers and repeatedly appropriated lands of the "timar" on a hereditary basis. Therefore, the "ciftlik" areas were remarkably broadened although several remained quite small and would never become large landed estates. Furthermore, the "ciftlik" were privatized de facto becoming outright allodium lands. 19th century reforms, despite Koranic law, will give a legal foundation to this unsettled situation and the term "ciftlik" will become synonymous with private property. While striving to modernize and lead their countries closer to European standards, Serbia, Montenegro and later Yugoslavia encountered the problem of dismantling this semi-patrimonialist structure that was unanimously considered unjust



and utterly obsolete. Therefore, at the time, the most obvious solution to this problem was to promote a land reform (see Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli, this volume). This was also the authoritative opinion of eminent foreign experts, such as renowned French geographer Jacques Ancel, who knew the region well, having been in loco during WWI (Ancel 1930, 1). According to all these Occidental experts, researchers as well as travellers and diplomats, the „ciftlik“ was perceived, on the one hand, as the symbol of an execrable administration and low economic productivity, and, on the other hand, as the bulwark of an agrarian system based on semi-serfdom social relations that implied exorbitant taxes besides arbitrary and iniquitous services for the peasants (Schultze-Jena 1927, 50 ff.). Present-day researches have re-examined this institution reaching more differentiated conclusions (Adanir, 1979); in those days instead, the „ciftlik“ was perceived, figuratively speaking, as an insult to civilization. In light of this outlook, the land reform was launched in an area whose economic situation was deplorable, to say the least - northern Macedonia and Kosovo - not only taking into account the „ciftlik“, but also a fifty-year span of political instability marked by uprisings and wars. Therefore, these two regions were characterized by massive land abandonment and the utter insecurity of a territory overrun by bands of irregular troops halfway between a liberation warfare and plain banditry. Overall, however, the Yugoslav land reform required an elaborate series of measures pivoting upon colonization. In fact, by the end of the second Balkan War a conspicuous migratory trend ensued, more or less forced, mainly towards Turkey and, alternatively, Albania. The migration concerned „ciftlik“ owners of Turk or Albanian descent who were leaving the country expecting upcoming changes of the landed property régime. Around 1913-1914 autochthonous families of Slavic ancestry had already begun an unforeseen takeover of the deserted lands or were buying them at low prices (Roux,

1992: 191). The governments of Serbia and Montenegro immediately tried to check this tendency. A law concerning the peopling of the „freed“ regions, which provided for State management of all deserted lands plus all lands lacking a property title, was promulgated in Montenegro in February 1914. This law may be considered a prologue to the land reform itself, whose promulgation took an incredible amount of time - from 1919 to 1934 - because of several additions and amendments. These few data give proof to the significant efforts of the Yugoslav government to modernize agriculture in the two above-mentioned peripheral and economically backward regions.

Undoubtedly, the pillar of this complex reform action was the decree dated September 24, 1920 that regulated the „colonization“ of the new southern regions, in which „colonization“ meant the State's land grants to farmers. This project had two main aims:

- land distribution to the most poverty-stricken, autochthonous rural population through the subdivision of „ciftlik“;
- settlement of farmers from other areas of Yugoslavia on the deserted properties and former State or municipal property (Ancel 1930, 58 ff.).

The allocated plots were between 4 and 5 ha, congruent with family unit size. According to the promoters of the reform, this amount of land would be enough to guarantee an entire family's subsistence. However, most of the land in Macedonia and Kosovo was unproductive and soon the allocated plot extension proved to be inadequate (Ancel, 1930, 60). This already suggests how the first stages of the reform were indeed superficial, chaotic and irrational. Moreover, there were no plans for a subsequent establishment of infrastructures. In 1923, the Yugoslav government, coping with the operation's tangible shortcomings, undertook road, canal and rural dwelling construction, swampland drainage, fight against malaria, farmer's professional training, promotion of cooperatives (Roux, 1992: 192). To complete the reform process, further government de-

crees enacted between 1931 and 1934 concerning colonization, postulated the arrival of numerous farmers in Macedonia and Kosovo from other regions of the country (Roux 1992, 193).

At the time, several Western-European experts on rural problems were favourably impressed by the accomplishments reckoned as evidence of effective modernization. In his book about colonization in Macedonia, Jacques Ancel praised the Yugoslav land reform as regards to the wonders worked in Old Serbia and Kosovo (Ancel 1930, 2).

However, the Yugoslav land reform was not only a means to promote socio-economic development, as it appeared at the time to the enraptured foreign watchers. Nowadays, it is a well-known fact that an ethnic homogenization project linked to a clearly nationalistic policy, adopted especially by Serbia ever since the second half of the 18th century, lurked behind the “progressive” façade. In fact, in 1878 this country had been able to expel Albanians from the Upper Morava River basin, a territory assigned to Serbia by the Treaty of Berlin (Roux, 1992: 187). Later, Nikola Pasic (Serbian Prime Minister from 1909 to 1918) took up this notion of de-Albanizing and simultaneously re-Slavizing the south of future Yugoslavia. He estimated to attain this project within twenty years (Roux 1992, 187). This plan was resumed by the Yugoslav land reform after WWI and, as already mentioned, concerned only the southern regions of the new State, i.e. known to be a territory with vast areas of Albanian predominance. From a present-day standing, influenced by now by ideals of “multiculturalism”, such an undertaking might seem monstrous. At the time, however, projects of ethnic homogenization via agricultural colonizations, i.e. more or less forced migrations, were deemed wholly appropriate, if not expedient to increase the political stability of a region, as in the specific case of the Balkan area. The “normality” of such procedures, which we might define “post-imperialist”, has been skilfully highlighted by Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker

1996, 10 and 148-178). Corroborated by the approbation of the international community and firmly believing in the historical right due to their nation, as well as to the recent settlement of Albanians in that territory, Serbians and Montenegrins had no doubts concerning the legitimacy of changing the ethnic composition of these two regions. Albanians were seen as invaders or occupiers because for centuries they had collaborated with the Ottoman power often as high-ranking civil service officials. Moreover, Albanians were regarded as “Turks”, in the first place, because of their Islam faith and, secondly, because their national identity had only recently become apparent; at the turn of the century, Albanians had obtained only vague regional and international acknowledgements. The same religious faith plus a real similarity of some everyday behaviours, especially public ones, could actually give rise to fabrications that would be easily employed by nationalistic policies aimed at an ethnic composition shift in the southern regions. Therefore, Macedonia and Kosovo, the latter acknowledged as the “cradle of the Serbian nation”, had to be “freed” not only from the Ottoman domain, but also from the intolerable and unmanageable “foreign” – not Slav – population. The true logic behind the land reform is in this last sentence.

It was not so much the need to modernize southern Yugoslavia as the eagerness to strengthen the “national element” by re-Slavizing the two regions (Roux 1992, 191). Consequently, the “ciftlik” liquidation was not principally a program to abolish an unjust and entirely corrupt archaic semi-patrimonialism; it was a scheme to seize the land of a class of landowners who were regarded as “alien” because of their ethnic background. The predominance of an “ethnic logic” instead of a “social” one behind the elimination of “ciftlik” is confirmed mainly by the fact that most “ciftlik” in Macedonia and Kosovo were expropriated merely and tacitly because their owners were not chiefly of Slav origin, although their “ciftlik” were



below average size; therefore, quite unlike the redistributed large estates (Roux 1992, 194). As Ancel notes as well, just before the land reform, the “ciftlik” owners in southern Yugoslavia were not like the rich absentee “beg” who lived in Istanbul, yet collected a specific income in kind from their landed property (Ancel 1930, 60). In southern Yugoslavia there were average farmers mainly of Albanian descent whose land was tilled by servants (Ancel 1930, 60; Roux 1992, 194) and not a class of “Rentenkapitalisten” with a “parasitic” mentality (Bobek 1962). In fact, only 37 of the 6,973 “ciftlik” catalogued by the land reform administrators exceeded 500 ha, while 75% were below 50 ha and half of this percentage was not above 20 ha (Roux 1992, 194). Although this data indicates the presence of a rural middle class “in statu nascendi” – the ideal aim of several land reforms – “ciftlik” were declared State property without exception and, subsequently, allotted for free to Slav “stock” tenants leaving the former owners with a quota from 5 to 15 ha (Roux 1992, 194). The “ethnic” project of “(re)Slavization” of Albanian lands in the southern regions, chiefly in Kosovo, is even more unmistakable in the colonization policy. Agrarian colonization was a remarkable undertaking charged with symbolic consequences, particularly in the so-called “cradle of the Serbian nation”. The goal was to re-establish the supposed primordial Slavic nucleus through settlements of immigrants from other areas of Yugoslavia. More than 100,000 ha, over one fourth of Kosovo’s tillable land, was apportioned to 12,000 or up to 14,000 families, according to different sources (Roux 1992, 195). To evaluate the extent of the reform, a further amount of 60,000 ha apportioned to 14,000 local allottee families must also be taken into account.

In line with the prevailing “Yugoslavist” ideology of the time and propagated by renowned geographer Jovan Cvijić – confirmed believer of a historical ethno-national fusion amongst southern Slavs (Cvijić 1918) – the newcomers hailed from

various regions of the country. The settlers’ geographic origin shows that 76.4% – a vast majority – came from Montenegro and Serbia, 11% from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.2% from Vojvodina, while 4.4% arrived even from Croatia (Roux 1992, 196). Since authorities wished to avoid the immigrants’ dispersion, they were settled in specific colonization areas from which Albanians were banned. In fact, if the latter owned any land within these areas, they would be expropriated and then compensated either with low quality lands far away from towns or with inadequate indemnities (Roux 1992, 195). A veritable ethnic segregation strategy was forthcoming.

However, these were not the only discriminations connected with the agrarian colonization that Albanians from that area had to withstand. In Metohija (nowadays western Kosovo, near the present border with Albania) only 0.4 ha of tillable land per person were left to farmers of non-Slavic origin. Concurrently, agrarian courts of law would rarely uphold any appeals filed (Roux 1992, 195). This territorial ethnic appropriation struggle went amiss and the implicit nationalistic policy of the Yugoslavian land reform fell short. One of the main reasons for the fiasco in Kosovo was certainly the demographic issue due to the prolificacy of the rural class, especially those of Albanian descent. This phenomenon and the settlers’ arrival plus the low chances of internal or external emigration at the time brought about a case of rural overpopulation in the region. A national and international drop in produce prices, meaning lower incomes for farmers, made things even worse.

It is not surprising that in 1930 ca. interethnic relations worsened, giving rise to strong tensions between Slavs and Albanians, peaking in a violent atmosphere strewn with clashes and outrages (Roux 1992, 199). The political and intellectual “élites” saw this crescendo of interethnic clashes as proof of the political weakness of the land reform and the need for more drastic measures to fight back Albanian

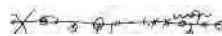
expansion in the “cradle of the Serbian nation”. At this time, more definite projects, which indeed correspond to present-day “cleansing” or “ethnic purification”, arose and multiplied for the “transfer of Albanians” (Grmek, Gjidara, and Šimac 1993). The strongest upholder of this new policy which should have strengthened the (re) Slavization of Kosovo, begun but not completed by the land reform, was certainly Vasa Čubrilović, an eminent representative of the Serbian intelligentsia, professor at the Literature Department of Belgrade University, besides being a cabinet member of several post-war Yugoslav governments (Grmek, Gjidara and Šimac 1993, 149 ff.). In his famous lecture “The expulsion of Albanians” held at Belgrade’s Serbian Cultural Circle on March 7, 1937, this author proved the relationship between the ethno-political failure of the land reform, especially as regards to colonization on the one hand, and the need to relocate Albanians (Gasparini 1999, 1 ff.). The closing statements of this text, which the “ethnic cleansing engineers” of present-day former Yugoslavia regard as “sacred”, is worth quoting verbatim:

“Compte tenu de tout ce qui vient d'être dit, ce n'est pas par hasard que, dans l'analyse de la colonisation du sud, nous partons de la conception selon laquelle le seul moyen efficace pour résoudre ce problème, c'est le transfert massif des Albanais. La colonisation graduelle n'a pas eu de succès chez nous, pas plus que dans les autres pays. Lorsque le pouvoir d'Etat désire intervenir, dans l'intérêt de son propre élément, dans la lutte pour la terre, il ne [...] peut réussir que s'il agit brutalement. Sinon, l'aborigène installé sur sa terre natale et qui [...] est acclimaté est toujours plus fort que le colon. Dans notre cas, il faut d'autant plus tenir compte que nous avons affaire à une race rude, bien implantée, résistante, et féconde, dont feu Cvijic disait qu'elle est la plus expansive dans les Balkans. De 1870 à 1914, l'Allemagne a dépensé des milliards de marks pour coloniser graduellement ses territoires de l'Est, en achetant des terres aux Polonais, mais la fécondité des mères polonaises

a eu dessus sur l'organisation et l'argent allemands.” (quoted from Grmek, Gjidara and Šimac 1993:184).¹

This drastic program, as similar ones by Serbian intellectuals and politicians, remained a dead letter due to the upcoming war which led to Yugoslavia’s “first dismemberment” in the Spring of 1941, while eastern Macedonia and most of Kosovo were annexed to “Great Albania” under Italian control. As was to be expected, the trend shifted since the assimilation and expulsion policy was aimed at Slavs now, especially against homesteaders who had settled from the 1920s onwards. Under Marshal Tito’s establishment of the “second Yugoslavia”, pre-war boundaries were reinstated, but the “Albanian issue” was only “set aside” up to the 1980s when strong interethnic tensions flared up again in Kosovo: the onset of the present tragedy. Over these past ten-fifteen years, the “transfer of Albanians” issue, devised between the two World Wars as an extension of the land reform, reoccurs peremptorily in the Balkans bearing hatred and death.

In conclusion, the Yugoslav land reform was surely not a prior instance of “ethnic cleansing”, but it certainly was a relevant factor of ethnic tension escalation in the southern regions, especially in Kosovo. Undoubtedly it can be interpreted as a primary “historical antecedent” to the conflicts of this millennium’s end consequent to Yugoslavia’s “second dismemberment”.



Comprehending Land Reform Experiences in Yugoslavia: Some Theoretical Remarks

The socio-anthropological analysis of land reform in Yugoslavia between the two World Wars shows how a law enacted to solve the “social question”, i.e., aimed at decreasing social disparities and promoting the modernization of rural economy, went on to become an important instrument at the service of the homogenization of eth-

1) “Taking into consideration all aspects, it is not far-fetched that analyzing southern colonization, we have reached the conclusion that the only effective way to solve this problem is a mass transfer of Albanians. Gradual colonization was not successful here as in other countries. When the State wants to intervene to safeguard its own interests, its own land, it can only do so by acting ruthlessly. If not, the aboriginal, settled and acclimatized in his native land, is always stronger than a colonizer. In our case, we must also bear in mind that we are dealing with a tough race, deeply rooted, hardy and prolific; as Cvijil notes, it is one of the most widespread in the Balkans. From 1870 to 1914, Germany spent billions of marks buying land from the Poles to gradually colonize its eastern territories, but the fertility of Polish mothers defeated German organization and capital.”

nically and culturally complex regions. Therefore, the scheme to transform historically multi-ethnic territories into mono-ethnic ones was integral to the entire land reform project. In South-Eastern Europe in particular, as the exemplary case of land reform in Yugoslavia between the two World Wars shows, the realization of these mono-ethnic territories was implemented through significant population movements, which, however, came short of reshaping the ethnic composition of the regions involved. (Roux 1992, 201). "Peasant studies" researchers have essentially disregarded these migratory waves aimed at changing the ethnic composition of specific regions in order to homogenize the national States. This is probably due to an approach focusing chiefly on the development process of rural economies and societies in extra-European countries regarded as backward and peripheral, African and Asian ones in particular (Bernstein and Brass 1996-1997).

It was Ernest Gellner who devised a Weberian ideal-type he styled "Ruritania" (Gellner 1983, 58 ff.), the name itself clearly pointing up the rural character of this fictional national entity. Gellner, therefore, wanted to highlight the key role of rurality as an aggregate of symbolic and political resources with which nations in Central and Eastern Europe having specific ethnic identities could be built. An analysis of what could be defined as Ruritanian ideology and its implementation in Yugoslavia shows that it is based on four strictly interconnected key notions: ethnic nation, rurality, territory and land. Therefore, the politically-constructed correspondence between ethnic nation and rurality, given also the associated correlation between ethnic nation and territory on the one hand and the likewise assumed one between rurality and land on the other, implies another politically-constructed equation of land with territory. This means that landed property not only represents an economic asset or a social resource, but is also and foremost regarded as a nationally-significant symbolic

capital. Accordingly, if we observe a strict correlation between ethnic nation and rurality in terms of political ideology and social practices, then we can almost certainly add that land, thus also the farm, village etc., is regarded as a sacred fragment of the national territory. The Yugoslavian land reform as implemented in the Kosovo between the two World Wars would thus appear to confirm Deema Kaneff's statement according to which during the period of the reorganization of the agricultural sector in post-socialist Bulgaria the land becomes national territory (Kaneff 2002, 180 ff.).

The Yugoslavian land reform was, thus, a means to further inflame conflicting nationalisms. In turn, this bolstered the socio-political circumstances that fostered the growth of antagonistic practices and ideologies based on processes of self- and hetero-ethnicization. Up to the land reform, these interethnic tensions had been sporadic and rather mild phenomena. Yet, viewing interethnic relations in rural Yugoslavia as idyllic would be misleading. Social life was typical of the "ethnic divided societies". Communities tended to ignore and accommodate each other rather than confront each other.

Together with the new ways to access the land – a crucial resource at the time – came an increasingly strained atmosphere laden with interethnic tension that escalated into reciprocal acts of violence, both physical and symbolic. Ultimately, the land reform, with its strategies of "inclusion" and "exclusion", to a great extent helped build or emphasize "ethnic differences" and boundaries between "we" and "they", clearly visible to this day as in the specific case of Kosovo. In these cases, land redistribution in accordance with "ethnic" criteria turned out to be an important "historical precedent" that, emerging from the deepest layers of collective memory, seeps into the current management of interethnic relations. Therefore, it is not surprising that a land reform such as the Yugoslavian one, which called for the redistribution of such a fundamental necessity as the land, kindled deep-seated "col-



lective traumas” due precisely to the way it was implemented. To this day, after several generations, these are “traumas” that in areas chiefly geared to agriculture continue to reinforce and perpetuate reciprocal feelings of mistrust, fear, uncertainty, hostility and anger. Studies on “potentials for conflict and disorder” from a historic-anthropological perspective wishing to overcome the instantaneous and mechanistic aspects of the structural and functional approach need to consider the “dramaturgical” analysis of the “flow of events”, i.e., the “conjunctural cycle” distributed along the “longue durée”. Therefore, what Marshall Sahlins defined as the “structure of the conjuncture” must be reconstructed; in other words, how specific historical events, apparently not very significant or indeed negligible, but in the end crucially relevant, engendered dramatic changes that to this day have repercussions on the collective representations of each community and on the social relations between individuals and groups (Sahlins 1981).

If we follow the suggestion put forth by Fernand Braudel and Marshall Sahlins to take into account “long-term cycles”, we also need to consider the role played by socialism in Yugoslavia. In terms of this country’s specific interpretation of socialism, which can be traced back to Tito, the state’s recognition of ethnic differences was rather inconsistent, as well as opportunistic. This “recognition policy” permanently and ambiguously played on the difference of statute

between “nations” and “nationalities”. Due to a purely formal federalism coupled with an intentionally inert structure that ultimately failed to satisfy any ethnic group, the pre-war problems and obsessions stemming not only, but also from the land reform were carried over, becoming worse, from pre-socialism to post-socialism. Socialism never truly broke away from the past, though viewing it as a mere “freezer” of history would be a serious mistake. “Freezing theories” are inherently flawed because they underplay the dynamic processes of a society while emphasizing its static nature. Yet, if we resort to these interpretations, then we need to use the freezer metaphor. It is common knowledge that these appliances generate cold thanks to heat produced dynamically. From a contemporary point of view, in order to “manage” ethnic diversity, socialism chose strategies that were static, thus inadequate, deeply painful and, at times, deliberately counterproductive. Pre-existent tensions, rifts and conflicts were thus heightened or, at best, postponed. Finally, an analysis based on the “longue durée” shows that the “structure of the conjuncture” permanently characterized by an actual persistence of interethnic tensions in a situation of apparent political discontinuity will help reconstruct and above all understand the “logic” behind the unexpected, yet predictable outbreak of ethnic disputes in the 1990s and the persisting frictions in what used to be Yugoslavia.

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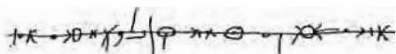
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The agrarian question: the agrarian movement and issues of land ownership in Greece, 1821-1923



Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli

Professor of Social History

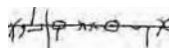
Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences of Athens

ABSTRACT

Since the foundation of the Greek state in 1830 arises an agrarian issue which until 1923 takes various forms and causes an agrarian movement. This is mainly due to the changing institutional and social framework when new lands are annexed. This article refers to the problem of "national lands", the lands that belonged to the Ottomans and were appropriated by the Greek state during the War of Independence (1821-1829) in order to be distributed to the peasants. Many uprisings took place between 1833-1852. The solution is found with the First Agrarian Reform in 1871. The article refers also to the problem of the feudal system which existed in the Ionian Islands as well as to the problem of *Tschiftliks* in Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia. The latter finds a solution with the Second Agrarian Reform in 1917. Another acute problem is also mentioned: the currant crisis, which appears in northwest Peloponnese at the turn of 19th century.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian Reform, National Lands, Uprisings, Feudal System, *Tschiftliks*, Currant Crisis.



Introduction

The terms "Greek agrarian question and agrarian movement", covering a period over a century from the beginning of the Greek state in 1830 until 1923, do not only depict the various successive phases of the same phenomenon, that is the agrarian problems, claims, movements or revolts. During this period, the agrarian question itself is being transformed. This is mainly due to the varying institutional and social frameworks in which the differing rural problems arise when new lands are annexed.

From the outset it can be said that the agrarian question in Greece, as it appears in different periods of time or social contexts, is related to either land ownership or the incorporation of peasants in the market.

Following the successful Greek Revolution against the Ottoman rule, 1821-1829 and especially after the election of Otto as

King of Greece in 1832 (see map), the dominant problem in agriculture is the question of 'national lands', i.e. the lands that the Ottomans had abandoned and were given to the Greek state because of the war. This problem was finally solved with the First Rural Reform in 1871 when these lands were being allocated to peasants and cultivators over a low price.

Another acute problem during this period was brought about by the annexation of the Ionian Islands in 1864 (see map), where, especially in Corfu, from the very beginning of Venetian rule, 1204-1797, an extremely feudalistic system was implemented - similar to that of feudal Europe - which, nevertheless, continued to exist during the British Protectorate (1815-1864). Despite the different nature of this question in relation to those of national lands, its settlement is part of the same policy that led to the distribution of national lands.

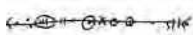
A new period starts for the agrarian

Map 1. Successive territory gains for Greece: 1832, Sterea Hellas, the Peloponnese, 1864 Ionian Islands, 1881 Thessaly, 1913 Crete / Macedonia / Epirus, 1920 Thrace, 1947 the Dodecanese



movement with the annexation of Thessaly and part of Epirus to Greece in 1881 (see map), where the dominating issue is the problem of *Tschiftliks* (large holdings) and the consequent problem of *koliyi* (landless sharecroppers) which is aggravated as time goes by due to the reaction of *koliyi* that turns into an uprising. During the same period, a number of other agrarian issues occur, originating after Macedonia and the remaining part of Epirus were liberated and annexed to Greece following the victorious Balkan wars in 1912-1913 and, finally, Thrace in 1920 (see map). The Second Agrarian Reform regulating the main agriculture problem in Greece, the problem of *Tschiftliks*, was effectuated in 1917.

Another question, which is related to the incorporation of the peasants in the market, was the currant crisis that tormented the Peloponnese in 1892-1910. Due to the non-absorption of large quantities of currant, a big crisis of currant burst out. Then, in the areas of the currant cultivation, mainly in Northwestern Peloponnese, dynamic mobilizations of the populations took place, demanding a state intervention policy.



Rural Uprisings

The nature of the Greek war of Independence against the Ottoman Empire (1821-1829), as it was formed under modernism, was right from its start national, bourgeois, liberal and democratic, having egalitarian-

ism as its central characteristic.

According to the National Assemblies throughout the Greek War of Independence and the "right to war", all former Turkish territories, state and privately owned, had been appropriated and declared Greek "national lands", and they had been transferred to the ownership of the Greek state, with a view to be distributed to Greeks as a reward for their participation in the war. (Petrooulos 1985: 272) This was later adopted by Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first Governor of Greece (1828-1831). In the meantime, in 1830 a law was passed granting a plot of one *stremma* (1 *stremma* = 1,000 square metres = 0.247 acres) to all Greeks so they could build a house with a garden and yard.

This creation of small land ownership was adopted by the three-year Regency of Otto (1833-1835), as well by King Otto's reign (1835-1862). The aim was to create a nation of small land owners¹ (Petropoulos 1985: 11) who would support the monarchy's power and at the same time would contribute in diminishing the powers of notables and chieftains. In any case, the Greek state was firm in its promise to distribute national lands to the peasants and did not succumb to pressure from the land owners who asked for national land auctions so that they themselves would purchase them.

The request for building a European and modern society in Greece had to deal with different reactions from many parts, reflecting actions and feelings against modernism and the West and favouring the old traditional ways that are considered to be threatened and endangered (Diamantouros 2002: XI).

In 1833-1852 the Greek kingdom suffers from successive uprisings which cannot be characterized as clearly agrarian, because they are not part of a definite agrarian movement with defined rural demands. Nevertheless, these uprisings could be seen as part of the early history of the Greek agrarian movement because they are carried out by peasants as well as being part of a pro-capitalistic stage of agrarian rebellion. On the other hand, what can be seen as

1) See the introduction of the Volume, page 11

very typical of the situation is that no revolt proclamation contains a claim for the burning issue of national land sharing.

In the newly formed kingdom of Greece, in 1832 (see Map1 above), the Regency tried to shape a modern institutional framework, but any kind of change in any department, mostly in religious matters, in economic measures or matters that had to do with the traditional ways of life would become a reason for uprising (Aroni-Tsichli 2009). We should also mention the policy of the Regency that aimed to fully reform the structure of the Greek Church by bringing into force three main regulations (Frazee 1987: 119-160; Petropoulos 1985: 214-227, 607-611; Dakin 1985: 111-112; Troianos and Dimakopoulou 1999:129-166): first, by declaring the Greek Church as autocephalous following its separation from the patriarchate of Constantinople; second, by transferring the church affairs under the state administration (Greece, Government Gazette 1833; Aroni-Tsichli, 2001a: 144-148) and third, closing down some of the monasteries (Glytsis, Loukos and Belia 1987-1998; Maurer 1976: 593). Only the few Catholic monasteries remained as they were (Laskaris 1924; Freeze 1987: 111-112, 195; Strong 1824: 365). In 1835 the Catholic population in Greece was 17.648 and in 1840 it was 25.000.

Apart from religion, important causes for uprisings were the new economic measures (Greece, Government Gazette 1833; General State Archives 1833; Glytsis, Loukos and Belia 1987-1998; Maurer 1976: 593). Any new measures or even a simple change in the collection of existent taxes was cause for rebellion. In the independent Greek State, even though some taxes had been abolished, the tax of the Tenth (Ashar) still existed, which was assumed to be one of the highest and all peasants had to pay (Dertilis 1991: 273-288 ; 1993: 43). In addition, a new taxation that was imposed on the cultivators of national lands as a usufruct tax and reached 15% ,unleashed a storm of protest (Petmezas 2003: 60-65). That happened because the peasants were not used to pay any

usufruct during the Ottoman rule.

The Regency undertook these measures so a strictly centralised system could be established, urged certain discontented groups to express their dissatisfaction, thus revealing a complex of controversies and rivalry (Aroni-Tsichli 2004a). What is mostly evident among the various actions of the opposition is the widespread conflict between the countryside and the capital. The areas with the highest autonomy during the Ottoman rule, Mani (Aroni-Tsichli 1994: 11-57) in the Peloponnese as well as the old areas of the Armatoli² of Sterea Hellas, were the areas where most uprisings took place during King Otto's reign.

An important reason for the strong dissatisfaction and protest against the politics of the Regency was the settlement of the military issue. The Regency decided to adopt the western military system and to create an army composed of non-Greek mercenaries that the Regency could fully control. These measures resulted in breaking the few remaining forces of the Greek regular army and especially the irregular forces of the War of Independence. Almost all these people became bandits (Kleftes).

Banditry and uprisings were the two main characteristics of the Greek country. Among all socio-political issues of the time, these two facts were the most obvious ways of social protest since they reflected a way out for the rural population in its attempt to survive in an insecure society. However, by the end of 1837 when the law for conscription was passed in order to create a national army and to abolish the mercenaries forces, it was considered to be the most anti-popular law of that period and caused many reactions for years to come, as well as the uprising of the islands of Hydra and Spetses in 1838 (Aroni-Tsichli 2009: 179-189).

The rebels proclaimed that their uprisings were due to the fact that the goals of the War of Independence in 1821 had never been achieved and their perception that the religion of their forefathers was in danger. The proclamations of the uprisings that

2) "Armatoloi" were armed groups of Greeks who were in the service of the Turks and guarded main cross-roads, country roads, mountain passages as well as persecuting the Kleftes.

took place in the ten-year period of King Otto's total monarchy (1833-1843), apart from protecting the Christian Orthodox religion, demanded also a constitution for the Greek people. Following the Constitution granted by King Otto, the main demand in the proclamation of uprisings from 1843 and henceforth was the proper application of the constitution and the provision for change of government. It was indeed impressive to notice that there was not a single demand concerning rural matters on behalf of the rebels. For example, the major request for distributing national lands to landless peasants is nowhere to be found, neither in the revolutionary proclamations, nor in the policy statements of political parties that undertook the country's administration through elections.

According to the Constitution of 1844, almost all Greeks over 25 would acquire the right to vote, provided they had a profession or proprietorship of any kind. Only paying guests or apprentices were excluded from this right³ (Aroni-Tsichli 1994). Later, with the Constitution of 1864, universal suffrage was established for the male population (Alivizatos 1981; Mavromoustakou 2003: 27-50).

However, the introduction of parliamentarianism (1844), a new political system, did not bring any significant improvements in the life of people. Although they had the right to vote, they did not have the ability to fully comprehend all constitutional matters. Even in the Memoirs of Makrygiannis, general in the Greek War of Independence, the constitution expresses a set of rather traditional values and the struggle to pursue and restore them and not just a charter of political and parliamentary rights (Theotokas 1985).

The successive uprisings during the period of King Otto's reign were misleading for the people since there was no actual difference in the leaders' intentions and goals. Matters became even more complicated as some leaders of the uprisings would, after some time, offer their support to the opposite front and fight against the group of an-

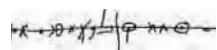
other uprising, which had exactly the same demands (Weber 1976: 248).

In conclusion, the rebels of the multiple uprisings wanted to preserve the 'good old times', traditional religious practices, traditional local autonomy and privileges, and to return to the traditional economic policies, which they more or less idealised. But their demands did not go any further.

Uprisings in Greece after the War of Independence did not affect social structures and institutions at all. The conflict did not lie among social groups but among groups of interest.. Moreover, the uprisings in Sterea Hellas (Roumeli) and the Peloponnese (Moriass) in 1848 were not ideologically related to the revolutionary movements of 1848 in the rest of Europe. (Aroni-Tsichli 2009: 317-326). Proclamations of the Greek rebels in 1848 did not include any social claims as, at the time, Greece was not dealing with the same social problems as the West, or as the European South-East, where the national problem is evident. (Sakellariou 1848: 322; Vournas 1952: 105,127; Sfyroeras 1976: 135; Skopetea 1987: 289; Brekis 1984: 192). On the other hand however, the uprisings of 1848 did not include any modern ideas, but were a mere repetition of the uprisings of 1847 or earlier than 1847 and a return to the past which, in their minds, was now idealised (Aroni-Tsichli 2001b: 15-28; Aroni-Tsichli 1999a).

Traditional uprisings (1833-1852) during the reign of King Otto (1833-1862) appear as revolutionary acts of the rural classes against poverty and the dire living conditions they had to face and for which the new state with its modern institutions were to blame. However, there were armed movements of the rural population that was at a clearly pre-industrial and pre-capitalist stage. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that these uprisings also expressed a kind of social protest to the fact that the establishment of the new national and centralised state failed to fulfil the unformulated expectations of the Greek people who had fought for their independence.

3) In the fields of politics and the right of vote, there is a differentiation in Greece regarding what is mentioned in the Introduction of the Volume.



First Agrarian Reform (1871)

It has already been mentioned that, during the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman rule, all Ottoman land properties fell under the Greek state which promised to distribute the land to the Greeks as their reward for fighting during the War (McGrew 1985; Petropoulos, 1985: 272; Karouzou 1989). The Greek State took care to consolidate its wish by including the distribution of these lands to their cultivators in the Constitution of 1844 (article 105), as well as in the Constitution of 1864 (article 102).

It is not possible to determine the expanse of national lands in the freed areas as there is no cadastral property registry (Damianakos 2002: 188-191). According to estimates however, national lands in the majority of the Peloponnese, amounted to more than half of the arable land (McGrew 1985: 237-242; Petmezas 2003: 25-26; Tsoukalas 1977: 71-74; Vergopoulos 1975: 106; Greece. Newspaper of the Parliament Debates, Period 3, Session B', v.A', p. 404). Out of a population of 700,000-800,000 inhabitants, Greek land owners were estimated to be 80,000-200,000 against 500,000 landless. It should also be noted that apart from these lands, large areas were owned by the Church (Aroni-Tsichli, 2004b; 2001a: 148).

The Greek State was firm in its promise to distribute national lands to the peasants and did not succumb to pressure from the land owners who asked for national land auctions so that they themselves would purchase them. Without settling for good the distribution issue, the state had made at times individual arrangements (1834, 1838, 1848) in order to satisfy specific groups such as Independence soldiers, widows and orphans, endowments to soldiers' daughters, settlement of refugees in unredeemed lands. More successful had been the 1835 endowment law that distributed national lands by auction to all the Greeks, military or politicians, that had taken part in the War of Independence, over a low price that was to be reimbursed in

36 instalments for the purchase of the lands (Greece, Government Gazette 1838).

This law, though, was not popular with the agrarian world because it did not grant land for free (Petropoulos 1985: 272-275; Greece, Government Gazette 1835). However, all these national land allocations refer to a limited area of 265,000 to 500,000 stremma.

Hence, during this first period, the Agrarian Question never became a social conflict between two opposing groups as, in this case, the land owner was the state itself. Therefore, the matter of rehabilitation of landless peasants was accepted by everyone (the Greek government, landless cultivators, small holders, medium and major landowners) as a fair claim on the peasants' part. The debate was constricted to how the distribution of the lands would take place, if they would be given for free or if the new owners would have to pay an amount of money to the state. It has to be pointed out that during that period the allocation of national land did not have such a social nature because the cultivators of these lands were the ones who controlled them. They could sell the land or give it to their children as inheritance. Moreover, the usufruct they had to pay for the national lands was much more to their advantage than being sharecroppers for a landowner.

The characteristic of land proprietorship in that period is the coexistence of all kinds of proprietorship (minor, medium, major). Within the lands that had been liberated after the Greek Revolution of 1821, there had been some Tschiftliks (5% of total). The peasants assumed that the national lands were enough to satisfy everybody, so they did not stake their claim to the expropriation of these few Tschiftliks which had not devolved to the Greek State as national lands because they had remained as compact properties during the signing of the London Protocol for the Independence of Greece (February 3rd 1830) and had not been occupied by rebellions. Even the Tschiftlik owners of these lands were content with the legal consolidation of their



rights as the Roman-German Law stated and which identified full proprietorship of the land having adverse consequences for the koliyi who were to lose their traditional rights as the Ottoman law and the Greek common law stated, thus becoming simple hired agrarian workers. These Tschiftlik owners had not tried to exercise their rights in practice against the koliyi until the annexation of Thessaly (1881).

Paradoxically, however, although during King Otto's reign numerous uprisings broke out, national land distribution was not a demand, nor was this or any other agrarian claim included in the political party proclamations.

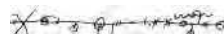
Finally, the national lands allocation to peasants was settled with a law fifty years after the beginning of the Greek War of Independence in 1871 (Franghiadis 1993; Karouzou 1990). It seems that by then the conditions were ripe for such an arrangement in Greece too, since other European states had also ventured allocating large land properties to landless peasants. Additionally, it can be observed that since the middle of the 19th century, major land owners had already started to lose interest in land occupation and turned to acquiring high positions in public administration and politics.

The first agrarian reform was implemented by the government of Alexandros Koumoundouros when Sotirios Sotiropoulos served as Minister of Finance; this reform dictated the division of 2,650,000 stremma of a total value of 90,000,000 drachmae to 357,217 allotments at a low price. After national lands were distributed, land ownership in Greece was characterized by the equal existence of small, medium and large rural ownership each of which covers approximately 1/3 of the total of arable lands (Franghiadis 1993; Vergopoulos 1975: 110; Tsoukalas 1977: 74; Mouzelis 1978: 35; Derilis 1977: 44). According to the 1879 census, the rural population in Greece amounts to 254,000 families, and therefore the Agrarian Reform in 1871 answered the agrarian question as almost every Greek peasant

owned a rural plot.

King Otto's aim to create a nation of small land owners who would support the power of the monarchy was realized⁴ The Greek peasants of that period were in their majority pro-royalists and voted for conservative parties (Legg 1969: 325-327).

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that this 1st Land Reform in Greece is not strongly based on the principle of social justice. This target belongs mainly to the 20th century. In Greece, although one of the basic targets of the Reform of 1871 was the reward of the Greeks for their participation in the liberation of the country, another important target as well was the institutional consolidation of the right in full proprietorship, whether this involved national lands or Tschiftliks etc, with the ulterior purpose of making the market function unhindered⁵.



The agrarian question of Corfu (1864-1868)

Immediately after the annexation of the Ionian Islands into the Greek state (1864), a crucial agrarian question arises especially in Corfu (Marcoras 1868; Moustoxidis 1848). The administrative structure of the Ionian Islands is completely different from that of the mainland, due to their constantly different foreign occupation.

Corfu fell under Venetian rule after the Fourth Crusade in 1204 (Bacchion 1956). So from the beginning of the Venetian rule (1204-1797) an extremely feudalistic system was implemented, similar to that of feudal Europe, which, nevertheless, continued to exist during the following years as well as during the British Protectorate: 1815-1864 (Anogiatis-Pelé and Prontzas 2002). The Venetians had allocated to the nobles plots of land, the so called feuds⁶.

This feudal system surviving through the centuries was still in place when the Ionian Islands were annexed to Greece, as an obsolete and fossilized medieval institution under which Corfiot peasants were particularly burdened (Asdrachas 1996: 21-37; As-

4) See to the Introduction of the Volume.

5) Therefore, we observe a differentiation regarding what mentioned in the Introduction of the Volume.

6) In bibliography the term "timars" in the Ionian Islands is used for western type feuds as well, even though the two systems, Feudal and Timariot are completely different.

dracha and Asdrachas 1985). According to this feud system, rich land owners - the feud holders - assigned the cultivation of their plots to peasants (Pantazopoulos 1962). The situation was even further complicated because of the variety of plot assignments. The peasant who could not afford to pay the rent for the plot turned to moneylenders who, in the end, made claims on the plot itself. Money lending had been a plague for Corfiot crofters even after the annexation of Corfu to Greece, when the feud system was abolished and laws favouring farmers were enacted. More often than not peasants, not being able to fulfil their obligations to their lenders, were dragged to courts and then imprisoned due to the old law on detention.

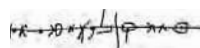
Another factor that was making things ever worse for peasants was the way that agricultural products, and especially olive oil, were handed to the land owners (Constantini 1996: 11-19). What was making this difficult to sort out was the fact that peasants were forced to pay tax on olive trees in oil and not olives. This is the reason why it was necessary to pre-estimate the amount produced. But estimators were appointed to the task by the land owners and they overestimated the future amount of olive oil to be given to their boss; as olives in Corfu were collected from the ground, it was long after the estimate had been made. It was, therefore, possible during this long period that olives were damaged and the crop was lower than the peasants' expectations. However, even in this case, peasants were forced to give the amount agreed upon at the time of the pre-estimate. This unfair system was catastrophic for many Corfiots who were indebted on the basis of an assumed income. If the peasant failed to give the pre-estimated amount of oil, he was detained. If the peasant was delaying his instalments of three consecutive years or was deemed to be neglecting farming the plot, then the land owner evicted him and the plot reverted to his ownership. This is the so-called "reversion".

As soon as the Ionian Islands were annexed to the mainland, this burning agrar-

ian question in Corfu was set on the table (Sideris 1934: 57-58). Besides, peasants were already demanding social justice. To this effect, fights were also given by the Corfiot agrarian deputies to liberate peasants from the medieval feudal oppressions, which caused a number of reactions on behalf of the parties involved. The strong arguments of the old regime as well as the fights of the supporters of the peasants are all evident in the opposing parliamentary discussions, as well as in the newspapers and in the pamphlets of the time (Aroni-Tsichli 2005a: 593-607; Progoulakis 2003; Greece Parliament 1968).

Despite reactions and the polemic raised in Corfu by the parties involved between 1864 and 1868, a series of laws was enacted that, with subsequent amendments, freed the inhabitants of the "countryside" from the obsolete medieval feudal system of the past and set the foundation for the small land ownership (Kouris 1868). However, peasants lived in squalor for a long after that as implementing legislation on agriculture required funds which were nowhere to be found due to the lack of credit institutions and agricultural banks.

Finally, once and for all a solution to the agrarian question in Corfu was brought about with the laws enacted by the pro-E. Venizelos administration in 1912-1914 which dictated that still existing "enduring weights" to the Domestic Administration of Corfu [Εγχώριον Διαχείρησιν Κερκύρας] were abolished without reward, and those towards private entities with reward paid by the Special Fund with resources from exported products, mainly the oil exports tax (Sideris 1934: 57-58). The last remaining "weights of the past" were abolished in 1925.



The Agrarian issue in Thessaly: the Problem of Tschiftliks The second Agrarian Reform in 1917

As has been the case of the Ionian Islands (1864), Thessaly and the area of Arta, that formed part of the Ottoman Empire, were

annexed to the Greek state in 1881 following diplomatic procedures which had started in the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Before Thessaly and the region of Arta in Epirus were annexed to Greece (1881), the fertile expanses of these areas had been governed by the Ottoman law (*tasarruf*), dictating that the right to own does not mean right to absolute ownership of the land (Ioannidou-Bitsiadou 1983). According to most probable estimations in 1881, among 658 villages only 198 were “free” and approximately 460 were *Tschiftliks* (Sivignon 1992: 117-175).

During the prime period of the Ottoman Empire the main feature of the Ottoman land ownership was the *timarion*. The *sipahi* to whom the *timarions* were allotted had no right of ownership over the land. There were army officers who were forced to march out with a precise number of soldiers after having been invited by the *Porte* and, instead of a wage, they took over the collection of the Tenth for life (Asdrachas 1999: 23-83; Tsopotos 1912: 47-48, 89-107; Pantazopoulos 1987; Vergopoulos 1975: 54-56). With the gradual decline of the *Timariot* system when the Ottoman expansionist wars came to an end and the dominant owners of *timarions* did not offer to the state any military services, the prior *timariotic* partition in Thessaly, Macedonia and other districts of Greece were substituted by *Tschiftliks*.

According to F. Braudel (1982: 67), *Tschiftliks* already appear for the first time in 17th century, marking an innovation. The process of creating *Tschiftliks* in the Hellenic region developed in the same way it generally happened in the Balkans. A characteristic case of creating *Tschiftliks* is the practice Ali Pasha of Ioannina used. By using terrorist methods, he forced many villages to become *Tschiftliks*, in order to be granted protection from the predatory raids and the vulgarities that he himself provoked. Thus, although he did not own even one of the *Tschiftliks*, he and his sons ended up having 263 *Tschiftliks* in the region of Thessaly, a number that tallies with 66% of the major properties of Thessaly.

Ali Pasha had also many *Tschiftliks* in other parts of Greece: 411 *Tschiftliks* in Epirus, 100 in Macedonia and 172 in Aetolia-Akarnania (Triantafyllidis 1906; Aravantinos 1895: 604-606 ; Giannopoulos 1972 ; Alivisatos 1932: 143; Petmezas 2000: 75; Newspaper of the Parliament Debates, 1883: 906, 915-916; Newspaper of the Parliament Debates, 1882: 202). After the extermination of Ali in 1822 by the *Porte*, these vast areas were confiscated and then given over to Ottoman functionaries.

The institution of *Tschiftliks* is assumed to have contributed to the decline of the classic Ottoman proprietorship status in favour of the *Tschiftlik* owners, thus leading to a transition of the proprietorship status, in a way, to a form of total proprietorship, yet without achieving the establishment of full and unlimited private landed property, during the period of the Ottoman Empire, that was completed with the foundation of independent Christian States in the Balkans (Vergopoulos 1975: 64; Karouzou 2006).

In *Tschiftliks*, the landowners held the property which was cultivated by the peasants according to the system of share farming on a part of the produce, while the state preserved its bare ownership. In essence, this was a kind of “continuous partnership” between the land owner and the peasant. In this relationship, the peasant, according to the Ottoman and custom laws, was linked for life to the land and bore a transferable hereditary right on it, as well as other traditional rights on his house, the forests, pastures, vineyards, fresh water sources on the *Tschiftliks*; this meant limiting the ownership of the land owner (Hatzigiannis 1910: 10-19; Karavidas 1982: 171-172, 111-122).

This situation changed completely in Thessaly and Arta in Epirus when, following the annexation land owners - according to the bare and complete ownership of the Roman-German law of the Greek State - perceived their relation to share peasants as a simple tenancy given that the land had been relieved of the tangible rights of *koliyi*.

Already before the annexation of part



of Epirus and Thessaly to Greece, Ottoman landowners, fearing a possible nationalisation, hastily sold their properties (Sfika-Theodosiou 1989). The new buyers of these Tschiftliks belonged mostly to the Greek Diaspora, including Andreas Syngros, Constantinos Zappas, George Zarifis, Christakis Zografos, Constantinos Karapanos, Pavlos Stefanovik-Skylitsis, Evangelos Baltatzis, who made their purchases in good prices making the best out of the sell out in the markets of Constantinople.

Charilaos Trikoupis, Prime Minister at the time, did not attempt an agrarian reform in Thessaly and the Arta area in Epirus. In fact, he tolerated the absolute Tschiftlik system anticipating that these purchasers would invest important funds in Greece, essential for modernizing and industrializing the country. In addition, he believed that these new Tschiftliks owners would venture modernizing agriculture in Thessaly; this was not the case, however, with only a few exceptions. Not only these landowners did not seek to modernize agriculture, but on the contrary, they contributed to an even greater shortage in grain production as they preferred to free from cultivation continuously larger expanses, making use of Trikoupis' favourable provisions (such as tariffs on grain imports, abolishment of the Thessaly customs office), and then rent them to traveller livestock peasants at high prices. Thus, grain cultivated areas decreased by 42,4% from 1885 to 1897 (Agriantoni 1986: 285; Sfika-Theodosiou 1989: 184-187).

The conflict between Tschiftliks owners and koliyi following the annexation was brought about because these landless share croppers. They refused to accept the aggravation of their situation as a result of the new demands of landowners according to the new ownership status which was alienating them from their traditional rights (Triantafyllidis 1974: 35; Hatzigiannis 1910: 18). That is, according to the law in force at the time in the Greek State, landowners had the bare ownership of the lands in their possession, whereas koliyi had lost all rights

on the land they farmed. Koliyi manifested their struggle in refusing to sign the yearly tenancy contracts imposed by the Tschiftliks owners. In refusing to pay additional tax and kicking out foremen or any other Tschiftliks representative and, in general, in their refusal to accept the new order originating from the new legislation - dictating bare ownership of the landowners on the lands that themselves had been farming for generations- more often than not led to their eviction from the lands following the expiry date. These fighting claims of the koliyi resulted in never ending quarrels and friction leading often to bloody conflicts, violence and arrests, given that state officials, the gendarmerie, the army, court decisions etc., represented the interests of the Tschiftliks owners (Aroni-Tsichli 2005b: 53-82). At this early stage, the agrarian issue, making its first steps in the area of Arta, was aggravated in dozens of rebellious other villages, mostly in the area of western Thessaly (Triantafyllidis 1974: 35; Pachis 1882: 37-43; Arseniou 1994: 34-35).

The Government under Th. Deliyannis attempted to solve the problem of Thessaly and in January 1896 submitted five draft laws to Parliament, suggesting for the first time the expropriation of 1/8 of arable lands from every Tschiftlik in Thessaly. In this way, that 20-25 stremma would be given to each landless share cropper along with the house they lived in, providing for the way of payment and other measures and aiming at the development of agriculture in Thessaly (Hatzigiannis 1910: 30-32; Sideris 1934: 73-74). However, Deliyannis did not manage to move to voting and referred the draft laws to a special committee whose findings bore no substantial result; the reason was the reaction of Tschiftliks owners on the one hand and the Greek-Turkish war in 1897 on the other. As Greece was defeated in this war, more hardship was in store for the people of Thessaly (Louvi 1998: 145-159).

Despite the peasants' continuous and strong resistance, from the annexation of Thessaly to the beginning of 20th century,

their claims had not been incorporated into a structured fighting framework and did not bear any kind of modernizing vision. It was mainly looking to the past in an attempt to restore an obsolete regime of share farming, as this had been applied under the Ottoman rule; this regime recognized the relation of the *koliyi* as a relationship of “continuous partnership” between the *Tschiftlik* owner and the share cropper. In this “partnership” croppers had many rights and their relationship with the land owner included not only obligation, but also tangible terms.

Despite the importance of the problem for more than three decades, an organized peasant movement failed to be born, as did some agrarian body or party. This is not a surprise, considering that many of the members of Parliament of the area were *Tschiftliks* owners themselves.

In the eve of 20th century many changes took place and the first round of the struggle by farmers in Thessaly, as described until now, was about to come to an end. At this point, the peasant movement was strengthened and changed its form and content to run alongside the labour movement of the time. Now, the peasant movement in Thessaly did not restrict itself to the reaction of peasants towards foremen, the gendarmerie, and so forth, but attempted to articulate new claims in new, modern forms of negotiation such as massive actions, protests, and rallies taking place in the large cities of Thessaly. These ended in addressing resolutions to the government, the parliament, and the King by forming associations and committees. In this phase, the centre of the struggle is transferred from the country side of western Thessaly to mostly the urban centres in eastern Thessaly (Aroni-Tsichli 2005b: 145-197).

The peasant movement was significantly pushed forward by the establishment of agrarian associations such as the Agrarian Association of Thessaly in Larissa in 1904, the Farming Union in Trikala in 1906, and culminating with the Farming Lowland Association in Karditsa in May 1909 under the presidency of Dimitrios Bousdras. It

was this way that the struggle claiming the expropriation of *Tschiftliks* was organised and welded together.

The presence and activity in Thessaly of Marinos Antypas was quite typical. He aimed at raising the living and education standards of the peasantry. He served for a few months only as a foreman in the estate of his uncle, G. Skiadaressis in 1906. Because of his struggles and his subsequent assassination, Antypas has been one of the two symbols of the peasant movement in Thessaly, the other symbol being the Kileler incident itself (Karanikolas 1988: 197-206).

In the first decade of the 20th century, intense farmer claims were targeting the land-owners as much as the state itself, since large expanses from the *Tschiftliks* of large land-owners such as Stefanovik, Zappas, Zarifis were now property of the State either as a bequest or following a takeover at a low price.

The need to solve the problem originated in a Law passed in 1907 by the government of G. Theotokis, allowing for the distribution of land to landless peasants. The reason for enacting this legislation was the wish to reinstate the refugees who had arrived to Greece from Eastern Rumelia, Bulgaria and Romania, following the persecution of Greeks with rural ownership. The law provided for voluntary and non-obligatory expropriation and was addressing refugees and not indigenous peasants. The *Tschiftliks* owners had not reacted at the Parliament's vote because the law was rather obscure and they didn't realize that indigenous landless persons were made eligible for the plot.

Other social strata offered mobile support to the struggle of peasants in Thessaly. The middle class / bourgeois and middle class intellectuals were on the side of peasantry of Thessaly, taking over - in general terms - the leadership of the peasantry movement. Bringing together intellectuals was further reinforced in 1908 when the Sociological Society was established by Alexandros Papanastasiou, Spyros Melas and Alexandros Delmouzos (Papanastasiou 1988; Damianakos 2002: 191-194). The La-



bour Centre in Volos also played a crucial role in developing the peasantry movement in Thessaly. The press also played a role as well, and particularly the newspaper *Pan-thessaliki* of Sofoklis Triantafyllidis.

The first large scale of programming and manifestations for the promotion of the peasant movement were launched in the large cities and towns in Thessaly between September and October 1909 and on 20th January 1910 (Karanikolas 1980: 197-206). A typical example, an emblem of the struggle of Thessaly, are the incidents that took place in the train station of Kileler and Tsoular, among protesters travelling to the rally in Larissa and soldiers who were on the train, which resulted in some dead protesters and many seriously wounded. More people were killed or wounded in incidents that took place in Larissa later. This is the "uprising" that came to be known as the Kileler incident that had actually happened in Larissa (6 March 1910), where unarmed peasants were defending themselves in street fights against army units. (Karanikolas 1980; Kordatos 1973: 152)

A landmark of the Thessaly issue was the discussion on the expropriation in the Second Revisionary Parliament in 1911. The issue of the expropriation conflict with the Constitution was solved by passing an amendment "on ownership" to article 17 of the 1864 Constitution and the approval of the term "public benefit" instead of the "public need" which was the valid term used at the time (Sideris 1934: 147-149).

During the 1910-1920 decade, the course for the settlement of the agrarian question was in process with several partial adjustments. Prior measures had been the creation of agrarian Chambers, the organisation of agrarian services and institutes, the promotion of partnership association with the fundamental law 602/1914, and the foundation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Public Estate in 1917 (Sideris 1934: 159-160).

Following the victorious end of the Balkan wars in 1912-1913, the territory and the population of Greece doubling within ten

months, the agrarian issue expanded to new lands, such as Macedonia. The remaining part of Epirus was also liberated and annexed to Greece following the victorious Balkan wars of 1912-1913. Finally, Thrace was annexed in 1920 (see map). However, in these areas, despite their large *Tschiftliks*, especially in Macedonia and Epirus, the agrarian issue was not of too much importance for two reasons: firstly, the Greek state managed to avoid repeating any unsuccessful actions of the past at the annexation of Thessaly and Arta, and secondly, a large number of land ownership questions had been settled by relevant legislation.

The second agrarian reform regulating the main agriculture problem in Greece, the problem of the *Tschiftliks*, was effectuated by the government of E. Venizelos in 1917 with the five legislative decrees of May 20th 1917 which came to force when Law 1072 was enacted on December 29th 1917 (Sideris 1934: 170; Greece, Government Gazette 1917).

Finally, the law on agriculture took its definitive form with the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922 when the Greek army was defeated by the army of Mustafa Kemal in Asia Minor. Population exchanges followed between the two countries: Orthodox Greeks and Muslim Turks. So, under the pressure of 1,069,957 refugees arriving in Greece, half of whom were farmers, finding a solution to the problem was expedited.

The "Revolution of 1922" party, with Minister of Agriculture G. Sideris, proceeded with the agrarian reform by enacting a Legislative Decree "on the reinstitution of landless peasants" on February 15th 1923. The Legislative Decree of the Revolutionary Government of N. Plastiras, a landmark in the agrarian policy of the Greek state, instituted the expropriation of private lands and the grant of public, municipal and communal plots for the agrarian indemnification of share croppers and refugees (Sideris 1934: 176-181; Alivisatos 1932).

The 1917 agrarian reform in Greece was the most important in depth, in relation to the rest countries in Europe. In addition,

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among the countries of Eastern Europe where agrarian reforms took place, Greece came in second as far as the allocated surface of land to farmers was concerned (Vergopoulos 1975: 178-179). Consequently, the rural policy of the Greek State regarding land ownership was placed among the most radical ones of its time. The rapid rise of the middle class, which was directly connected to the industry, as well as the development of the impersonal capitalistic system and the increasing state interventionism, had contributed greatly to the formation and materialization of this radical rural policy of the Greek State.

Therefore, the formation of a great number of minor domestic exploitations that arose from the agrarian reform did not hinder the penetration of capitalism. On the contrary, the Greek domestic agriculture optimally integrated in the capitalistic system through the mechanisms of the market.



The crisis of the curren⁷ in Greece (1892-1910)

The economic structure of Northwestern Peloponnese during 19th century is associated with the cultivation and trading of the curren (Kalafatis 1990: 212-218; Panagiotopoulos 1980; Sakellaropoulos 1991: 89-92; Patronis 1993a; Patronis 1992). Due to the continuously increasing demand of curren abroad, in the mid-19th century Greece had become a quasi mono-exporting country (Franghiadis 1990). The expansion of the curren cultivations spurred after the unexpected opening of the French market during the 1870s, attributed to the destruction of the French vineyards from the grape-disease phylloxera. Moreover, France absorbed lower quality curren as raw material for mass consumption wine, namely raisin wine (Augé-Laribé 1907: 21-95; Garrier 1973; Pech 1975; Pizaniias 1988: 71-80; Patronis 1993b). On the contrary, all the other countries consumed curren as a dried fruit. Especially in England, a per-

manent and steady customer, they absorbed high-quality curren, since they used it for making meals and sweets, especially the traditional English pudding, widely spread to all social ranks.

The prosperity since mid-19th century had benefited all the categories of peasants as well as the townsmen in the areas of Northwestern Peloponnese, who were almost exclusively occupied with curren cultivation and curren commerce. Therefore, the curren crisis at the end of 19th century that was brought about by the overproduction and non-corresponding absorption of the product when the French market closed, led to a huge economic and social crisis. The fall in the prices of the curren and of the revenues from the exploitation of land that followed, neither led to an exclusively capitalistic agriculture, nor did it result in the creation of a strong agrarian party, as it happened in other countries (Mouzelis 1978: 204; Dertilis 1977: 129; Liakos 1986: 114-115)⁸. A decisive stage, that directly concerns the current study, is the protective tariff list in the import of curren that the French Minister of Agriculture, Jules Méline, introduced with a law in January 1892 (Barral 1968: 85-87; Agriantoni 1986: 275-276).

Although the proportion of the curren cultivators that turned to emigration or urban pull during that period was substantial, the countryside was not yet devastated. The governments frequently orientated their policy to this direction and the "social issue" commenced to be laid on the table. However, at the same time, the people of the countryside started to constitute a factor that we cannot overlook. In Thessaly, as well as in Northwestern Peloponnese, the peasants affirm strongly their presence, in connection with the burning issues that preoccupy them, and not exclusively for food shortage or a temporary crisis.

In Peloponnese, rural mobilizations took place in an area - one of the more incorporated ones in the capitalistic economy - while the agricultural emancipation has preceded enough to claims of its direct in-

7) Curren vineyard or Corinthian curren is a Greek variety and its fruit (stafilai) give after drying a pre-eminently known Greek product called Corinthian curren or black curren which is mainly consumed as a dried fruit or used for the preparation of food and pastry like for example the famous English pudding.

8) Moreover, at least for the 19th century, the "ideological and political inactivity of the agricultural class" has been particularly stressed.

terest (Aroni-Tsichli 1999b: 108-111, 152-184, Aroni-Tsichli 2006). Through the currant crisis that started in the early 1890s, we witness the transformation of the rural class and its organization under a collective action. Now, except for the traditional methods of rural protest, the currant cultivators protested and fought for their demands using modern negotiation tactics, carrying on a joint fight with the other social classes. P. Barral (1968) considers such movements to be of 'agriculturist type', meaning that there is an agrarian population, which, despite all its diversifications, is opposed to an urban industrialized world; P. Gratton (1972: 9-12) denies the existence of such a society depending on interests. However, he notes that in an economic crisis, small holders and agrarian workers may temporarily side themselves with the big bosses, like for example in 1907 in Languedoc-Roussillon. Commercial and land associations, as well as committees for the organization of demonstrations are created, mobilizations and demonstrations are organized, memos and resolutions in which several demands are stated are sent to the King, the Parliament and the Government. (Gratton 1971: 188-190).

From September 1893, an enormous wave of dynamic demonstrations and mobilizations broke out. However, Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupis refused the governmental intervention for the settlement of the currant exports. Finally, in the beginning of January 1895, Trikoupis submitted his resignation and, a little later, failing to be elected in the next general election, left the political scene of Greece for good.

The vital demand that was finally raised was the withholding (*parakratima/ παρακράτημα*) (Newspaper of the Parliament Debates, Period 14, Session A, Meetings No. 43). Through the withholding, a proportion of the currant production excess would be deducted and, under the direct management of the state, it would be transferred exclusively and solely to the domestic industry, aiming at the best possible counterbalance of offer and supply. This demand

did not derive from a specific class, nor did it reflect - as the generally held view is - the interest of individual social groups (for instance, of the currant traders).

The demand for withholding was raised by areas that produced massive quantities of lower-quality currant. These areas constituted the vast majority of the currant production places. On the contrary, the parties that produced fewer quantities, but of fine quality of currant, were against the withholding. This dispute had reached such large extent, that the Press of the time named it a "new Peloponnese war" (Newspaper of the Parliament Debates. Period 14, Session A. Meeting no 38).

Therefore, under the mass pressure from the majority of the currant production areas, the Prime Minister Theodoros Deligiannis passed a new law in Parliament, in July 1895. The withholding was imposed, amounting to 15% in species (Newspaper of the Parliament Debates. Period 14, Session A, Meeting no 46-47). This law constituted the first form of implementation of a currant policy on the part of the state, yet without being able to definitely solve the currant problem (Eftaxias 1898: 15).

In 1899 Prime Minister G. Theotokis introduced in the Parliament a new draft law, which led to the establishment of the Currant Bank in July of 1899 (Sideris 1934). The shareholders of the Bank - whose term was set to twenty years - were all the currant planters who contributed currant fruit through the tax in species or the exporting duty.

Great turmoil was caused and many mobilizations took place in the currant production areas of the Peloponnese in 1903. These upheavals were due to the proposal of an English fund holders' company for the conclusion of a Currant Monopoly Agreement, which had to pass in Greek Parliament. This time, people in all the currant production areas sided themselves over the materialization of this proposal, and pressed the government with demonstrations, resolutions and great mobilizations to adopt this solu-

tion of the currant problem.

However, the distillery industrialists had ranged themselves against the Currant Monopoly Agreement, as their interests had been injured with the annulment of withholding. Furthermore, several merchants, grocers and currant recipients in London were also against the Monopoly. The pressures of the latter to their government, as well as the opinion of the Foreign Powers, particularly England, resulted in a stance against the Monopoly. Considering that the Monopoly Agreement was contrary to the terms of the already existing Commercial Agreement of 1890 between Greece and England, as well as to the terms of other Commercial Treaties between Greece and other Powers, led the Monopoly Agreement to a dead end and finally in its voting down in the Greek Parliament. An immediate consequence of the Monopoly cancellation in June 1903 was the heightening of the mobilizations and commotions in the currant production areas, resulting in the governments' fall one after the other (Aroni-Tsichli 1999b: 249-293; Kalafatis 1990: 1112).

The settlement of the currant issue was achieved with the signing of an Agreement between the Greek State, the Currant Bank and the Bank of Athens. This was ratified by Parliament in July 1905 on the basis of the Agreement, and an Anonymous Society was established under the name of the "Privileged Company for the Production and Trading of the Currant" or "Unified" [Eniaia/Eviaia] (Greece. Newspaper of the Debates in the Parliament 1905)⁹. With the establishment of the Privileged Company, the Currant Bank was abolished. The Privileged Company did not belong to the currant producers, but it was a private, profitable enterprise (Agriantoni 1986: 227; Sideris 1934: 86-87).

With the establishment of the Privileged Company, a new period began for the history of the currant issue. This Company was dissolved in 1924, since meanwhile new conflicts had arisen between the aforementioned company and the currant producers

and, thus, the Self-Governed Currant Organization (ASO) was established (ΑΣΟ) (Sideris 1934: 227-243).

However, after 1905, the old vigor of the currant issue began to fade due to many reasons, such as the emigration of many currant growers to America or to major cities in Greece. Another reason was the differentiation in the types of cultivation: tobacco and the production of grapes that could be used in winery started to replace the currant in 1910. The extirpation of currant grapevines was done with a payment of an indemnification to their growers (Evelpides 1956: 123; Pizanias 1988: 99).

Nevertheless, the fact that contributed to a large extent in the reduction of the great tension of the currant issue was the so-called "currant reformation" in 1905 by the government of Demitrios Rallis. According to the Agreement, by which the Privileged Company was established, the prosecutions of the currant producers for their old debts towards the Currant Bank stopped, and the terms on the basis of which the Privileged Company would make the settlement of their relations with those old debtors would be defined.

In a way, these enactments favored the entry of agriculture in a modern, urban society and everyone accepted them. Furthermore, through several organizations - agricultural, land, commercial associations - as well as through several mobilizations-demonstrations, manifestations, resolutions and other protests - the foundations of a corporation activity were laid (Kalafatis 1990: 1112). However, the study of the main laws that were passed during the currant crisis reveals the indecision of the state to proceed to a bold and efficient initiative.

As far as the currant population is concerned, we notice that the agrarian movement during the currant crisis is a movement that unifies the classes against the unfavorable economic conditions. The agrarian movement in Northwestern Peloponnese (1893 - 1910) constitutes a great agrarian protest, a "global rebellion" of the area (Aroni-Tsichli 1999b; 332-343). Regard-

9) Analysis and critique on the currant Agreement of «Ενviaia» see France. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, (AMAE) Nouvelle Serie, Grèce (NS/GR), Vol. 1,2,5, 51, and in the AMAE, Correspondance Politique, Grèce (CP/GR), Vol.130, 131, 132, 133,134, 135, 136 and Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale (CCC) Patras, Vol. 6,7 and Great Britain. Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London, (F. O.), 286, Vol. 428,431, 437, 457, 458, 463,468, 470, 478, 479, 481, 483, 485, 486, 493.

ing the political and social messages, this fight was characterized by its conservative content. The political trend that prevailed in the agrarian movement during the currant crisis was directed by the urban class. Therefore, the initiatives did not derive from the agrarian class. They were directed by major proprietors, currant merchants, political parties' agents or personalities of the area, doctors, lawyers etc. Consequently, the fight of the currant growers did not take place within the bounds of a fight of the classes, as it started to happen in labor environments of the time, mainly because there were many categories of peasants. So, at this phase, the fight of the classes did not touch the currant production provinces.

The revolution of the currant production areas of Northwestern Peloponnese were the instinctive outburst of populations that suddenly found themselves in a kind of economic limbo. Exhausted by the blows of an unfavorable coincidence which they were not prepared to face and to which, they desperately tried to resist and threatened by an imminent destruction, the people involved in the growing and trading of currant, were activated proclaiming a local and universal "rebellion of despair". The big crisis of the currant growing affected the entire population of the area. Moreover, in the economic and social history of agriculture, "the Mediterranean vineyard was the first one to be harmed" (Bardissa 1976: 33; Sagnes 1978: 3-30).

In conclusion, the movement of the currant production provinces of the Peloponnese during currant crisis can be characterized as an apolitical movement. A movement of rebellion against the economic destruction and sordid poverty, the agrarian movement of the years of the big currant crisis left deep scars in the collective local psychology. There was a protest of a population that tried to maintain not only their living standards, but also a way of living according to the vineyard ways and customs, the vineyard "culture". Finally, it was the movement of a unanimous local defense that was fed with the power of a "Mediterranean"

feeling for the defense of the main Mediterranean product, the grapevine, against the increasing economic crisis. In addition, we can consider the currant crisis as a first symptom of the negative consequences of the integration of agriculture in the international capitalistic market.

✂ RANOKH

Conclusion

Following the Independence of Greece till the distribution of national lands (1871), the dominating agrarian issue was the problem of the distribution of national lands to peasants. Paradoxically, however, although during King Otto's reign numerous uprisings broke out (1833-1852), national land distribution was not a demand, nor was this or any other agrarian claim included in the political party proclamations. Those successive uprisings cannot be characterized as clearly agrarian ones because they were not part of a definite agrarian movement with defined rural demands. Nevertheless, these uprisings could be seen as part of the early history of the Greek agrarian movement because they were carried out by peasants and also because they were part of a pro-capitalist stage of rural rebellion.

Immediately after the annexation of the Ionian Islands to the Greek state (1864), a crucial agrarian question arose, especially in Corfu, where a feudalistic system similar to that of feudal Europe continued to exist. The medieval feudal system was abolished with a series of laws between 1864 and 1868.

Both the allotment of national lands in 1871 and the settlement of the agrarian question in Corfu were animated by the same prescriptive rules.

In both Peloponnese and Thessaly, where acute agrarian movements appeared at the turning of the 20th century, the land proprietorship status, the crops, landed relations and working and living conditions of the residents in general were completely different.

In southern Greece and especially Peloponnese, small and middle domestic hold-



ings had been established as the dominant form of proprietorship which expanded in 1871 with the allotment of national lands and very soon affiliated to the merchandized cultivation of the currant. In these regions the agrarian question did not exist. Only during the currant crisis at the end of the 19th century did agrarian mobilizations appear in northwest Peloponnese that aimed at state intervention for the settlement of the problem arising from the great surplus of undisposed currant. Still, the confrontation of this crisis did not divide the social body. On the contrary, all social groups jointly confronted a crisis due to a juncture that had arisen from the international market and not from landed relations.

On the other hand, in Thessaly, where grain was cultivated, major land ownership with *Tschiftliks* and *koliyi* (dependent peasants) was prevalent. With the annexation of Thessaly and Arta 1881, a burning agrarian question appears for the first time in the Hellenic area with the aggravated juxtaposition between two social groups: *Tschiftlik* landowners, (in whom the state itself was included in some cases) on one side and *koliyi*, or small land cultivators, on the other side, both claiming the same lands. So, in that case, a sheer social agrarian movement emerged. The same problem was confronted by the new regions of Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace that united with Greece after the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. The *Tschiftlik* problem was solved with the radical agrarian reform that commenced in 1917 and was completed in 1923. Yet, it could also be added that the agrarian struggle, emerging in these northern areas of Greece, also expresses the reaction of the traditional agrarian world to a broader market or, in other words, the vibrations that the embodiment of peasants caused to such a market.

It must be pointed out that in Greece the two major reforms (1871 and 1917-1923) that resolved the question of national lands and the *Tschiftlik* question respectively were basically imposed from high quarters. The Greek peasants did not manage

to organize themselves autonomously into a powerful agrarian party, as it happened in other Balkan countries during interwar, when Bulgaria, for example, had the most powerful agrarian party in the Balkans. In Greece, discontent and the reactions of the rural strata actually hemmed in within the limits of the bourgeois conflict of the political parties. The Greek Agrarian Party had just been founded in 1922 and, as far as the number of its members is concerned or the political influence it exerted, it composed a petty force in the Greek political life.

In consequence, it is interesting to note that the Greek peasants did not pursue the conquest of immediate political authority for many decades. As for the differentiation between North and South, it is noted that in southern regions, the so-called "Old Greece", the peasants were in their majority pro-royalists, at least during the 19th century, and voted for conservative parties. On the contrary, peasants in northern Greece were always radical in their political views, in relation to those of "Old Greece" and voted for progressive parties.

In conclusion, it can be said that the three agrarian questions of the 19th century, that is to say, the question of national lands, the question of early uprisings and the agrarian question of Corfu, were related to the transition of the agrarian world and agriculture from a pre-industrial and pro-capitalistic framework to a liberal nation-state framework that released land from "feudal" or other burdens and placed it in the merchandized circuit, thus making it merchandise.

The question of the currant and *Tschiftliks*, that characterized the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, was related to the embodiment of Greek agriculture in the market and the problems that arose from this embodiment.

Consequently, the 1st Agrarian Reform of 1871 did not have so much a social feature as an institutional one: it remitted total individual proprietorship from legal ambiguities (state ownership, sharecroppers' occupation, etc.), making it so that it could be



placed as merchandise in the market.

The 2nd Agrarian Reform in 1917, though, had a more social feature as it allocated major farms to landless cultivators and *koliyi* for the settlement of the social

question. However, the social feature of this reform did not prevent the full embodiment of the peasants in the market, but, instead, it accelerated it, thus accelerating their subjection to the commercial and banking capital.

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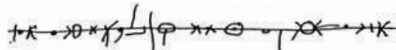
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The Fall and Rise of the State in Rural Romania and Hungary



Andrew Cartwright

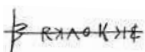
Research Fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies at the Central European University in Hungary

ABSTRACT

This article argues that whilst demographic fluctuations and land privatisation raised concerns that the state had little influence over rural affairs in Central and Eastern Europe, recently, there have been signs of a more assertive and interventionist state. Focusing on policies that address the realities of an aging farming and rural population, this paper argues that the return of the state recognizes that land no longer offers the same degree of security and that the transformation into a mixed and prosperous rural sector would require more direct action than suggested by the EU policy.

KEYWORDS

Post-socialist states; agrarian policy; rural populations; demographic changes; state intervention



Introduction

Understanding the relationship between the post-socialist state and the rural sector in Central and Eastern Europe has attracted the attention of a fair number of scholars. Political scientists have questioned the trajectory of new ruling coalitions that were partly based on revivals of historic peasant parties; economists speculated as to the productive potential of the newly privatized farm sector and anthropologists and sociologists focused on the changing demographic profile of the countryside and whether this meant the return or the continuing demise of the peasantry. In other words, there has been a renewed concern with the political, economic and social dimensions of the contemporary agrarian question.

As the introduction to this volume shows, some of the questions about state policy, the make-up of the rural population and the dominant forms of agricultural production are by no means new or original. That being said, certain features of the current agrarian question are distinct, at least

in terms of form. Whereas political economy stressed the continuities and change in the new constellations of power, sociologists and anthropologists highlighted how the central state was profoundly weakened by the transition (Hann 2006). For some, the principal metaphor of the rural transition especially was state withdrawal, whether in terms of its willingness to regulate prices and production, controlling freedom of movement or providing public services. At the same time, intense competition from West-European producers and detailed trade and production regulation from the European Union created a new and, sometimes, baffling environment for discussion of old agrarian and rural questions.

Arguably, the rural areas have been especially amenable for revealing the ambivalent nature and consequences of state withdrawal; whilst neo-liberal governments allowed or encouraged the private sector, they showed scant support for traditional rural employers and an almost cynical tolerance to the collapse of rural public services and the huge increase in rural poverty. Some commentators wondered how long rural areas could play a so-called buffer

role that relieved pressure on urban areas, at the same time as urban-rural migration was hastening the rise of the rural ghetto and the dramatic, albeit unevenly spread, exodus of young people from the countryside. As we shall see, one of the particular battle lines in this contest was the provision of farm subsidies and social security in the rural areas. Throughout CEE, the strict boundaries between the two became even more blurred and contested than in other parts of the continent. If agricultural land was to be returned to mass ownership, then surely this could re-establish rural livelihoods on the basis of private land ownership, self-provisioning, and, in time, semi-subsistence production. In one scenario, this could lead to the creation of that frequent totem of agrarian politics, the family-based commercial farm, with the attendant question of how far this transition would require active state support and, if so, what form exactly. On the other hand, the distribution of land to almost one in four of the Romanian population could be a major buttress that could place social welfare policy on an explicitly peasant footing; the restoration of private land becoming the principal means whereby rural land owners (and their urban-based kin) could take care of themselves.

Not everyone agreed that neo-liberal agrarian policies were the byproduct of a weaker, nearly absent rural state. In both Hungary and Romania, which will be the main two countries in focus in this paper, the early 1990s witnessed a substantial decentralizing of powers to local "self-governing" institutions. Villages assumed responsibilities that had long been held by more distant authorities, including revenue raising powers, albeit on a limited scale. Later in the decade, co-operation between small settlements was encouraged so that scarce resources would go further and there were plenty of examples of initiatives to jointly manage rural schools, clinics and other public services. The image of wholesale state marginalization was perhaps an exaggera-

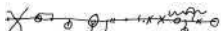
tion. Not only did both states retain significant agricultural and forest holdings, they continued to shape the market for agricultural products, particularly when it came to the price of staples like bread and the supply of inputs.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the state and the emerging private sector, notwithstanding its position in the wider post-socialist reforms, remained one of the more inscrutable of post-socialist puzzles. Was mass land ownership a long-term cushioning strategy that could allow for a much more gradual and presumably less disruptive approach to development and modernization? On the other hand, was it an anachronism that threatened accession to the European Union on the grounds that no member state would agree to quadruple the Common Agricultural Policy budget to accommodate all these new "farmers"? What exactly was the new rural population? Was it shrinking or growing? Were the urban poor relocating to the countryside on a temporary or permanent basis? Were they settling down or just catching their breath? And what of the later waves of out-migration and their returns of remittances? What would such income mean in the countryside – land accumulation, property renovation or smooth income fluctuations in the absence of meaningful rural pensions?

The contemporary agrarian question can be examined from many different perspectives. Here I combine traditional concerns such as land tenure, with more questions reflecting the shifting demography of the rural areas, such as the function of social welfare policy and the importance of public services. Whilst not discounting the thesis of state withdrawal, there is also an argument that state intervention in both Hungary and Romania is on the rise. Whether as a bigger land owner, in the land market or assuming greater responsibilities from local authorities, there is a more assertive state compared to earlier post-socialist years. If this is so, then what explains this return? Is it a realization that the EU has

only a limited interest and capacity to engage in large scale and complicated agrarian questions? Or does it reflect changes in the international economy and increased preferences for land and commodity-based investments?

The first section examines demographic changes in both countries and the implications for agricultural and rural development. The second section looks at the advantages and disadvantages of owning farm land, including a case study of land policy in respect of the rural elderly. The third section examines relations between the state and the rural population, through the changing provision of rural services, while the final section relates these actions to the original idea of the withdrawal and subsequent return of the state.



The demographic context

In many parts of Europe, overall population levels are bound to shrink, coupled with a significant aging of the population. By 2025, the median age in Slovenia will be 47 and 20 per cent of Bulgarians will be over 65 years old (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007). Debates on population aging encompass their economic implications, consequences for political participation (Goerres 2009), for inter-generational relations (Czekanowski 2011), and the organisation of education systems, to name but a few (Chawla, Betcherman, and Banerji 2007).

In many parts of Europe, rural settlements face a very uncertain future, particularly where the further reduction of public services may accelerate out-migration and weaken the attraction of the countryside. Whether or not the quality of public services can halt or even reverse negative demographic trends is questionable — a recent report on policy alternatives for regions facing demographic pressures, for example, was at a loss to what to recommend to do in Sachsen Anhalt, Germany: “In a nutshell, it appears that a weak reproductive poten-

tial, ageing and depopulation are the biggest challenges for the case study regions. The relatively high birth rates in the Scandinavian regions and the comparatively “young” age structure of the Hungarian regions’ population attenuate these problems somewhat. For Sachsen-Anhalt, on the other hand, it seems that the gathering demographic clouds have no silver lining” (ESPON 2013, 59).

Strong rural–urban connections have long been a distinct feature of the CEE region and have perhaps been an underutilised resource when contemplating future settlement needs. As Table 1 below shows, the rural populations remain a significant portion of the overall population.

Table 1: Urban populations for Hungary, Romania, Serbia and selected countries: 1970–2020

| Country | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2020* |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Denmark | 79.1 | 83.7 | 84.8 | 85.1 | 86.8 | 88.1 |
| France | 71.1 | 73.3 | 74.1 | 76.9 | 85.2 | 89.6 |
| Hungary | 60.1 | 64.2 | 65.8 | 64.6 | 69.0 | 73.4 |
| Ireland | 51.7 | 55.3 | 56.9 | 59.1 | 61.9 | 65.1 |
| Romania | 40.3 | 46.1 | 53.2 | 53.0 | 52.8 | 53.5 |
| Serbia | 39.7 | 46.1 | 50.4 | 53.0 | 56.0 | 59.6 |

* Predicted figures based on UN DESA (2012).

However, unlike in Western Europe, rural migration has been associated with the urban poor, seeking to reduce their living costs, rather than the affluent, seeking a peaceful retirement. Many in the new countryside have entered into farming unwillingly and more as a part-time stop gap rather than a new career. Remittances from younger migrants can compensate for the loss of labour and care, although there are very little signs that these funds have been used to improve and expand agricultural production. The majority of the 6 billion euros sent home to Central and Eastern Europe in 2007, for example, was used to supplement household expenses – around about half – and also spent on financing education. Only 3 per cent was used on actual investment (Fihel et al. 2007).

Dealing with and understanding the dynamics of rural population change have been a key epistemological test case. The current 'resident population' figures only partially capture the true dynamics of rural residency. It was the Hungarian anthropologist András Czegledy who coined the phrase 'urban peasant' to describe those who spend their weekends and summers in the countryside, staying in family homes often with an elderly relative living there relatively full-time. According to Czegledy urban peasants were engaged in food production not so much out of economic necessity; their time spent in the countryside reflected their attachment to "self-provisioning", which gave the chance to spend time with family, sharing the fruits of their labour with friends, family, and neighbours. Urban peasants were important because not only did they ensure the upkeep of rural properties, they also could help take care of elderly relatives and even neighbours. However, they were not tomorrow's farmers and, in that sense, there was no need to consider them as potential beneficiaries of subsidies, training and other efforts to promote family-based farming.

Whilst such demographic features may seem relatively marginal to the agrarian question, they can be placed in a wider context of rural developments, which understands the countryside in terms of non-farm based benefits to urban areas. One example that has become emblematic is in respect of care for migrant children. It has long been common for children to spend their long summer break in the countryside. Now, this has been extended to all year round. Urban children living with their rural relatives have become a significant feature of Romanian migration, where often both mother and father migrate to work in Spain, Italy or elsewhere. According to a UNICEF study in cooperation with the "Alternative Sociale":

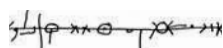
350,000 Romanian children had at least one parent abroad in 2008. This represented 7% of the population under 18 years of age. The study noted that 126,000 children under

10 years of age have both parents abroad. Another 400,000 children have suffered the absence of one parent for long periods. The rural Romanian regions suffer the most from this phenomenon. In particular, the Romanian Moldavia has 100,000 "white" orphans. Other regions that particularly suffer include Transylvania, Oltenia and Muntenia (Bezzi 2010).

Arguably, both sets of urban groups transcend the notion of temporary guests and, in terms of rural development, they can be seen as a significant feature. Areas close to cities and larger towns are more susceptible to these kinds of population fluctuations and are at an advantage compared to villages with fewer amenities and badly served by transport connections. Sociologist Dumitru Sandu found that villages further away from large settlements were more likely to experience permanent out-migration. Whereas villages with populations of around two thousand people, close to European highways and with a history of commuting, higher numbers of young people and relatively high unemployment were more likely to experience circular rather than permanent migration. In fact, almost 60 per cent of all circular or return migration in the Romanian countryside originated in only 4.4 per cent of villages (Sandu 2000, 18).

Incorporating demographic complexities into policy and planning is not straightforward. Migratory flows are fickle and the lengths of time spent abroad or the level of remittances are very hard to predict. Higher numbers of children staying with grandparents might be good for rural school numbers, but, with unpredictable economies in host countries such as Spain and Italy, these children staying in the countryside may well be disrupted when their parents return. In a similar vein, the presence of 'urban peasants' can signal healthy urban-rural connections, but it can also be affected by the waning of interest amongst young people and the availability of green markets in the towns and cities.





The advantage and disadvantage of owning land

As is well known, the land reforms of the 1990s favored restitution to pre-collective owners, although they did so in different ways. Hungary restored land to former legal owners¹, but also distributed compensation vouchers that could be used to purchase apartments or invest in newly privatized enterprises. Vouchers could be spent anywhere in the country, creating strong competition for land where soil was fertile or the landscape attractive. They also led to the “voucher market” where recipients converted their vouchers into cash (Swain 1993).

Land reforms had a significant impact on the nature of ties between urban and rural areas. In some areas, they produced a new class of landowners with little farming experience, but with expectations that their land could provide profit and security. However, without farm management skills, capital and equipment and, in some cases, without the support of their younger family members, many quickly abandoned farming to become “either village-based pensioners or external to either the [former] co-operative or the village, or both” (Swain 1999, 1206). In Romania, over six million people applied for land under Law 18/1991, representing close to one quarter of the entire population (Cartwright 2001, 118). Unlike Hungary, land was usually returned in the same location as it was in the pre-collective days. It was then divided between former owners and, should they no longer be living, their lawful heirs. According to the World Bank, almost 60 per cent of these claimants lived in urban areas.

Given this land distribution, it was unsurprising that the early post-socialist agrarian question would turn on issues of conditions of tenure and building the infrastructure for new land markets. Both countries reverted to old techniques for reducing the fragmentation of land; all sales of land had to first recognize the pre-emption rights of fam-

ily members, neighbors and locals offering them first refusal on any sale of land. Secondly, and invoking the specter of good and bad landowners, new rules were introduced to limit land-based speculation; in Hungary, for example, entities with a legal personality were not allowed to own land, only to lease it and, in both Hungary and Romania, there were ceilings on the maximum amount of land an individual could own. And throughout CEE countries, restrictions on foreigners buying agricultural land were loudly introduced (although there were plenty of ways around these rules in practice).

In Hungary, the opening up of agriculture transformed the rural economy. Whereas agriculture, hunting, fisheries and forestry contributed almost 13 per cent to GDP in 1990 and employed nearly 700,000 people, by 2008, the number working in the same sectors was down to 174,000 and the share of GDP was just over 4 per cent (Hungarian Central Statistical Office). The pressures led many to abandon farming in the commercial sector, the semi-subsistence farms and even the subsistence weekend or hobby farms. There was a significant reduction in the domestic livestock industry, as well as there was a steady decline in the once profitable fruit and vegetable sectors. This was accompanied by a steady rise in land rented out on long-term leases. There has also been a transformation from rents being paid in kind to rents being paid in cash (Biro 2008, 61-88).

The distribution of land in Romania had different consequences for the countryside. Under Law 18/1991, those who had worked for years on the collective farms, but did not own land before, could receive land only after the former owners and their heirs had settled their claims. The antagonism and social divisions created by the land reforms undermined the cultivation of local land — those who were relatively land-rich tended to be labour-poor and those with labour were unwilling to work for those who, they felt, had cheated them from their fair returns (Verdery 2004).

1) The land and non-land assets of the co-operatives that were still formally privately owned by members of the co-operative (but were in collective use) were fully restituted to their legal proprietors.



The fact that land ownership could be a source of both profit and security was not lost on central and local decision makers. In Romania and, to a lesser extent, Hungary, social welfare transfers gradually shifted towards means-testing when it came to assessing entitlements and it is here that we can witness some of the more subtle dimensions of the agrarian question (Barr 2005). In Romania, the minimum income program regulated the valuation process for household assets, including land which was assessed according to size, local rents and soil quality. Income from land could then be imputed to the household, regardless of whether the land actually provided such an income. According to the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the land valuation process frequently worked to the detriment of many rural households (Sinclair et al. 2002, 11). Given the limited revenue raising powers of many local authorities, it was vital that they could maximise central transfers and minimise the contributions that had to come out of local budgets. If land values were set at an artificially high level, then the imputed incomes from land would carry households above the poverty threshold and thereby the applicant would not be entitled to minimum income support. As local authorities had to contribute 20 per cent to minimum income support, inflating land values was a useful technique to reduce local social security bills. The DFID researchers found that, in some parts of Romania, rural land values exceeded those in the most exclusive capital suburbs in the country (Sinclair et al. 2002, 11).

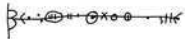
Land ownership was a disadvantage in other ways. De-collectivisation created hundreds of thousands of new land owners. However, not every kin claimant was registered in the land cadastre. Households disguised the actual division of intra-family land incomes by registering ownership in the name of a single elderly relative. This reduced taxation, it maintained access to certain welfare benefits, as well as reduced the costs of notaries and other land registration fees. In Hungary, much land was owned by

younger, often urban-based, family members in the form of undivided shares. These shares were usually found in larger fields making it easier for larger producers to rent and use the land. Again though, all the 'real owners' might not feature on the property title. Traditional practices of family inheritance might govern the division of benefits, and yet, over time, the implications of these arrangements became steadily more disadvantageous to those with the misfortune to be owners. It was estimated that over one million cases of intergenerational land disputes filled up the Romanian courts in the 1990s (Cartwright 2001, 118).

Fragmentation of land was a further complication on the restructuring of the agrarian sector. Where owners were too old to work the land or their offspring no longer interested, the consequence was an increase in the amount of land that was abandoned. Although there are few official statistics, there is a growing number of studies and institutions that cover the topic. In 2013, Kummerele et al found that almost 10 per cent of Romanian farmland was abandoned, whereas in Hungary, the proportion was estimated to be closer to 5 per cent. An earlier study in Romania gave a higher estimate of 17 per cent (Rusu et al. 2002), whereas Alcantara et al found that between 1990 and 2005, 28 per cent of all cropland was abandoned in Romania (2013). While land abandonment rates are lower in Hungary, there are still significant portions of land that are unworked. In 2011, the European Court of Auditors found almost 900,000 hectares of land deemed ineligible for support under the Common Agricultural Policy on the grounds that it was not in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition.

The problem was that the reconstruction of the land market did not prove able to facilitate the circulation whether through sale or lease. Whilst there might be strong demand for land outside of Bucharest or around Lake Balaton, there was much less activity in more remote, hilly and hard to

reach areas. Alcantara, for example, found that the rates of abandoned land were especially high in central Romania.



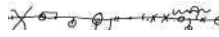
Rural Population Decline and the Elderly

The elderly are in many ways one of the central players in the contemporary rural question. Not only are the majority of active farmers in their mid-fifties and over, the rural population in many rural areas is made up of pensioners. Older owners are also the dominant group of land owners, whether they are based in the urban areas leasing out their land or living in the countryside and still working at least part of their land. In other words, if it had one, the colour of the agrarian question would be silver.

In respect of their elderly populations, local authorities in the rural areas have had limited scope for providing services in the past twenty years. Outside the major urban areas, there were (and still are) virtually no residential facilities for the elderly. Local authorities in Romania, for instance, have understandable reasons for treating land as actual income even when it actually provides none. In some cases, public services have become a shared task between the lowest self-governing settlements and intermediate regional or county authorities. Homecare visits for the elderly in Hungary are organised by micro-regional authorities and delivered in conjunction with social services department from larger conurbations. In other words, the smallest settlements may no longer have principal responsibility for the elderly, but they can still play an important role in representing local needs.

Policy debates concerning the rural elderly are often beset by ideological arguments that invoke on the one hand, the dangers of foreign takeovers and, on the other, state exploitation of rural poverty as a means of acquiring land. In respect of public services for the rural elderly, there have been significant discrepancies between ru-

ral and urban residents (Milbourne, 2012). Those who worked for the state or in collective farms received far smaller pensions than their urban counterparts. Although many state enterprises went bankrupt, the loss for rural pensioners was aggravated by the attendant collapse of basic public services. As we have seen, rural underemployment and low pensions could be offset by the fact of land ownership, and yet, the slackening of ties between rural and urban areas changed the context in which land was seen as an unquestionable rural asset leading to a significant change in state policy towards private property.



Loosening the attraction of land: Land for Pensions

The Act on Agricultural Land (1994) and the Act on the National Land Fund (2001) saw the introduction of the Land for Pension (LFP) scheme in 2002 in Hungary (Cartwright, Medve-Balint, Svensson 2010). Open to all land owners who were over 60, holding between 1-20 hectares and able to prove sole ownership, it soon proved to be a very popular policy, each round of applications receiving twice the number it was able to pay for. Under the program, the state bought land from elderly landowners in exchange for an extra monthly payment on top of their pension. Land values were calculated by taking into consideration the local golden crown value of land (the standard means of assigning notional value based on soil quality and geographical location), as well the estimated value assigned by the owner. The annuity is then divided across the estimated number of years that the owner is expected to live. In many cases, the additional income equals, but sometimes surpasses the value of their current pension. Furthermore, payments over a number of years often meant that the state bought the land for a price that went well beyond its market value.

The program is also designed to support





land consolidation by acquiring and amalgamating small parcels to create larger surfaces that can then be rented out or sold to family farms. Over the years, the emphasis has changed as to the principal beneficiaries; most recently, stress is on this land being used to support the development of the small to medium sized sector. Secondly, the LFP reflects an acknowledgement of the extent of rural poverty and the fact that farm land should not be automatically deemed to offer secure incomes; in the words of Government Directive, 255/2002, “the program is meant to give a ‘realistic alternative’ to those who cannot farm due to age and who want to “make life a little bit easier in their remaining years by the extension of the pension”. The LFP program signals a counter example to those who would see the state as having withdrawn from rural affairs.

From a local perspective, interviews with successful applicants and responsible administrators in two villages in Eastern Hungary in late 2009 showed that individual and intra-family relationships in respect of land were more pragmatic than sentimental. All the applicants had very low pensions and their sons and daughters were uninterested in farming and, in most cases, no longer lived in the village. None of the applicants actually owned land themselves before the change of regime. They received restitution coupons because their parents had owned land or because they had been employees of the co-operative. One 65-year-old widow described how her children encouraged her to sell the land in order to top up her pension which was at that time, around 150 euro per month. She refused at the beginning since she said she did not want to strip her children of their heritage. Eventually, however, the children convinced her that they were absolutely not interested in inheriting the land and would much prefer if she used the money to increase her own pension. A second interviewee, a 74-old widow, said she had “several sleepless nights before making the decision. One wants to leave something for the children,

but also has to live without being a burden on them.” In almost all the cases we interviewed, the decision to sell the land was described as being a joint family one. All the interviewees wanted to show that their children had agreed or encouraged their decision, and that there was no regret on the children’s part that they would no longer be able to inherit land. One widower conceded that his sons were not entirely happy with his decision to sell his land to the state. In contrast to the other would-be inheritors, these two sons actually owned land of their own, but as they had made it clear that they did not want to help cultivate their father’s land, he decided to apply to the scheme without asking their opinion.

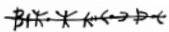
As one of the applicants explained, even his father, whose large land property was confiscated in the 1950s and who was alive at the time of the restitution, considered the land that he got back as “money found on the street”. As he continued, “forty years had passed by in the meantime, so my father never expected that his confiscated land property would become his own again.” It was also common that the land sold to the state under this scheme was generally unmarketable and was not able to provide a proper standard of living. When they first received land two decades before, many informants had high expectations of the rewards they could expect. Some worked the parcels themselves, some leased them out and many kept livestock. Unpredictable prices for pork, high input costs and reports of broken contracts led many to give up livestock switching their rent from in kind payments to cash.

In almost all cases, none of the younger family members demonstrated any interest in owning, renting or cultivating the land. As one interviewee added:

“I still have 5.5 hectares of land, but my son is a PhD candidate in mathematics and is not interested even in renting out the land <...> it is unsecure, there are many examples of how difficult it is to find or manage the relationship with a tenant, even the Association

will hardly pay you anything. It is also difficult to sell."

Even though the area has one of the highest land values in the country, annual incomes from leasing seldom exceeded 120-150 euro per year and, with most interviewees having very low pensions, they needed the extra income. As one interviewee put it: "the land has essentially become a burden". Under these circumstances, the LFP scheme with its generous monthly payments compared very favorably to the rents owners could expect. In many cases, a single monthly payment is higher than the total annual rent. This way, it took very little time to 'earn back' the value of the land sold to the state through the monthly payments. As one said, it took him 3.5 years to receive the sum he thought he would have received if he had sold the land. Since he sold it at 60 and can expect the extra annuity till he dies, he hopes to get much more from his land.



Conclusion: Private exits, state returns and foreigners

It seems clear that, although operating at different speeds and according to considerations, exiting from farming and relinquishing land ownership has been a key feature of the contemporary agrarian question in Hungary and Romania. In some cases, this was in response to the difficulties of starting private farming in the context of external competition, lack of capital and labor and an increasingly heavy regulatory burden coming out of the European Union. Although, there have been moments in which the state offered widespread support to semi-subsistence producers, longer term policies have encouraged exits from both land ownership and private farming. The decline in the smallest part of the farming sector has been quite spectacular. In Hungary in 1995, there were over 1m small holdings under production, whilst, by 2007, the year of the last Farm Structure Survey that number was down to 390,000. The average

age of a private farmer is now 56 and the proportion of farmers under 40 is only 12 per cent. In Romania, the agricultural work force and the number of holdings is still second only to Poland in the European Union; however, there are also strong signs of withdrawal from farming without any replacement by younger generations. The family labor force, for example, which cultivated the vast majority (84 per cent) of private farms, dropped by a quarter between 2005-2007 and there were even higher proportions of elderly owners who were producers – 71 per cent of holders of agricultural land were over 55 and over half the private agricultural work supplemented their pension through subsistence production. All three countries have introduced various inducements to speed up this transformation in the structure of farm ownership. As was the case throughout the EU, farmers could apply for early retirement at 55. This program proved especially popular in Poland, with over 70,000 applications approved and a further 30,000 expected by 2013. However, as the evaluators pointed out, although the early retirement measure was wholly justified in their view, at the other end of the spectrum, there was significantly more supply of land and farms than taken up under the young farmers program².

One of the interesting aspects of contemporary agrarian question is the extent to which it draws on EU policies and programs. As mentioned above, there has long been a profound wariness towards the collapse of the agrarian question into the rural question in CEE. With good grounds, many wondered whether it made sense to include all the new farmers of Eastern Europe in the Common Agricultural Policy. Was it good public policy to use limited EU funds to subsidize a three hectare farm outside Bucharest? Was there not a danger that the CEE states would try and deal with a whole range of rural under-development problems within the context of the already bloated CAP, hence the real concern over what would be the dividing lines between

2) See Ex-ante evaluation of the Rural Development Program 2007-2013, page 24, Annex Five, Rural Development Program for 2007-13, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2009.

subsistence, semi-subsistence and commercial farms? In many respects, Brussels was loath to give explicit direction to these questions and whether it is demise of the early retirement scheme or the fact that the land for pensions programs had to be funded entirely from domestic sources, the EU is a much more marginal player than what might otherwise be portrayed.

A second example of the assertive state is in respect of the continuing exit from family land ownership. As land prices rise and the interest of foreign buyer increases, the state assumes an increased role as part broker, part land manager. By 2011, the National Land Fund in Hungary, had acquired ownership of 1.82 million hectares of land, which amounted to 180 907 parcels or 23 per cent of the total agricultural and forest land in the country. Its remit, according to its Director, is to “provide land for family farms, animal husbandry, to improve the land ownership and land leasing system, influence land prices and land leasing fees, activating the land market (both sale and leasing), to act against land speculation.” In the context of increasing land concentration in certain parts of the country, as well as the benefits to be gained by accessing large amount of EU subsidies, the role of the state in respect of domestic farm land has become increasingly complicated. As one recent study on land-grabbing in Europe put it:

On the one hand, the state – or progressive factions receptive to the interests of small farmers and civil society concerns – is leading the charge in investigating suspicious land deals and taking measures to curb them, such as with the uptake of ‘pocket contracts’ in the new Criminal Code. On the other hand, the state also facilitates many large-scale land deals. A state-capital alliance characterized by elite enrichment, corruption and cronyism threatens to stymie any attempts to tackle land-grabbing in Hungary. The transfer of thousands of hectares of formerly state-owned lands into the hands of small group of people between 2002 and 2010 is indicative of

this alliance. It is, in a sense, a kind of ‘pocket contract’ enforced by the state involving the large-scale selling off or long-term lease of formerly state-owned land to big business at the expense of local small-scale farmers (Fidric 2013).

According to the same author, foreign landownership in Hungary amounted to between 1-1.5 million hectares of farmland. In Romania, where state land ownership is around 20 per cent of all agricultural land, the land market was opened to foreign buyers from January 1st 2014. Previous estimates put the total amount of land in foreign hands at between 600-700,000 hectares. In this context, state land ownership becomes even more of an issue, whether or not this is in terms of facilitating access to land for foreign buyers, or, as some pronouncements from the Ministry of Agriculture have put, it defending the national interests by facilitating access to smaller, family farmers.

The idea of the state withdrawing from rural areas may remain relevant in respect of those places where the population is shrinking fast. In these cases, public services may be increasingly based on the supply of mobile services, such as home visits and temporary health clinics. Maintaining rural schools to retain and increase local populations is bound to remain controversial. However, in respect of the elderly who still own the majority of private farm land, there does appear to be a willingness to accept that farmland is not always able to provide the income, security and sense of obligation that it once did. Turning land-based security into cash-based security seems to be in line with larger trends in social welfare policies. It also reflects the ongoing disengagement of both the rural and urban populations from direct self-provisioning of food, which had been one of the more contradictory elements of the post-socialist agrarian question. Encouraging people to grow their own food could indeed cushion many during a time of profound upheaval. How far it could be the basis for a new private agrarian sector in the context of the European Union



was a wholly different matter. It is tempting to agree that, at least in the early 1990s, the state was relatively powerless to deal with both the social and economic dimensions of the agrarian question. However, as both the market and the EU seemed to be unable

to deal with the transformation of the rural areas, the central state secured an increased role for itself and, in some dimensions, particularly those relating to the elderly, returned to a central position in rural life.

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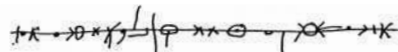
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Albanian Peasant Economy in the Aftermath of Property Right Reforms - A Review of the 20th Century Tenure History



Edvin Zhllima

Associated Professor at the Agricultural University of Tirana

Klodjan Rama

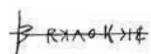
*Ph.D. candidate at the Leibniz Institute of Agriculture Development in Transition Economies (IAMO)
in Halle / Saale, Germany*

ABSTRACT

This study reviews some of the most important changes in Albanian land tenure. This historical description of the tenure systems from the Ottoman period to the recent reform will provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of tenure arrangements in Albania. It will point out their policy objectives, their implementation in practice and their impact on structural features of the agriculture system in Albania.

KEYWORDS

Land Tenure, Land Reform, Peasantry, Albania, Southeast Europe



Introduction

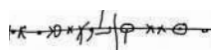
Land reform is one of the key aspects of broad agrarian changes. At its core stands the redistributive element (de Janvry 1981; Allen 1982; Hayami 1991; Lipton 1993), though the direction of the transfer processes varies. While land reforms of the early 20th century aimed at transferring land from large landowners or feudal-type estates to landless people - peasant or tenants, depending on the arrangements in place -, reforms of the early 1990s in countries of the former socialist bloc involved transferring land from collective agricultural entities, established during the communist period, to private farmers. Both processes entail social, economic and political implications, depending on the goals and objectives of the reform initiators. As Sikor and Müller (2009) point out, socialist movements in many parts of the world used land reforms as means for deep social transformations, in which large landholders were dispossessed not only of their economic endowments, but mostly of

their political power. Southeast Europe could not be left out of this trend (see, for instance, Cartwright 2001 for the case of Romania). Also, in Albania, feudal-type practices with few big landowners controlling the social and economic life of rural communities were gradually replaced by socialist-style organizations, with the "collective" being at the centre of any social and economic relations. Although agriculture showed improvements in terms of production and mechanization, farmers' livelihoods did not experience significant changes. The land privatization reform that followed the demise of agriculture cooperatives and state farms, aimed at increasing the welfare in rural areas and development of the agriculture sector, through free-market mechanisms, has so far been able to provide subsistence means to rural populations and reshape distribution of property rights on land. While, in most cases, land reforms of the early 1990s in Central and Eastern European countries were aimed at restoring this historical injustice by returning the confiscated land that communist governments utilized in the created

collective entities to its previous owners, the Albanian government opted for a distributional approach driven by equity considerations (Matthijs 1997; Swinnen 1997). Land was distributed on a per capita basis to all family members of agriculture cooperatives and state farms, ignoring the original property rights on land. As such, the peasantry emerged as an actor of social resistance through customary rights, who managed to survive the radical regime of communism reappearing in the chaotic evolution of the post-socialist period. In many instances, customary rights acted as an opposing instrument against government interventions, although their legitimacy depended on resource endowments and the structure of rural society. Many rural communities, especially in the hilly and mountainous areas, disregarded the formal law stipulations, reinstating the original property rights on land and other natural resources such as forests and pastures (Aliko 2001; Meçani 2009; de Waal 2004; Stahl 2012).

The aim of this work is to look at the impact of the reforms on the Albanian peasantry and the distribution of rural assets. We argue that the transformation of land-right institutions based on legal reforms has been the main trigger of the transformation of the agricultural systems in the country, the modes of production and the rural livelihood. At the basis of land-right institutions stand the concept of property rights and its ability to provide peasants with the necessary security and incentives to undertake initiatives that will help them improve their livelihoods.

Some theoretical considerations on the role of property rights and tenure security on development of agriculture will be presented in the subsequent section. It will be followed by a historical description of land tenure systems in Albania, from the Ottoman rule to present days. Next, implications of land reforms, especially of the recent one, will be discussed. Finally, the concluding section will summarize the main arguments presented throughout the work.



Role of property rights on agriculture development

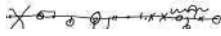
Property rights are a class of institutional arrangements. There are different understandings over what constitutes a property right. Furubotn and Pejovich (1972: 3) understand property rights as “the sanctioned behavioral relations among men that arise from the existence of goods and pertain to their use”. Meanwhile, Bromley and Cernea (1989: 5) argue that property should not be viewed as an object, but rather as “a right to a benefit stream that is only as secure as the duty of all others to respect the conditions that protect that stream”. Both arguments point out the aspect of security and use of the property. A very important aspect of property rights pointed out by many scholars is to identify the entities entitled to reap the benefits derived from the access to that property. Four basic categories of property rights over natural resources have been identified: private property, communal property or common property, state property and no one’s property or open access (Bromley and Cernea 1989; Feder and Feeny 1991; Schlager and Ostrom 1992). Under private property, the rights are assigned to an individual. Under communal property, rights are assigned to a group of individuals. Under state property, management of the land is under the authority of the public sector. Meanwhile, under open access, rights are left unassigned. In each of the categories, the right-holders are entitled to undertake certain actions related to that particular property. Alchian and Demsetz (1973) developed the concept of “bundle” of rights that include the right to use, alienate and transfer property. The concept of “bundle of rights” was further elaborated by Schlager and Ostrom (1992), breaking down the use concept into management, withdrawal and access rights. This way of specification of rights provides a basis for understanding how property rights structure the incentives of farmers to invest on agriculture

land. One of the basic arguments over property rights - for example, on land - is that the clear definition of these rights creates incentives for investment, leading to higher land productivity (Pejovich 1990; Deininger and Feder 1998). The security of land rights by means of a clear definition, accompanied by land registration and titling is recognized by many economists as a means to provide security to the owner that his / her investments and efforts will not be lost and help her / him to resolve land disputes (Demsetz 1967; Feder and Feeny 1991; Binswanger et al 1995; Feder and Nishio 1996). Clear property rights and tenure security improve the transferability (temporary through rental agreement or permanent through land sale) of land to cultivators who have the resources to make better use of it (Deininger and Feder 1998; Binswanger et al 1995). Such approach was the basis for the titling reforms carried in the 1980s and 1990s, for the developing countries which implemented land reforms for allowing redistribution and reducing poverty and inequality (Bouquet 2009). These state-led reforms aimed at achieving tenure security, distribute individual and transferable property titles (for some countries not since at the beginning), as well as formal registration of land transfers (Deininger 2003). The same approach was used also for the CEEC post-communist countries. In these reforms, the state took a primary role on promoting land redistribution and titling for family farms established from the dissolution of former state farms and cooperatives (Cartwright 2001; de Janvry et al 2001; Sikor and Müller 2009). On the other hand, in their "access theory", Ribot and Peluso (2003) argue that property rights alone may not be sufficient to guarantee security, but other instruments such as factor markets, networking, authority, and sources of revenues may all play a role. In particular, decision-making over land sales may be affected by capital, labor and input and output markets, as well as general and direct perceptions of insecurity which stem from the relations between formal and in-

formal institutions. In this formal-informal clash, social identity and access to authority are equally important (Thomas 2006; Deininger 2003; Ribot and Peluso 2003).

The theoretical underpinnings discussed above, except for the work of Ribot and Peluso (2003), consider primarily economic factors and incentives that guide decision-making on reform choices, land use practices and overall livelihoods of the rural sphere. They point out the crucial role of the state in a classical approach where peasantry is seen either as a beneficiary or victim of the decisions taken by state policies. However, the way the Albanian peasant has behaved along the last century history, as covered in this chapter, calls for a more flexible approach, as mentioned in the work of Wolf, who sees the peasant population as a dynamic and an interactive group in which cultural and inner-institutional factors are interlinked with the external forces brought about by state changes (Wolf 1982). This model is the best for translating the political changes that have happened in Albania and in the region within a century. Such changes have transformed the power and activities of the state through land reforms, which alternated the access of peasants to the endogenous rural assets with the associated benefits, which results in peasantry differentiation, discussed at different times by various scholars, such as de Janvry (1981), Cartwright (2001) and Stahl (2012), to name a few. As mentioned in the work of Thelen et al (2008), these changes are hard to capture by the simple notion of "state withdrawal" since the state never stepped back despite the changing nature during its history: for example, from a supranational one, as during the Ottoman period, to a national / central one during socialism and then again to a dichotomous one (central and local) headed again by supranational forces emerging from the EU integration. The role of the state during this chapter will be depicted through the types of reforms implemented, considering the motivation and the controversial forces.





Evolution of Albania's land tenure

Albania's land tenure has undergone continuous changes throughout history. During medieval times, it was dominated by large land estates belonging to the feudal elite who served the ruling empires of the time. These estates were called timars and were awarded to military lords (beys), to local officeholders (spahi) and to non-landowners who provided supporting troops for the empire (Vlora 1973; Prifti 2004; Meçani 2009). Ownership was granted temporarily and could not be inherited or sold by the appointed administrators. On the timars, peasants could work and own plots whose sale was, however, not allowed. The peasants were tied to the spahi land and had the obligation to pay rent to the timarli. In the 16th century the spahi's power was strengthened, their land ownership enlarged and their power over peasants increased significantly. At the beginning of the 18th century, a parallel system of ownership called *çiftlik* started gradually taking shape. A tenure reform in 1858 (Eraz-i Kanuni), dissolved the timar system and formalized the *çiftlik* system, in which the owner had a financial, but no military obligation to the Ottoman Empire (Meçani 2009). The feudal landholding structure started to lose power during these years and, in the second half of the 1800s, the landholdings owned by beys¹ were transformed into mega structures. In this system, the relations with the peasantry severed², as their rights on land were largely neglected (Prifti 2004). The beys kept enlarging their *çiftliks* by purchasing the peasants' land. Cases of distress sales that converted peasants to land workers were numerous (Meçani 2009). At the beginning of the 20th century, half of the total land was administered under large *çiftliks*³ and the Ottoman state, while the other half was dominated by fragmented land structure managed by the free peasantry. This evolution of land relations in Albania during Ottoman rule is not a country-specific process. Similar pat-

terns of land relations have been witnessed in many countries that had fallen under the Ottoman rule (see for instance, Aroni-Tsichli this volume, for the case of Greece), but different reforms paths followed afterwards, driven by political interest and carried out in ethnical lines, as in the case of Yugoslavia (Giordano in this volume). Albania's reform processes were rather slow and largely ineffective in tackling the most pressing issues for the peasantry, with land distribution to the landless being the prominent one.

After Albania's independence in 1912, the Ottoman state land still remained state property and there were no significant changes in terms of land operations. Despite the concentration of ownership⁴, the agricultural operation in large estates was carried out mostly by tenants and, often, the landlords left a major portion uncultivated. The distribution on land in the aftermath of the Albanian independence was distributed as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Albanian tenure structure in the year 1912

| Land holders | % of total land |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| State | 14,7 |
| Large owners | 36,7 |
| Religious institutions | 3,6 |
| Farmer owners | 45 |

Source: Wheeler and Waite (2003)

After failed attempts for land reforms in 1912 (by a fragile government which lasted very shortly until 1913) and 1924 (a short-lived left wing revolutionary government), at the beginning of the 1930s, the Albanian government undertook some serious efforts to distribute the state land to landless farmers, but nothing important was achieved. King Zog I established an Agrarian Reform Act which drafted the main rules for free distribution of land to landless peasants purchasing it from large landowners with the provision of keeping at least 40 ha for each owner, plus 5 ha each for spouses and children. At the same time, a financial reform bill was planned to be established

1) A different structure was established in the northern highlands, where the power had given for decades to tribal chieftains called bajraktars. The relationship in these areas was not between landowner and tenant; the bajraktar (a community leader) could collect a rent above the administration of its governance and maintenance of security (Prifti 2004).

2) The *çifçi* (the peasant) was renting in the land, the agricultural hut and the instruments and had to plant those products requested by the Bey. The obligations are: 1/10 of the production (*yshyr*) is paid to the spahi as a timar owner, and again 1/3 of the production (in case half of the agricultural instruments were of the owner) as an obligation toward the *çiftlik* owner (Fraseri 2009).

3) This intermediate version between feudalism and capitalism was evident until the beginning of the World War II in Albania, similarly to that seen in the South Italian system of *mezzadria*.

4) Observations made in 1912 by E.C. Sedmayr found that 5 rich families had ownership of 50,000-60,000 Ha. There was also a class of moderate owners (100 ha per farm) and small owners (10 ha) (Gambeta 1999).

using the National Agricultural Bank for financial compensation of land lost by the landholders (Lorenzoni 1930). However, the Bank was never established and the land redistribution stopped after two years. The ownership structure as shown in Table 2 was still dominated by large landholdings. Frasheri (2009) states that the reform failed to achieve the objectives of redistribution as it benefited only 1880 family farms and involved only 8109,5 ha of land, of which 3411,5 was given from state land and 4698 ha from *çiftlik* land.

Between 1912 and 1945 a gradual redistribution of land resulting from the fragmentation of the large holdings was witnessed. Still, land inequality was high as a few landlords, the state and religious institutions owned an average of 2,000 hectares each. Meanwhile, a class of small landowners with farms of 1-9 hectares was working hard to survive. However, the landless population continued to exist (14 % of the total population) and became strong supporters of the emerging communist elite created during the World War II, who then ruled the country until 1990.

Table 2: Structure of the land ownership before the reform of year 1945

| Status of ownership | No of households | % to total no. of households | Surface of land in Ha | % to total land |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| State land | | | 50 000 | 12,7 |
| Large Land owner class | 7 | 0,005 | 14 000 | 3,6 |
| Rich proprietors | 4 713 | 3,0 | 91 587 | 23,3 |
| Middle and small land owners | 128 961 | 83,1 | 237 666 | 60,4 |
| Population with no land | 21 544 | 13,8 | 0 | 0,0 |
| Total | 155 225 | 100,0 | 393 253 | 100,0 |

Source: Aliko (2001); Gambeta (1998)

Meanwhile, the period after WWII was marked by radical changes in ownership. In 1945, the communist government initiated

an agrarian reform whose key pillars were expropriation of large landowners and redistribution of their land to landless farmers. Nevertheless, farmers could not enjoy the newly-acquired land for long, as redistribution was soon followed by collectivization of agricultural land through an aggressive promotion. Since the majority of the population was rural (70, 5% in 1946) and thus strongly linked to their land, the communist government addressed the collectivization process slower than it did with other sectors of the economy. Collectivization became more intensive in the 1950s and was completed in 1959 in Southwestern Albania and in 1967, in the remaining mountainous areas (Fishta and Toçi 1984). With the establishment of Agricultural Production Co-operatives and State Farms, the number and size of farms reduced drastically. Individual rights to private land were restricted to 2,7% of the total land, and that in the form of small plots such as home gardens of a maximum size of 1100 m² (1500m² ha in mountain areas) per household, including a cow and / or ten small ruminants (Wheeler and Waite 2003; Civici 2003; Stanfield 2002; INSTAT 1991). Table 3 shows the structure of land ownership between 1950 and 1990.

Table 3: Albanian land ownership by area between 1950 and 1990 in thousand ha

| Year | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| State Farms | 13 | 65 | 124 | 151 | 170 |
| Cooperatives | 21 | 330 | 454 | 532 | 504 |
| Peasant home plots | 357 | 62 | 21 | 19 | 30 |

Source: INSTAT, Statistical yearbook (1991)

The land consolidation program and agriculture intensification continued over the years, where production units were enlarged, while the number of agriculture cooperatives was reduced from 1484 to 492 between 1960 and 1989. Due to economic hardships caused by the self-reliance philosophy, by the end of the 1980s, the government had undertaken some slight modi-

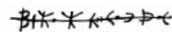
5) Swinnen (1997) defined three options for consideration: (i) the Minimal Reform Option, which implies more autonomy for enterprises, but only with minimal restructuring and limited privatization of assets; (ii) the Social Equity Option, meaning the full distribution of property rights to farm workers and rural households; and (iii) the Historical Justice Option, meaning the full restitution of property rights to former owners.

6) The harsh geographical and demographic changes during the central planning period caused modifications to the village boundaries. In cases where the land of the village was not well-defined, the land per capita index of the cooperative was accepted as a proxy (Stanfield et al 2002; WB 2006).

7) The part of the population resident in the village, but not working in a cooperative were awarded half of the land per capita given to the rest of the population with an upper limit of 0,1 ha (law 7501, Art.6). Later on, this part of the population was also compensated with state land or refused land, whenever it was available in the area of the village. The same *de jure* benefits were given to unemployed families and those who had the status of politically persecuted by the Communist regime (Law 7514, date 30.09.1991) (Meçani 2009).

8) Only a small part of former owners benefited indirectly through some regulations. The ones still residing in rural areas benefited partly as regular members of the cooperatives, with equal rights as every other member and partly from the 100% return of the inner urban part of the village lands (if not subject of privatisation from enterprises). ►

fications to the legislation, transferring to farmers between 0.1 and 0.3 ha of land, a cow and small ruminants and allowing for a modest agricultural market (De Waal 2004; Civici 1998). This period marked the first signals for transformation of the consolidated agriculture entities which were undergoing deep financial problems and high underperformance (Sandström and Sjöberg 1991).



Land tenure after 1991

The economic difficulties and the external political changes made the government accept political pluralism and adopt free-market principles. One of the major and urgent measures undertaken by the government was the transfer of land and other state-owned assets to private agents. A Social Equity option⁵ was endorsed by the government, which was based on a somewhat debatable law, known as Law on Land no.7501, dated 31st July 1991. The philosophy of the law was driven by an egalitarian principle, which stipulated the distribution of agriculture land, free of charge, to all farm households, in per capita terms based on the land surface that was within the boundaries of each village⁶, strictly respecting the quality of the land and other indicators of its value. The eligible families were the ones that had lived in the village before 31st July, 1991⁷.

The process of land distribution progressed quickly in the first three years, affecting 88% of planned surfaces, including the 91.5% of the of cooperative land (430,155 ha) and the 79% of the state farm land (114,560 ha). Not all regions, though, responded correctly to Law 7501. The World Bank (1996) pointed out that approximately 15-20% of the total agricultural land was redistributed to previous owners based on the pre-1945 boundaries (see also Kodderitzsch 1999; Meçani 2009; Aliko 2001). This phenomenon was witnessed mostly in the northern mountainous regions, where the elderly of the villages, who could remember

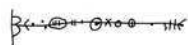
the pre-collectivization boundaries, were endorsed by the local communities to undertake the restitution of the land to historical owners (Morone 1997; Kola 2004; Kaser 2001; Bardhoshi 2007; Voell 2004). In other cases, for example, in several coastal areas, land ownership is still disputed between agricultural landholders under Law no. 7501, former owners and the state, given that the classification of lands in these areas is fuzzy as some lands are classified as forest or pasture, which, legally, are under state ownership. Furthermore, these areas are designated as a potential land fund made available for former owners who are eligible for compensation (WB 2006). During these years, political debates about the fairness and outcomes of the reform continued to be very active, thereby increasing the overall tenure insecurity. Some villages even reversed the first land division and re-distributed the land according to the pre-1945 boundaries. The Albanian government, through the 7501 Law, did not refer to the pre-1945 ownership rights as did other countries in the CEEC. The reform of 1991, with the exception of some partial returns of land in specific cases, did not recognize pre-1945 boundaries, but vaguely mentioned the issue of compensation in Law No. 7501. Under pressure, the government approved Law No. 7514, dated 30.04.1993, "for the restitution and compensation of ownership to former owners", which supported the restitution of building plots, agriculture and non-agriculture land where possible⁸, and compensation in financial or equivalent land terms. In order to avoid conflicting with other policies, restitution was not applied to all types of land and property. Farmland distributed under Law No. 7501 was not made subject to restitution. The situation became more complex because in some villages in the hilly and mountainous areas, former owners were successful in securing a division of agricultural land based on pre-1945 boundaries. Between 1992 and 2006, there were cases in which some former owners, with personal power, or later using the Res-

titution and Compensation Commissions, were occasionally awarded land that was the subject of the official land distribution process (Giovarelli 2001) or tried to take a part of the transaction value in case of land sale from the post-collectivization owner using the customary pressure, especially in cases of villages with no radical changes in population since 1945.

In other peri-urban areas, however, rural migrants mostly from mountainous and remote areas of the country, but mostly from the northeastern part of Albania, squatted on state lands, which were subject to restitution. Witnessing these movements and the incapacity of the government to react, the former owners called into question the legitimacy of the exemption of agricultural land from the restitution. As a result, a huge gap exists between state promises, which have been quite ambitious, and the perception and trust of the former owners. This situation is still unresolved and the issue is of top importance for the national policy agenda and EU integration processes (WB 2012).

The process of land distribution was prolonged and accompanied by abusive practices, where some non-eligible people benefited illegally, some benefited beyond the per capita dimensions prescribed in the law and the land commission regulations. These led to property overlapping, squatting and further widening of land disputes and conflicts (MoAFCP 2007d; WB 2006). These abuses forced the Parliament to officially close the land distribution reform at the end of August, 2008. From the existing land surface of 697,000 ha of agricultural land, about 561,000 ha are privatized by family farms. About 96,5% of the distributed land was at the same time accompanied by the distribution of land titles through the "Act of Ownership Title to Land" (MoAFCP 2007c)⁹. This process is followed by the registration of agricultural land, which is yet to be completed. So far, only 81.5% of all cadastral rural land has been registered, including the refused and state land, and in order to have full rights of sale and inheri-

tance, farmers need to acquire an "Ownership Certificate" at an Immovable Property Registration Offices (IPROs).



The impact of the 1991 land reform and the current challenges

The last land reform has been in many ways one of the most important land reforms of the 20th century in Albania. It remains one of the most radical reforms in the former communist countries of Central Eastern Europe (CEE), with the highest level of de-collectivization and individual privatization — including the distribution of state farms — giving modest attention to the issue of former owners (Deiningner 2003). Despite the redistribution, which was the first objective of land reform, there were also indirect and undesirable effects such as:

The structural impact. The division of land created high fragmentation with respect to the quality and distribution of land to families. As a result, the structure of the agricultural land tenure changed rapidly after the land reform. The 622 production units, cooperatives and State Farms, were dismantled into 44.500 farms. The large surfaces of slightly more than 1.000 Ha in average ceased to exist. Family farms are now small (1.2 Ha), composed of many parcels (an average of 3-4 plots per farm), often located far from each other and from farm houses (from 1 to 10 km). Most studies carried out in Albania conclude that fragmentation is one of the most negative phenomena of the reform (Lemel 2000; MoAFCP 2007a; Civici 2003; Lusho and Papa 1998). The fragmentation also brought about a reduction of the irrigation and mechanization coverage due to the failure of state services to survive in the emerging market, as well as the massive destruction and theft of the inherited assets (irrigation channels, tractor stations, water pump stations, etc).

Structural changes need, nevertheless, to be viewed beyond the physical fragmentation of the land. Particular attention also

► 8) They had also benefited from the CM Decision No.161, (08 / 04 /1993) "For some additions to the CM decision No.452, (17 / 10 / 1992) "For the restructuring of the State Enterprises" where the former owners, living in the same District could have an equal share of land with the other workers of the State Farms, but no more than the land they had given in the past for the establishment of the farm.

9) However, families actually possessing this land are not yet provided with the ownership document in some areas of the country (GoA declares that about 3% of the overall privatized area). Law No. 9948 (07 / 07 / 2008) "For reviewing the legal validity of the title of the agriculture land" (OJ no. 122, 31 July 2008, p. 5387), amended with Law No. 10136 (11 / 05 / 2009) "For a change in the Law No. 9948 (07 / 07 / 2008)" "For reviewing the legal validity of the title for the agriculture land" (OJ No. 86, 2009, p. 3775), includes a special provision defining the state structures and deadlines for the fulfillment of this obligation (MoAFCP 2007d)

needs to be paid to land-use practices and income-earning opportunities available to rural households. In his study on the political ecology of Albania's land reform carried out in Southeast Albania, Stahl (2012) pointed out that there is intra- and inter-village differentiation caused by socioeconomic, political and biophysical determinants, resulting in two distinct patterns of land use, intensification and extensification¹⁰. He argues that land use differentiation was primarily a function of access to production factors, land, labor and capital, where the areas that generated the highest land rents from agriculture activities received the highest concentration of capital and labor (Stahl 2012: 46).

Land use patterns and intra- and inter-village differentiation were determined also by the overall changing social structure. In the early years of the post-socialist transition, the land reform emerged as a contributor to the maintenance of the rural landscapes, which later on underwent significant changes due to the intensive migration in and outside the country. Between 1991 and 2001 more than a fifth of the population moved toward large urban centers (INSTAT 2001) and between 2001 and 2011 for the first time the rural share of the population became smaller than the urban population (INSTAT 2011).

Furthermore, the role of the broader socio-economic-political and biophysical determinants on land use patterns and production modes that farmers employ should be considered in connection to the larger institutional set-up in which they interact.

The institutional impact. Despite the distribution of official titles, since the beginning of the reform, scholars identified property-right insecurity in different areas in Albania. Lemel (2000) found two types of tenure insecurity: formal and subjective insecurity. By "formal" insecurity he defined the insecurity coming from low availability of documentation, the registration discrepancies, inaccurate mapping, etc. Even after more than a decade since the beginning

of the reform, surveys carried in different parts of Albania still observe strong signs of formal insecurity on land rights (Mathijs 1997; Stahl et al 2009; MoAFCP 2007b). By "subjective" insecurity is understood the owner's perception on the insecurity of his / her property. Subjective property insecurity in Albania is affected by the unresolved issue of pre-collectivization owners, creating conflict within rural communities (Lemel 2000). Continual clashes are found in rural communities between those having the land titles of the land reform and those having inherited land before 1945 (pre-collectivization owners) in the villages (similar to Lemel 2000; Musabelliu et al 2004; Wheeler and Waite 2003). Another type of direct subjective insecurity for the actual farmers comes from the clash with squatters on private land. Such perception has implications on the changes done to the law of land distribution¹¹ and to the nationally unresolved issues of restitution and compensation of the land owners before 1945. The negative perception is also emphasized by mistrust towards the agencies in charge of managing property titles and the transfer procedures they employ (i.e. Immovable Property Right Offices, civil courts and notaries). This is relevant in the context of high levels of corruption (WB 2006; CRSSD 2005; Stahl et al 2009).

In a survey carried out by Zhllima and Imami (2011), tenure insecurity is found to be lower in plots acquired through customary rights (predominantly ancestral land), where there are no conflicting claims between post-collectivization and pre-1945 owners, as compared to plots acquired through state reform that exhibit these conflicts. Insecurity is still high (WB 2012) and is perpetuated also by the huge number of disputes arising in rural areas. The unresolved disputes have made that half of the cases to be pending in civil courts and, as consequence, often conflicts are managed by local and customary mediators (such as local village elders, other municipal level officers, religious leaders and NGOs) out

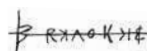
10) By intensification, Stahl (2012: 34) means "the shift inland use where the amount of capital and / or labor applied per unit of land increases", whereas by extensification the opposite is meant.

11) Since 1991 the legal basis of the land distribution has been the subject of various revisions. For example, Law 7501 of 19.07.1991 has had 14 revisions and many CM decisions have been made for its implementation, thus creating difficulties in understanding, accepting and implementing the legislation by the involved parties.

of court. A part of disputes ended dramatically. Statistics from the Ministry of Justice in 2013 revealed that since 1992 there have been 8000 victims of conflict over property.

Another outcome of the reform is the malfunctioning of the rural land market in Albania. Land consolidation has been seen from policy makers as a panacea for the low agricultural competitiveness in Albania and the land market as the main instrument of land consolidation (MoAF-CP 2007a). However, the distribution and registration of land did not stimulate land transfers as the legal incentives to sell or buy were lacking. Until 1995, land sales were legally prohibited, giving rise to illegal land markets. Legal interventions made in 1995 sanctioned the land sale mechanism, defining also the legal rules for the actors arranging a land transaction. Nevertheless, the land sale market remained very weak. Data and surveys from the first decade after the beginning of the reform (Wheeler and Waite 2003; Lemel 2000; Moor et al 1997; Kodderitzsch 1999) until recently (WB 2006; WB 2007; Deininger et al 2012) show a formal rural immovable property market scarcely developed in Albania. Studies found out that property rights insecurity in Albania have a negative impact in land sale / buy decision (Lemel 2000). Zhllima and Imami (2011) found that farmers prefer to purchase land plots previously held based on ancestral rights, which are perceived as more secure, as compared to simple official government titles that are not combined with ancestral rights. The high costs of finding plots with good combination of customary rights deriving from inheritance and formal rights stipulated from Law No. 7501 titles reduce the ability of sellers and buyers to make transactions on land. Another obstacle is the legal ignorance on land sale rights (Lusho and Papa 1998) and the farmers' strong perception of the high costs of the formal arrangements, complex administrative procedures and suboptimal land administration system (CRSSD 2006; Zhllima et al 2010; Stahl et al 2009; ILD 2008).

The impact on investments. Property right insecurity seems to be detrimental to land use and investment in land improvement and conservation, especially on long term impact decisions, such as the planting and construction of fruits trees and vineyards (Lemel 2000). There are a few studies focused on land investments and on the influence of insecurity of land rights in Albania. Zhllima and Imami (2011) found that almost two-thirds of farms in perennial crop plantations were made in plots that were perceived as very secure, as opposed to 5% that were invested in plots perceived as highly insecure. Such factors have caused the late development of the fruit sector. Similar differences were observed also in other types of investments (including light constructions, greenhouses and water irrigation pipes).



Conclusion

Although having a century of self-established state history, the history of Albanian land reforms is endowed with radical changes. This study reviews some of the most important changes in Albanian land tenure covering three types of government regimes: i) a traumatic monarchy established after WWI with high odds for land structural changes, but hampered by inherited land structure coming from the Ottoman Empire; ii) an autocratic regime led by a communist radical approach of land acquisition and collectivization (imported from a radically different agriculture system) and iii) a transition democracy state supporting a strong neoliberal land reform which was challenged by the institutions inherited from the two former regimes.

The description of these reforms, implemented by various types of states, being strong monarchic or weak and captured, is much less difficult to be viewed based on Wolf's conceptualization. Each emerging regime clashed and then cohabitated within the rural social texture mixed in the formal

and informal attitudes above rural assets. Thus, despite the westernized approach used by the monarchy of King Zog I and the intense proletarianization of the peasant during the communist regime, a strong rural familial economy persisted.

Each land reform was guided by different principles. The first one aimed to reduce the number of landless people by defending the position of the tenants and smoothing the situation through the intervention of capital. This was a very modern approach for a state with modest institutional memory, short administrative experience and high pressure from the large tenant families. The reform, although having a weak structural impact, was a good signal for continuing changes in land structures.

The second reform aimed at modernizing the agricultural sector through intensive investments in irrigation and drainage infrastructure, mechanization and input use. This was accompanied by drastic changes in farm structure and, more importantly, on property rights. Abolishment of private property was the most radical undertaking of the reform with significant impact on the rural landscape. Under this organizational constellation, the peasantry was transformed into simply a paid worker for the agricultural cooperatives operating under a hybrid mode of production, between (borrowing from Wolf 1982) capitalist and tributary modes. Although the state invested intensively not only in infrastructure, mechanization and technology, but also in propaganda using slogans such as “let us make the village as beautiful as the city” to attract labor force, the situation of the peasantry and the rural landscape did not see significant improvements.

The third reform faced various policy challenges and many debatable outcomes. The main policy challenge consisted in the choice of the reform, where three options – social equity, historical justice and minimal reform – were on the table, each facing resistance from the interested parties. The Albanian parliament went for the social

equity option distributing on equal shares to former cooperative and state farm workers. The main outcome of the reform was the disappearance of large landowners and the creation of a large number of farms, with a small farm size and highly fragmented land, a farm structure which has negatively affected high productivity and efficiency levels. On the other hand, it allocated land to a large number of the peasantry, making them, at least officially, owners of the land they had been working on for several decades. These structural changes turned them into a peasant-worker class who uses the land mostly for subsistence and tries to complement livelihoods with off-farm work or migration. Moreover, with persistent tenure insecurity brought about, in the best case, from the incapacity and lack of authority from the state, the peasantry has kept being used as a vote storehouse for political parties.

The post-reform attempts to consolidate land institutions, land rights and land markets have been failing due to a very fragmented legal base and a rent-seeking policy approach. The further alignment of the Albanian agriculture policies requires the establishment of a land register system and land right chain, as a measure for the regulation of contractual relations and absorption of investment funds. The existing strong differences between Albania and the EU average call for substantial investments so that the Albanian peasantry withstands the competitive pressures of trade openness toward the single market and globalization. If there are no changes in attitudes and policies from the governments, the rural areas will remain underdeveloped and potential benefits that derive from the EU integration processes may be lost. In the near future, the relations between the state and the peasantry, under the continuous pressure coming from EU institutions remain to be scrutinized further.



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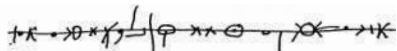
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"The Model Village". The Modernization Project of the Villages in Bulgaria (1937 - 1944)



Milena Angelova

Assistant Professor, Department of History

"Neofit Rilski" South-West University Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The article presents and analyzes the state policies pertaining to rural space in Bulgaria in the 1930s and 1940s. The research focus is on a project bearing the ambitious label of "The Model Village". The key objective of the program "The Model Village" emphasized the need of the village inhabitants (especially the young people) to adopt the modern hygienic habits, the rules of eating "healthily" and to recognize farm work as a professional activity.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian modernization, bulgarian rural space, "the model village", additional farming schools



Introduction

In the 1920s and 1930s, the agricultural and social problems were a priority in social discussions, as well as in the strategies of the ruling circles in Bulgaria. One particular issue was brought in the lime-light – the peasants' living conditions, raising the level of their educational and "cultural" standing, and the professionalization of agricultural labor. This article represents an attempt to analyze the state policies referring to the rural areas in Bulgaria in the 1930s and 1940s, as it is mentioned in a project bearing the ambitious label: "The Model Village".

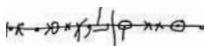
In recent years, the number of historical articles dealing with various aspects of the social changes that occurred in the Bulgarian rural areas after World War I has considerably increased. The lively interest in those issues has been inspired by researchers who have been trying to find the reasons behind the "belated modernization" phenomenon in Southeastern-European societies. In the context of the pre-socialistic transformational

processes in Southeastern Europe, there has been much talk about "the skipped agrarian revolution" and "development blockage" (Roth 1997: 26; Palairret 1985: 253-274; Sundhaussen 1989: 45-60). In view of these circumstances, the state policies regarding agriculture in the period ranging from the end of 19th century till the 1950s (an "era" considered stable in regards to its steady characteristics, its inner dynamics remaining unchangeable during the whole period) are to be perceived as a "list of historic gaps" (Wolf 2001: 277.) and a succession of deficiencies (Kassabova-Dintcheva 2002). According to these generalizations, the modernization thrusts come to Southeastern Europe always and only from the outside. Pursuant to them, the failure of modernization, however, is always interculturally determined and it is explained through "pervasive traditionalism" and the "unwillingness to change". Even when innovative changes are suggested (social mobility, educational strategies, etc.), they are always presented as contradictory to the attitude towards these innovations. Consideration shall be given a priori from a static rural way of life that, in these stud-

ies, is eventually assessed as “a stronghold of backwardness and traditional conformism” (Kassabova-Dintcheva 2002: 238-239). This article offers a different perspective to the common notion of the rural community of the time as a benighted stronghold of misery, diseases and ignorance.

The key term that appears in the article is “agrarian modernization”, which is to be understood as a functional interaction of not only farming, but also of social and cultural reforms making their way into the prevailing small farming practices and the traditional lifestyle of the rural population. This term is used to denote the process of interaction between the “new” and the “old” trends in the economic, social and cultural sphere – a tendency which has its effect on the peasants, as well as on the experts in the spheres mentioned (Wolf 1994: 71).

The objective here is not to reconstruct some general picture or a theoretical model on the social aspects of the “modernization” of the Bulgarian village between the wars. Only some elements of this process are presented; hypotheses on the effects of the social transformations that took place in the rural regions are suggested, and some definite conclusions are attempted mainly to enrich the historical picture of the subject matter.



“The Model Village” Program and Its Contexts

At the beginning of the 20th century Bulgaria was a typical rural country of small and middle-scale farming and prevailing peasant population. The basic economic entity was the peasant household which rested on the distribution of labor within the family. The traditional family and kinship circles played an important role in the social support of children, elderly people and disabled persons, while the mutual aid of fellow-villagers formed the second important column of the traditional social network. In this seemingly static picture, however, strong internal dynamics and big regional

differences could be observed. Many rural regions were involved in economic and cultural modernization processes. Although the majority of the population did remain rural, Bulgaria underwent intensive economic and social transformations which introduced modern industry, transportation, communication and new urban social strata as well (Angelova 2013: 75).

After World War I, the reformatory state policy concerning the rural population considerably enlarged its scope. The public eye focused on the social problems which the peasants would experience (Mollov 1940: 5-9; Kalapchiev 1946:5-6). In the 1920s the movement for the “economic and cultural rise of the village” turned into a “social trend” and public ideology, and in the 1930s “the improvement of the conditions of life in the village” became the leading motif of the movement (Grancharov 1930: 171-180). Gradually, some important problems were brought forward: the living standards in the rural areas, the peasants’ educational and “cultural” sophistication, the transformation of farm labor into a professional occupation, etc. (Wolf 1994: 72-86, Popova 2002: 171.).

In this decade, the public transparency of those issues got even bigger and numerous public organizations strove to provide solutions. What is more, during public debates, the peasants would define themselves as active participants in the processes rather than objects of influence. A relevant agency consisting of experts in “the rural lifestyle” was established at the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties (Popov 1938: 171-183; Raduchev 1941: 15-17).

The agrarian policy of the Bulgarian governments after 1934 implemented projects set back in 1920s – attempts at radical agrarian and social legislation during the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union (1920-1921). What is different from the summer of 1934 is the specific institutional “atmosphere” – the imposition of centralized bases in managing the changed conditions on social activities. The result of this is, seemingly, the strange partnership between

the state regulation and the reserved capacity for autonomous initiatives in the social sector as a whole. Here one should also add the ideas for the implementation of "expert management" of all managerial levels, especially at the municipal level¹.

The economic structure of rural areas in this period is also subject to an ongoing development. Indeed, these processes cannot be connected to absolutely all rural areas. It is different for different regions and villages, but the general trends are related to the share of intensive crops in agriculture, as well as to the increase in linking farmers to market mechanisms².

It should also be noted the related to these processes increasing differentiation and professionalization of agriculture, expansion of craftsmanship and increasing the share of the new jobs and commercial industries such as electrotechnics, carpentry, photography studios, etc. not only in the city, but in the village as well (Popova 1998: 113-116).

In the 1930s various organizations of organizations of "the third sector" in the rural areas became noticeable (Gavrilova, Elenkov 1998: 111-124). Numerous branches of various educational, charitable, Red Cross and other organizations and companies were established (Kasabova-Dintcheva 2000: 136). The focus of the current public discussions was also changed. Since the early 1930s, the more abstract-sounding rhetoric of "agriculture", "the agrarian sector", etc. has been increasingly replaced by that of "the rural family and / or household" and "the farmer" (Stoyanov 1943: 101-107). In addition to this, "the experts" working in the village already see the villagers not only as an object, subject to "modernization", but as active participants in "ameliorative endeavors" (Aleksiev 1941: 162).

It is not without significance that since the mid-1930s, as a result of the first major "agricultural and sociological" studies, there has already been some clarity on the specific parameters of the living conditions of the rural population in the country. In the second half of the 1920s, a group of young agrono-

mists, working with prof. Yanaki Mollov, initiated the beginning of agrarian sociology in Bulgaria (Uzunov 1941: 10). It became institutionalized with the opening of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute in 1935 (Kalapchiev 1946)³. In this institute, just as in the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, "a department for studying the living conditions in the village" was formed (Birnikov 1943: 39-44). The team working there began conducting the "agricultural and sociological research" (Kalapchiev 1946: 27-32). In the next few years, this gave specialists from the toddling agrarian sociology in Bulgaria the possibility to hold the first large-scale studies on living conditions in villages, on rural household budgets and expenditure of labor in households. Based on these data, "better" state strategies were also developed (Mocheva 1938)⁴. Few people from the Agricultural Economics Research Institute carried out their research through the assistance of agronomic services and teachers in existing additional agricultural schools in the country. Experts were trying to determine the surroundings in which the rural population lived – housing, their distribution, hygiene, problems related to the nutrition of the rural population, etc. (Mocheva 1938: 147-149)⁵.

Often the contradictory incentives and claims demanded more and more from the rural residents. This includes imperatives that permeate due to the influence of urban centers in the everyday practices of the village residents. All these elements entangle the multidimensional threads of the processes that a researcher has described as a kind of modernizing "colonization of rural worlds" - through processes of individualization, commercialization, medialization, the expansion of educational opportunities for the peasants (Langthaler, Sieder 2000: 8).



The "Model Village" Program (1937-1944)

At the beginning of 1937, as part of the highly popular movement for the "economic and cultural rise of the village", the

1) Naredba-zakon za selskite obštini /Decree-law of rural communities/ /Decree 179 since 29 July 1934, SG, issue 100, since 3 August 1934.

2) See Central State Archive, F.5051, d. 1 – Agricultural and Economic Research Institute. The collection contains around 500 "household accounting books" from the whole country. The total revenue and expenditure of the surveyed households can be traced within a few years (most of them are for the period between 1936-1939).

3) The institute was organized within the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property. Prof. Y. Mollov was curator and director of the institute until 1941; between 1941-1943 – A. Uzunov and until 1946 – G. Kalapchiev.

4) In sociological research on "rural agricultural household" of the 1930s and the dealings with problems of the "Bulgarian peasant", the main focus is related to the "cost of labor" of the rural housewife – at home and in the business operation. In this direction, the most representative study is that of Hristina Mocheva "Rural agricultural household in Bulgaria in 1935/1936 (budget, situation and cost of labor)", Sofia, 1938.

5) The study was conducted between 1935-1936 and it concerns 199 villages with data of 939 households /at an average of 6 people per household.

6) State Archive – Sofia, F1158k, a. u. 30, l. 298-299 – Church board-Dolina Banya, District of MIPH, Department of Community Care since 18. IX.1936; Public support, book 17-18, 1936, p. 531-531.

7) Towards the program of model villages – Model Village, year II, 1942, issue 9, 10.

8) Ordinance No37358 – Ordinances of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, Department of Agricultural Education, Department on the Custom in the Village, 1940, issue 44.

9) Ibid.

“Model Village” Project was launched in 11 communes⁶. Within less than five years, the program had already covered more than 110 rural communes on the entire Bulgarian territory, and, until the beginning of 1944, it was at its height⁷. Along with the change of the political regime in the fall of 1944, the enthusiasm about the whole Model-Village idea started to fade away until it finally died out around 1948.

The legislation of model households and villages after 1937 envisaged work in at least one village and three households in it in every district of the country (after 1941 and in the “new lands”)⁸. The final selection of the model village for each district was determined by a committee whose members included the regional agriculture chief or the chief in agricultural education, the regional custom agronomist, the district agronomist, the district doctor, the district engineer, the district manager, the district school inspector, the district forester. Once the committee had established the “model village” municipality, together with the mayor, they would develop a 3-year specific working program⁹.

The key objective of the program emphasized the need of the village inhabitants (especially the young people) to adopt the modern hygienic habits of the time, the rules of eating “healthily” and to recognize the farm work as a professional activity. The set of measures that would ensure a “better atmosphere” not only in one’s home, but also in the whole village, included improving the infrastructure, providing for sewers and bettering the water-supply, exploring the possibilities for at least partial electrification, building public health centers, as well as health consultative stations, bakeries, kindergardens, playgrounds and summer resorts. These small-scale local activities were to be organized at the initiative of central government institutions (Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, the Ministry of Interior and Public Health) and the active participation of rural communities and local “public” organizations (societies, cooperatives, committees).

Provisions were made also for the establishment of a practice-oriented educational system in the villages by organizing a network of so-called additional farming schools (Angelova 2003: 50-76). Specialized education was perceived by ideologists of public programs for the village as a significant modernization factor. It was considered the most important lever by which the new achievements of the agricultural science and technology, modern hygienic standards could reach more villagers. They should become usable and be introduced in understandable and applicable forms. A possibility of a large-scale “farming and household education”, suitable for village boys and girls, was seen in the enlargement of the network, including the additional farming schools established after 1924. Assigning the label “Model” to some schools depended very much on their proximity to the villages in the rural commune (Birnikov 1942; Wolf 1994: 71-86). In the early 1940s, such additional farming schools were set up in about 240 rural communes on the Bulgarian territory. At those schools, young graduates from junior high-school underwent a two-year course of training and education. They were later supposed to be dealing with agricultural production and household activities. About 83,000 graduates from those additional farming schools became the most important experts who were expected to carry out the “Model Village” Project – those young men and women were well-acquainted with the modern hygienic standards and knew how to eat healthily, how to make their farm profitable and so on. These people were also expected to serve as examples for their co-villagers (Birnikov 1943: 16).



External Influences on the „Model Village“ Program

The model “fever” received a stimulus also from outside; at that time such projects were a widespread trend all over Europe. The program in Bulgaria could not avoid outside influences that would come through

international organizations functioning in a relevant sphere and through the help offered by Bulgarian specialists in rural economy, who knew how to apply specific scientific models (Angelova 2008: 81-85). In the "Model Village" Project or, at least in its earlier version, some elements borrowed from the practices of the American Home Bureaus are to be noted (Mocheva 1941: 11-20; Mocheva 1941: 155). And this "borrowing" was rather intentional and not accidental – the project draft had been elaborated together with experts from the Ministry of Agriculture (who had been given the opportunity to specialize for a couple of months in the USA prior to drafting the project) and representatives of the American Near East Foundation in Bulgaria (Angelova 2005: 112-125). In 1935, an agreement between the Ministry of Interior and Public Health and the American Near East Foundation had already been concluded. This agreement emphasized the experimental economic and healthcare activities to be carried out in a couple of villages, which would later lay the foundations of the "Model Village" Program¹⁰. The Foundation was paying much attention to the sanitary centers in the villages, including the "model" ones. The program of the Near East Foundation for Bulgaria called the public's attention also to activities aiming at organizing model medical centers (both in urban and in rural areas) that would serve as practice centers for those doctors who were studying at the Foundation sanitary schools¹¹.

In the late 1930s and the early 1940s the "Musterdorf" German Plan came to influence the "Model Village" Project and, as a result, experts had already been sent to Berlin (mainly) to gain experience mainly (Petev 1943: 66-78; Uzunov 1941: 183-188; Vitanov 1941: 21-32). But the coincidences here are limited to the project names only. From a functional perspective, the German move-



Fig 1. General uplift demonstration in the rural community of Divlia, 1938. Summer kindergarten – Bulgarian central state archive, 3k, 15, 241.

ment prioritized primarily improvements in the technical parameters of the agricultural sector. As regards the "Model Village" Project, the emphasis was laid mostly on hygiene. That is why it was the women living in the rural areas (and especially the young women) who were the main target client in this project that sought to introduce changes mainly in the domestic sphere ("the lifestyle in villages"). Besides, the Bulgarian version was, to some degree, free from the totally standardizing zest of the "Musterdorf". The Bulgarian "public" agronomists would often share ideas and experience with their Romanian colleagues, who had ambitiously named their project "Cultural Hearths" (Todorova-Yoncheva 1943: 92-94; Gusti 1940: 3-18). What the two projects had in common was that they both aimed at mastering the strengths of the intellectuals living in the rural areas (civil workers, teachers, priests, etc.), as well as of the regular village population in order for the "social reforms", as provided by the Romanian state policy, to be put into practice.

In the process of elaborating the modernization strategies in regards to the Bulgarian village, the experience of the Italian "allowances" (Hadzhiev 1942: 13-20) and the 1928 Czechoslovak program "Concerns for a healthy village" (Burdzhova 1936: 172-176) were also taken into consideration.

It seems that what the experts cared most about was the implementation of the issues

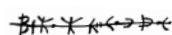
10) Scientific archive – Bulgarian Scientific Academy, f. 178K, op. 1, a.u. 85, l. 1-9 – Private archives of Yanaki Mollov (1884 – 1948).

11) Central State Archive, f. 372K, op. 1, a.u. 582, p. 42-44.



Fig 2. General uplift demonstration in the rural community of Divlia, 1938. Examination of babies at the Child Welfare Station – Bulgarian central state archive, 3k, 15, 241.

concerning public health and hygiene. Thus, the important human side of the historical changes was introduced, for it is exactly the change inside the individual which precedes all other changes to follow on a major scale (Dimitrov 1941). Some might view this as “a policy of trivial facts” which, however, is deeply connected with the anticipation of an impending change.



Conclusion

Before the program was terminated, the experts that had been involved in it still managed to put into practice some of their main ideas. Despite the fact that modern equipment for land cultivation was hardly within the means of the Bulgarian peasant's pocket at that time and one could hardly afford to

provide one's dwelling with everything necessary for a “modern hygienic home”, more and more people got informed about the existence of such possibilities, and were, to some extent, ready to use them, for they were able to see that they were actually effective (Birnikov 1942). This happens to be one of the biggest accomplishments of the “Model Village” Project and also one of the most important changes of the “peasant's” attitude towards the world. Even though a considerable part of the peasants did not have the possibility to put into practice the recommended innovations, the project still offered them the chance to obtain information about those reforms; the project literally put them up on display in a rather standardized form – in model villages and households. In this sense, something that can be described through an ingenious definition of modernization as “a revolution of growing expectation” actually took place (Roth 1998: 226-227).

The modern norms, as offered by the “Model Village” project, were gradually turning into “normal” ones for many young people living in villages, and for the members of the youngest generation, those norms had become the only behaviouristic model they would follow. So, as a result of the ever-evolving dimensions of the “rise of the village” programs, the Bulgarian peasants found themselves deeply involved in such projects that were taking place at that time in other parts of the world as well.

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Author: Liviu Măntescu

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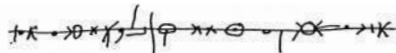
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The Ecology of an Agrarian Question Ecological Crises and the Coming of Age of Capitalism in Vrancea



Liviu Măntescu

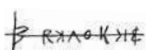
Researcher at Integrative Research Institute on Human-Environment Systems, Humboldt University of Berlin and Assistant Researcher at „Francisc I. Rainer” Anthropology Institute of the Romanian Academy

ABSTRACT

“Let us begin with the obvious. The Agrarian Question is also the Question of Nature, and, therefore, it is also the Question of Ecological Crises in the modern world” (Moore 2008, 57). But it is not because it is obvious that the ecological dimension of the agrarian question has been omitted in the literature until now. The focus on the political role of peasantry and on the emergence of new class struggles as capitalism made its way in the rural concealed the ecology from ‘The Agrarian Question’. This study traces the ecological implications of the development of capitalism in Vrancea region, Romania, from mid-18th century until the present day. It shows that the capitalist transition in the countryside also means a change of socio-ecological relations, namely a change of the social representation of Nature, a change of the modes of appropriating Nature, and a change of the institutions that govern economic action in the natural environment. All these changes are visible in the dynamics of the common property regime in Vrancea as market relations changed in the region. The study concludes that the ecological consequences of an agrarian question can be addressed systematically following the dynamics in the property regimes. Such a systematic analysis can help to better fathom transnational politics for agriculture and their implications for the natural environment in world-wide capitalism.

KEYWORDS

Ecological crisis, capitalist development, common property, Vrancea, Romania.



Introduction

I follow Culiță on the steep paths of the mountain in the forest neighbouring the village. The forest around us is no more than 60 years old. ‘When communists came to power in the ‘50s, Culiță recounts, the few remaining forests after the spoliation of the Italian and Austrian logging companies was chopped off to pay Romania’s war debt to the USSR.’ Along the Putna River the rusty railway of the first logging companies in Vrancea has been uncovered by last year’s floods. The communist party re-forested the area with more productive species of trees, thus changing the landscape and the biotic struc-

ture of the region. The forest grew anew were ‘mud was sliding down the hills’, as people remember. Eleven years after the fall of the communist regime in Romania, the villages in Vrancea got their communal forests back from the state. Following the restitution process, the post-communist nouveau riches build their political and financial capital by logging massively in the communal forests. Along with the property restitution process, new protected areas have been established in Vrancea to meet Romanian’s acquis for the European Union integration. The story of the agrarian question in Vrancea is a story of a slow transformation of property regimes as induced by the dynamics in production, exchange and credit relations along the past



Fig. 1. Contemporary Romania. Source: <http://www.romaniatourism.com/>, used with the consent of Romania Tourist Office, New York.

1) Țara Vrancei means, literally, Vrancea Country. It represents a small ethno-cultural region, among many others (e.g. Țara Bârsei, Țara Oașului etc.), along the Carpathian Mountains. Some of these ethno-cultural regions from Moldavia are known in early Romanian historiography as peasant republics that do not pursue orders from the Crown nor juridical guidance, and pay a collective tax to the Crown which people themselves establish. Dimitrie Cantemir mentions at the beginning of 18th century three such peasant republics within the Moldovan state: Câmpulung, Tigheci and Vrancea (Cantemir 1909 [1716]: 221-3. ▶

250 years. This story has remained encrypted in Vrancea's natural environment.

Țara Vrancei, or Vrancea¹, is a region in the Carpathian Mountains bordering Transylvania in the West and Walachia in the South. As part of the Moldovan Voivodship, and under the Ottoman overlordship², people in Vrancea had military duties for defending the South-Western border of the medieval Moldovan state. In return, they were granted communal property rights in the region, equal access rights among villages and individuals to the natural resources, mainly pastures, wood, salt and watercourse for mills, as well as the status of free peasants. This customary joint-ownership property regime in Vrancea, characterized by the lack of shares and the prohibition of individual entitlements, which I will discuss more at length below, is known as *devălmășie* (Brezulescu 1905, Stahl 1958). Until mid-19th century, no commercial roads or important customs were to be found in the proximity of Vrancea. This geographical and institutional isolation (Geană 1987) was hindered the development of capitalist market relations based on credit, commodification, creativity and competition (Beckert 2012).

Classic studies in economic history (Braudel 1982, Wolf 1957, Blum 1971) agree that the dynamics of economic relations are reflected in the dynamics of markets, as well as in the dynamics of property regimes. As the introductory study of this volume shows,

most studies dealing with an agrarian question in different parts of the globe address issues related to the alteration of the production relations and the political role of peasantry. Apart from cases of clear land dispossession, very few studies address agricultural differentiation in its dynamics as property regimes and economic relations (such as production, exchange and credit) change.

Hence, the agrarian question appears poorly formulated when conceived only as how capitalism affects agriculture and to whom the peasants offer their political support. As McMichael notes (McMichael 1997), the old productivist view on the agrarian question is no longer adequate, as food and environmental security are issues of global concern. What is more, the agrarian question lacked a thorough analysis of the ecological consequences of capitalist development in the countryside since its first formulations (Moore 2008, 57-8).

Kautsky, for instance, mentions only in passing the issue of 'soil exhaustion' as capitalist markets expand around the globe (Kautsky 1988 [1899], 214-15). Later on, Lenin (1961 [1901], 155-6), Bukharin (2013 [1925], 108-12), and Komarov (1936, 230-2) asserted that the limits of the capitalist development in the countryside are also set by the limits of soil productivity, which could be surmounted by the use of chemical fertilizers. But the consequences of substituting compost with artificial fertilizers in rebuilding the natural cycles of nutrients were not systematically addressed by these early political economists. As we have shortly passed the urban turn³, and as food and environmental security are top priorities on the international political agendas (Müller 2013), it is time to seriously consider the ecological implications of the agrarian question.

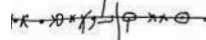
The few studies which have unwrapped the problem (Moore 2000, 2003a,b,c, 2008; Foster 1999; McMichael 1997; McLaughlin 1998) address only the macro level of analysis. Moore focuses on the ecological crises that accompanied global development of capitalism from medieval to modern times.

Foster looks at the environmental consequences of the industrialization of agriculture and analyses the ever-increasing social and ecological rifts between urban and rural societies. Based on Marx's account of such rifts (Marx 1991, 949-50), Foster shows how Marx's *theory of the metabolic rift* (ibid) could be very useful in analysing the present biodiversity loss as induced by the increasing global agricultural industry. McLaughlin (ibid), on the other hand, argues that the essentialist philosophical foundation of the agrarian question is one important reason why ecology is omitted when analysing the dynamics of agricultural systems.

In this context, the micro aspects of the problem remain understudied. Analysing the ecology of the agrarian question at a micro level means bringing the actors and their cultural, political, and economic contexts under scrutiny. It also means to circumscribe the research onto a well determined geographical space. A micro approach can, therefore, complement the macro perspective by explaining the concrete mechanisms of the observed macro changes. In this regard, Vrancea is a good case in point for South-Eastern Europe. Vrancea is a case of a dynamic common property regime which survived until today (Stahl 1939, 1958, 1959, 1965, 1969, 1980; Măntescu 2006, 2012; Vasile and Măntescu 2009), albeit the tumultuous geopolitical changes in this part of Europe which re-shaped the agricultural relations at the local level (Matl 1965, Constantiniu 1972, Giordano this volume, Zhllima and Rama this volume). In Vrancea, the structural changes of the property regime have been documented since mid-18th century. By following these changes, we can understand how capitalist market principles, namely credit, commodification, creativity and competition, got instituted in Vrancea, and how the natural environment was impacted by these changes.

The following pages depict the most significant moments in the transformation of common property regimes and market relations in Vrancea, from 1755 until the

present days. They show how these changes impacted the natural environment in this small region from South-Eastern Europe. The *longue durée* approach is complemented by ethnographic data that I collected from December 2003 until July 2014 (mostly during semester vacations, except for July 2009 – June 2010 when I undergone the fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation) in one village from Vrancea, namely Păulești.



Dynamics of Economic Relations and Common Property Regime in Vrancea

A property regime is a set of rules and regulations which mediates peoples' access to (natural) resources (von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009). The common property regime in Vrancea, *devălmășie*, underwent several important changes in the past 250 years. However, this joint-ownership property regime still embodies the lack of shares and the prohibition of individual entitlements, as well as indivisibility and inalienability of the common property. The changes in the property regimes in Vrancea were recorded in written documents, as well as in the morphology of the natural environment. As the following pages show, these changes are closely related to the development of market relations in the region. In the following, I will depict the most significant moments in

► 1) The political status of these peasant republics was reliant on their common property regime and on their military duties as border regions.

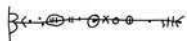
2) Moldova, Walachia and Transylvania were during the late medieval period off and on under Ottoman overlordship.

3) The urban turn refers to more than 50% of world population living in the urban areas. Recently, the oversimplistic statistical understanding of 'the urban turn' has been criticized by Brenner and Schmid (2014).



Fig. 2.
Vrancea District.
Source: www.ziare-sireviste.ro/images/harta/vrancea.jpg
The dark grey line approximates the eastern perimeter of Țara Vrancei.

the transformation of property regime and market relations in Vrancea and I will show how these changes impacted the natural environment in this small region from South-Eastern Europe.



The Repartition of Common Property among Villages

Vrancea was well-known as a pastoralist region in the historiography of the Moldovan Voivodeship (Cantemir [1716] 1909, 222-3). The pastures in Vrancea were common property for the entire region, thus the flocks could pasture anywhere, disregarding the village they pertained to (Stahl 1958). High inequalities among the number of animals pertaining to different villages led people to go to court in order to have the common property of the region divided among villages. The trial took place in 1755 and was mediated by the Voivode of Moldavia himself.

As free peasants, people in Vrancea were not paying individual taxes to landlords, but a collective one for the entire Vrancea region. This collective tax, called *cislă*, was paid in money directly to the crown. The contribution of villages to *cislă* was made according to the amount of pastures each village was using from the communal property of the region. How exactly individuals were contributing to *cislă*, we do not know for sure, but some documents (Stahl 1958: 146-50) attest that by mid-18th century, some more wealthy peasants were using their contribution to *cislă* to acquire more rights to pastures in the name of their villages, letting some other villages with little or no pastures at all. Thus, *cislă* was used as an instrument of appropriating more rights by some wealthier peasants in the name of their villages: the more contribution to *cislă*, the more rights to access resources for the villages with wealthier peasants. As a consequence, the equalitarian rights of access among villages that had been guaranteed by the crown in return for military services were slowly fading. The trial re-established the equalitarian rights among

villages by granting each village a well-defined area of common property in the neighbouring mountains. Thus, according to the documents we know, the common property in Vrancea has been divided among villages since 1755.

This episode coincides with the development of an international market in the nearby town of Focșani. Focșani is situated at about 40 km East from Vrancea, at the border with Wallachia. In 1750, a new custom was created in Focșani (Neagu and Mazăre 2009: 14) marking a re-animation of trade relations between the two Voivodeships. Numerous merchants from different parts of Europe and the Ottoman Empire came for business in the new market of Focșani and the small town quickly became a reference point on the commercial route between Iași, the capital of Moldova, and Bucharest, the capital of Wallachia (Iorga 1925).

At the 1774 census, in Focșani there were 170 households, out of which 25 were merchants of different ethnicities, including German, Serbian, Armenian and Jewish. The census specifies that in Focșani there was an official translator for juridical issues, including economic agreements (Neagu and Mazăre idem). This clearly shows the international character of the new market. Jewish merchants had a prominent role in the development of the market in Focșani. In his book dedicated to the contribution of Jewish families to the commercial relations in Focșani, Neagu notes that in 1785 the Jewish, Armenian and Romanian merchants from Moldova had same privileges (*hrisovoliți*) (Neagu 2010, 9).

The episode of the first partition of the common property of Vrancea among villages shows how high inequality in agricultural production among villages occurred in Vrancea in late Moldavian feudal times. This happened concomitant with the development of an international market in the nearby town of Focșani. This episode in the dynamics of common property regime in Vrancea also gives insights into what type of agricultural production Vrancea had at

that time - most production was related to sheep⁴. Yet no remarks regarding over-exploitation of pastures or other ecological disequilibria due to intensive pasturing are to be found in the documents. The restricted trade and credit relations seem to have contributed to the ecological balance of the region in this time period.



Neguțătoria Vrancei - The Merchant for Vrancea

In the case of Vrancea, the political, financial, administrative and juridical issues were regulated by *Obștei Vrancei* which was formed by the representatives, called *vechili*, of all villages of the region. This sort of 'senate' of Vrancea was not a permanent assembly, but rather a loosely-organized group that gathered whenever necessary (Stahl 1939, vol. I, 290).

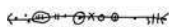
The economic role of the *vechili* was first related to trade and financial issues. Until the late 1830s, people in Vrancea were trading only with one trader, called *Neguțătoria Vrancei* - *The Merchant for Vrancea*⁵. The clause of the trade and the period during which *Obștei Vrancei* contracted with this unique merchant was established by the *vechili*. But as a rule, the Merchant for Vrancea was buying products under the market price with the obligation to secure the appropriation of all merchandize produced by the villages (Sava 1931, 36, 49, 50, 56). Moreover, the relation between the trader and the *vechili* was supervised by the state.

This unique trader was empowered by the Moldovan Voivode to lend money to the *vechili* in the name of the people of Vrancea, only up to 10.000 lei. H.H. Stahl states that "this traditional law had, at first, the role to prevent the penetration of traders and pawnbrokers, so that Vrancea's board of administration could better control one single trader" (Stahl 1958, 177). But Stahl, as a left-wing social scientist, publishing in Romania in the midst of the soviet censure of the 1950's, might have overestimated

the role of the unique trader for Vrancea. In a document dated 22 November 1806 (published in Sava 1931, 49-50), the *vechili* complained to the Voivode that people in Vrancea hankered to trade with other traders as well. This shows that some people in Vrancea were eager to trade more and make more profit than others, despite the restrictions imposed by the state.

Also related to trade relations, an important aspect is the commercialization of salt. Salt was a precious product in Europe up until modern times. Vrancea's mountains are rich in salt deposits. As already mentioned, the peasants in Vrancea had free access to salt mines according to the common property regime. Yet the peasants were not allowed to sell salt outside of Vrancea. A document as late as 1853, issued by Voivode Grigori Alexandru Ghica, reinforces this restriction. It states that, according to the vernacular rights of access, people of Vrancea are allowed to take as much salt as they need for their households, but any commercialization of salt, in or outside Moldova, is prohibited. Those who break the law will lose the right of free use of salt and will have to pay a fee double the price of the salt they had smuggled (document published in Cotea 2003, 42).

Therefore, credit and trade relations were strictly regulated in Vrancea by mid-19th century. The existence of one merchant to regulate the external trade in Vrancea, as well as the credit policies imposed by the state also meant a controlled level of agricultural production in the region. What is more, salt, the most precious resource in Vrancea at that time, remained outside the market realm until late 19th century.



Roznovanu Trial

In 1801, the Voivode Constatin Ipsilanti (1799-1801) donated the entire Vrancea region - with all its villages - to Iordache Roset Roznovanu, a high ranking boyar. The board of Vrancea, *Obștei Vrancei*, contested the decision by claiming that Vrancea is

4) We find this characteristic of agricultural production one hundred years later as well. Conea (Conea 2003, 44), for instance, notes that in 1852, of all 61 departments of Moldova, Vrancea had the most numerous sheep herds.

5) The documents I know which refer to the single merchant of Vrancea are from 16 March 1800, 22 November 1806, 25 November 1806, published in Sava 1931, 36, 49, 50, 56, and all use this denomination. Yet these documents present complaints of the *vechili* with regard to the fairness of the trade relations. Later, in a document dated 12 January 1837 (ibid, 156), we find that one village from Vrancea had its own merchant.

6) After examining several other documents from that time, Stahl concludes that the number is eloquent for the military capacity of Vrancea.

not, and never had been, feudal land. Therefore, the *vechili* went to Iași, situated at about 300 km away, to complain to the Voivode. According to what people reported to H.H. Stahl in 1927, 800 horsemen from Vrancea left together with the *vechili* to ask for justice (Stahl 1981, 69)⁶. The trial lasted for 13 years, during which the *Obștea Vrâncii* spent an impressive amount of money: 78.500 lei.

The accounting documents were found by Stahl and Sava in 1927 in the house of one of the descendants of the *vechili* (Sava 1931, XII; Stahl 1981, 64-8). 25.000 out of the total amount were borrowed money: 10.000 from the Merchant for Vrancea, with little interest, and 15.000 from a merchant from Iași for which *Obștea Vrâncii* had to pay interest of 4.000. Around the year 1806, a goat in the nearby market of Focșani varied between 3,23 and 5 lei (cf. a document from 1806 published in Sava 1931, 50). If we approximate the price of a goat in 1806 to 4 lei, then *Obștea Vrâncii* spent for this trial the equivalent of 19.625 goats. And this was only one of the trials that Vrancea was involved in at the beginning of the 19th century.

Yet some villages contributed with more money to the trial than others (Stahl 1958, 150-3), and in 1816 a new redistribution of the common property of the region among the villages took place. This redistribution was not free of tumultuous negotiations and new redistributions of the common property among villages took place in 1817, 1818 and 1840 (Stahl 1958, 153-60).

These successive redistributions of the common property in Vrancea impacted considerably the natural environment. Stahl (ibid, 163) analyses the difference between the use categories of different territories pertaining to villages. His analysis reveals "a progressive deforestation" (idem), as well as the transformation of former pastures into agricultural use between 1755 and 1816-1817-1818 and 1840.

In Vrancea, the common land was qualitatively divided, and still is, in four categories of use: *frunte* - the alpine pastures; *munte* - the forested areas; *codrii merii*,

dense deep forest, sometimes pristine forest; and *frunză* - the pastures next to a watercourse (Stahl ibid, 146). Many territories known as *munți* (pl. from *munte*, forested areas and pastures) become '*frunze*' (pl. from *frunză*), while other *munți* become mowing places for hay used in individual households. Also *codrii merii* diminished considerably between 1755 and 1840. Therefore, Stahl concludes that very few territories have the same use in 1840 as in 1755.

Before moving to the next section, a few important political events with regard to the overall historical context of the Moldovan Voivodeship between 1840 and 1890 are to be mentioned. In 1834 the trade between Moldova and Walachia was liberalized; in 1848 the custom in Focșani between the two voivodeships was eliminated and in 1859 the two united under the name Romania. In 1864 the administrative reform of Alexandru Iona Cuza Voivode established, following the French administrative model, the communes as the state's basic administrative unit. As Stahl's (1939) and Sava's (1931) studies show, in Vrancea, the former *vechili* became leaders of the newly-established communes. In 1865 the parliament of Romania adopted the first constitution and the civil code, where private property was defined as individual property. This administrative reform had a considerable impact at local level as transnational logging companies arrived in Vrancea by the 1890s.

The Transnational Logging Companies

As soon as the Allies (United Kingdom, Ottoman Empire and France) defeated Russia, the Crimean War (1853-1856) finally came to an end. As a result, Western transnational companies were free to extract raw materials and trade goods in the territories around the Black Sea. The liberalization of trade relations in the Black Sea region had a significant impact on Vrancea. With the arrival of transnational logging companies, forests acquired an increased economic value in the region.

Transnational logging companies established in Vrancea in 1893. This means that by this year the companies had offices and permanent employees in some villages. Yet previous economic relations had existed before this year⁷. Anyhow, starting with 1893, according to village hall documents, the foreign logging companies became a permanent presence in Vrancea. All the administrative personnel and forestry workers were foreign, mostly Austrian and Italian.

When the representatives of the transnational logging companies arrived in Vrancea, they encountered a peculiar legal system based on common property rights for accessing forest resources. This state of art was not covered by the existent state law, the Civil Code only recognizing individual private property and not common private property (Sava 1931; Stahl 1958). What is more, common property rights were not marketable. But as Stahl and Sava show (*idem*), since 1878 some local leaders, mostly the leaders of the newly-established village communes, some former *vechili*, had already started to trade use rights in the name of the community and retained the financial benefits for themselves. A new bourgeoisie was to be born in Vrancea.

Stahl and Sava show (Stahl 1959, 208-209; Sava 1931, XXXVIII) that by the beginning of 1900 there was already a competition among various foreign logging companies to acquire individual use-rights in Vrancea's forests, or to simply rent the entire mountains from the villages' elite, both strategies unlawful with regard to Vrancea's customary rights. Such companies were *Putna Forest* from London, *Țișița Company* (belonging the Grödl Baron Brothers from Budapest), and the *Anonym Romanian Forestry Society* (ARFS) based in Bucharest. Interestingly enough, Take Ionescu, Romanian Prime-Minister in 1910 and member of the liberal party, was the lawyer of the *Țișița Company*, while the ARFS belonged to Alexandru Marghiloman, member of the Conservative Party, later on, in 1918, also Prime-Minister.

What it is interesting at this point is

the absence of the local institution *Obște* *Vrâncii* from the negotiation with the transnational logging companies. The dissolution of this regional institution, which acted in the name of the confederation of villages in Vrancea, is analysed by Stahl in detail in the three volumes of his *Contribuții*. His conclusion is that the slow disappearance of *Obște* *Vrâncii* is due to the erosion of the communitarian spirit in Vrancea as capitalist economic relations made their way into the region. But, as the post-communist section detailed below shows, this answer is not satisfactory.

The lack of jurisprudence mediation between Vrancea's customary property regime, *devălmășie*, and the modern Civil Code, favoured the companies. *Devălmășie* was pictured as a sign of social backwardness in the public political discourse. Take Ionescu, for example, puts it very clear in a discourse in the Romanian parliament in 1910: "the status of joint-ownership is against the natural social order, and the progress stays only in individual ownership" (quoted in Stahl 1959, 213). Take Ionescu was pleading for the complete abolition of common property in Romania, but, in fact, he had other economic and political interests to defend.

Yet the ecological consequences of the arrival of the logging companies in Vrancea were devastating. So big were the ecological damages that the new forestry law from 1910 states as motives of the law:

"The big societies of wood exploitation, mainly foreign, with the help of local village elites, bought the [communal] forests of moșneni and răzeși [free peasants] at very low prices, almost nothing, compared with their true value. The local leaders of moșneni and răzeși received the biggest share of the price, distributing very little money to the other co-owners. Thus, the foreign companies could access the endless and beautiful jointly-owned forests, achieving tremendous gains at the disadvantage of moșneni and răzeși, who were the victims of their own ignorance, because none of them, leader or not, knew the true value of these forests." (Codul Silvic,

7) This is shown, for example, in the case of the fraudulent purchase of the common property of a village in 1878 by a company from Austria, using local leaders (the case of Bodești village Stahl 1959, 208-9).

April 9th, 1910, Monitorul Oficial, quoted in Stahl 1959, 208).

Still, the new forestry code conflicted with the vernacular common property regime in Vrancea, as well as with other common property regimes such as equalitarian *obște* in Walachia (Vasile and Măntescu; 2009, Măntescu 2012), or border-line commons in Transylvania (Șișeștean 2009, Roșu 2010). State officials were aware that the village communities in Romania owned important surfaces of forests, but this property regime was not regulated by the state at all, and, thus, did not contribute to the state budget. Moreover, the natural valuables located on these common lands were outside the free market realm – therefore, a double loss. For these reasons, the Liberal Party in power back in 1910 pushed the forestry code as a tool for introducing common property regimes into the market realm.

The Forestry Code instituted for each village community new regulations and restrictions with direct impact on peoples' access to forests and other natural resources such as pastures and salt. Each village community was entitled with an *Așezământ* – an official standard document according to which the villages had to elect a board of administration “which represents the people (in original “ceata moșnenilor sau răzeșilor”) for a third party”. Moreover, the *Așezământ* stipulates that it is mandatory for every community to have a bookkeeper and a president (The Forestry Code 1910, at. 46). And what is of foremost importance, the *Așezământ* stipulated that each community had to enlist the surface of the forest, the limits of the property and the number of

co-owners.

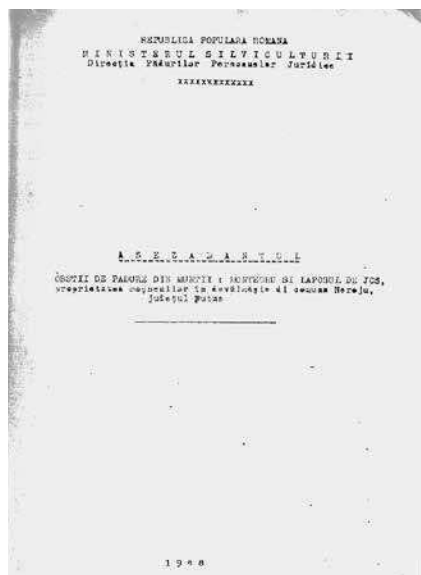
But there were no co-owners in Vrancea for people had equal and undetermined shares in the common property. The right to access the resources was a right of use, and not an ownership right. By imposing the lists with co-owners, the state attempted to transform the equalitarian *obște* system into a share-owned property system. The shares could, therefore, be inherited, sold and bought like any other goods, and the communal forests of the villages could be subject to market transactions (Sava 1931, XXXVIII; Stahl 1959, 206-220).

After 1910, taking advantages of the new forestry code, companies were, therefore, buying rights of access from the individual peasants from the lists of the *Așezământ*. Seizing the opportunity to make money, some peasants started to buy rights of access from fellow villagers in order to sell them to the companies. By the beginning of 20th century, a new local market trading rights to access the communal forests appeared in Vrancea.

By 1915, there were already legal complaints from peasants to the authorities with regard to the abuse of the foreign companies. A prominent conflict was between the *Țișța Company* and the peasants from the village of Păulești. People complained that the company was logging illegally on their common property and was building a railway on their land without their approval. The *Țișța Company* built about 100 km of railway between the village of Greșu, west of Păulești, at the border with Transylvania, and Mărășești, the nearest major railway-node in Moldova. In 1916, the carrying capacity was 13 railway locomotives, 120 wagons for carrying trunks of 10t each and 3 wagons for passengers. In 1930, there were 30 railway locomotives (Neagu 2008, 86). Yet no measures were taken by the officials, maybe partially due to the upcoming World War, so the authorities were not particularly bothered by the events (Neagu 2007, 97).

Nowadays, the people of Păulești remember the acts of sabotage that their forefathers did against the *Țișța Company*.

Fig. 3. Picture of the front cover of the *Așezământ* of the village of Nereju dated 1948. The village of Nereju was the last village in Vrancea who adopted *Așezământ*, only few months before the abolition of property rights by the ruling communist government.



First, were the dislocations of the railways, especially after the rain, when the rail-beds were looser. Most of the stories are related to one local actor: Baraghin, an unusually strong man according to the portrayals that people have given me. He led small peasant groups with the purpose of beating up the foreign forestry workers and destroy their shelters. Despite the fame of this primitive Monkey Wrench Gang however, at the time I did my research in Păulești (2003-2014), people were confused as to the exact time that Baraghin lived. He has acquired instead a sort of legendary aura for defending the forest of his village and he is often mentioned when it comes to the European Union's policies for nature protection, as I will show later on. However, also pertaining to local stories, an interesting detail is described by Henri Stahl. In 1927, when he pursued his first fieldwork in Vrancea, people would frighten misbehaving children by saying that Grödle will get them. The new bogeyman in Vrancea was nobody other than the co-owner of the *Țișița Company*.

The episode of transnational logging companies in the history of the common property regime in Vrancea shows a clear connection between foreign investment, a change of economic relations at the local level and a local environmental crisis. So big were the environmental damages that the 1910 forestry code had to make special provisions against the foreign logging companies. Coupled with the mismatch between Vrancea's vernacular common property regime and the Civil Code, the environmental crisis in Vrancea made way for the appearance of a new social class: the local leaders that sold access rights to the logging companies. This newly formed local bourgeoisie will be crashed by the communist regime.



The Communist Regime

When the communist regime came to power in 1948 backed-up by the soviet troops, private individual and common property

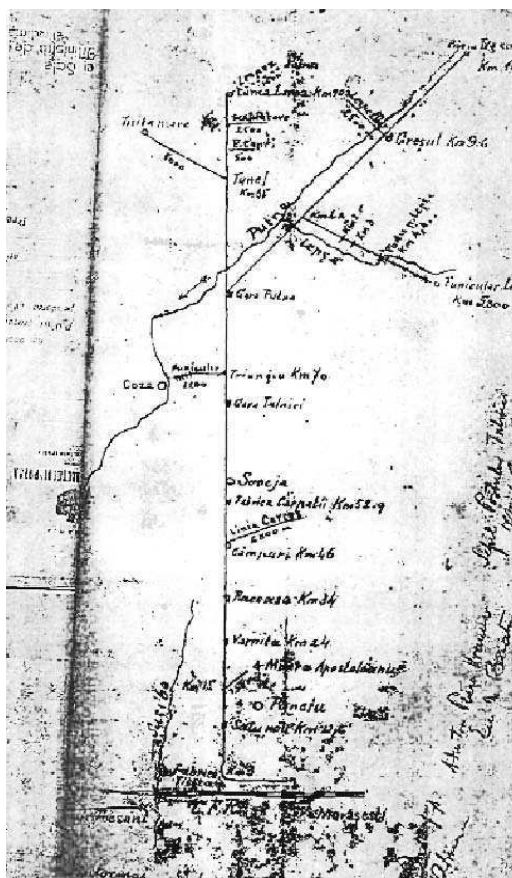


Fig. 4. The route description of the industrial railway of the *Țișța Company*. In the centre of the picture, one can easily read Gara Tulnici – Tulnici Train Station. Photo reproduction Ștefan Neagu's personal archive.

rights over forests were abolished together with the market relations based on credit, commodification, creativity and competition. This radical change in the property regime and economic relations in Vrancea had tremendous environmental consequences in the region.

After the Second World War, Romania had to pay war reparations to the USSR. The overall geopolitical context imposed harsh economic restraints at the local level: wood, cattle, grains, gas, oil and gold were succinctly delivered to the USSR until the 1960s. What was left in Vrancea from the deforestations caused by the logging companies was later completed by the Soviets. Ecologically speaking, Vrancea was one of the most degraded areas in Romania (Nistor 2011, 11-14). The negative effects appeared immediately when the water supplies could no longer be used for drinking in the whole region (idem).

Starting with the mid-1960s, the communist government of Gheorghe Maurer proceeded with massive re-forestation plans in all Romania, including Vrancea. Yet, as Nistor emphasizes in her work (ibid, 226-234), the reforestation was not made with local species of trees, but with rapid growing ones in accordance with the Soviet model of forestry science. Some of the people in Vrancea worked in the newly-established forestry sector as wage earners. The alpine pastures were not included in the reforestation process due to the high altitude of the Carpathian Mountains. But the overall landscape changed dramatically.

However, the contact between the villagers and their former common properties was not interrupted. Access to the forest became possible only through the state forest guard. Nevertheless, people continued to acquire fuel-wood and wood for construction from their own common properties even in the case when the forest was not located close to the village. The rationale behind this is the knowledge of the forest.

People knew the forest, and most had particular *good spots* for getting wood, especially wood used for construction. Building a house, a store house or a stable was a serious investment, and the most valuable trees were preserved from one generation to another in this regard. After the rough exploitation by the transnational companies and the Soviet regime, the most valuable wood was extremely rare and these trees were of great value for families and, sometimes, the trees were kept secret. Sometimes it was known in the community that a particular family envisaged to get trees for construction in a particular spot, and such a spot was subject to public or hidden bargaining.

Nowadays, the people in Vrancea still have very present in memory the ecological disaster from that time. One of my key informants in Păulești remembers the problems people had in procuring even fuel wood.

"I remember how in the '50s, during winter time, people were cutting the plum trees from the garden for there was no fuel-wood to be



found anymore in these mountains.” (Male, 80 years old, interviewed in 2003).

Yet the reforestations led to the formation of a new concept of the forest in Vrancea. People were all taking wood from a new forest now, the state forest. This forest was new not only in terms of property rights and access, but also physically. The landscape changed so dramatically as soon as pines and other coniferous were planted that some places around villages changed their names. Other places kept the original denominations despite the obvious mismatch with the reality. Still, studying the local toponymy is a good way of unmaking local ecological histories.

The way people were getting wood from the forest in the latter period of the communist regime (i.e. after 1980) was more or less legal. Most of the stories imply the tacit acceptance of the forestry guards, who were locals as well. A common practice when stealing wood was to bury the trunks in the courtyard of the house or as close as possible to their place of destination. Most of the men

were chopping the wood for construction in incredible conditions such as in underground trenches camouflaged in straw. Once the trunks were ready, they were immediately used in the construction or cut into pieces for fuel-wood, so that no evidence of the stolen wood could be found. Culiță remembers how in 1985 police came to his house while he and his father were building the new house.

“I was twenty years old when my father and I started to build this house. One day the police came, and said that they had been told that we had stolen the wood for the house. My father was next to me and the police was at the entrance of the courtyard. I told them, I don’t know, just like that: we didn’t steal for the forest is ours. The police replied: how come that it’s yours when it is the state forest. Then I said that the forest might be planted by the state, but the land is ours. The policeman got into difficulties, he was not from here, he was from somewhere in Transylvania. And they left... later I was told by my father that I would keep my mouth shut, unless I wanted to go to



prison. But I only told them what I knew.”

The case of Culiță, my host, is not particular. He was told by his father about the *obște* of their village, about the important common property the village used to have. His father was a shepherd and, like other shepherds in Vrancea, he continued with his alpine pasture business during communism, as these pastures, although still owned by the state, remained open to the villages for common use. Many times, Culiță went with his father in the mountains and this is where he learned about the common property of the village and its limits. People in the mountains were speaking openly about the limits between the common properties of the villages, and sometimes getting into fights for breaking into the former village properties. The use as common property of the alpine pastures regenerated permanently the memory of the common property until 2001, when the reestablishment of property rights for the villages took place. These memories were essential in peacefully tracing the boundaries between the re-established village properties.

The communist episode in the history of common property regime and economic relations in Vrancea shows how the natural environment was impacted by state driven re-forestation policies. The local biotopes were replaced with more productive species of trees in accordance with the Soviet forestry science. The market relations based on credit, commodification, creativity and competition were replaced by state-centred economy. Yet the search of the communist state to remediate the ecological crisis was made in accordance with economic laws of efficiency which radically changed the landscape in Vrancea.



Hotar: the Re-establishment of Property Rights and the Nouveau Riches⁸

In 2000 the Romanian parliament voted the law for property restitution of former possessions confiscated by the communist regime. This also included the communal

forests belonging to the villages in Vrancea region. While the individual possessions were highly disputed in legal courts, this was barely the case for village commons (Vasile and Măntescu 2009). The re-establishment of common property rights in Vrancea contributed to the development of new socio-representations of Nature. Nature turned from a witness of dispossession and retaliation to a bystander of common property rights and justice. I will describe below how the bordering of the common properties was established according to customary negotiations of just boundaries, what people call *hotar*.

There are different denominations for boundaries in the Romanian language, each bearing different meanings that the juridical dictionaries ignore. *Limită* is a neologism which was adopted in the Romanian language from French, most likely together with the Civil Code as many other juridical terms. *Limită* (pl. *limite*) is used in legal contracts in formulations such as “*limita proprietății*” (the limits of the property). *Hat* (pl. *haturi*) is another word for property-related boundaries. It comes from the Turkish word *had*, which means “authority”, “authorization”, “value”, but also “to ordain”, “to order”, or “decree” (DEX 2009). *Had* is close to the Ottoman Turkish word *hat*, which means line. The word appears in Romanian language in legal contracts during the Ottoman authority over the Romanian Voivodeships. In our times however, the word has more outdated connotations in spoken Romanian. Still, the word people commonly use in Vrancea for boundaries is not “*limită*”, nor “*hat*”, but the vernacular *hotar* (pl. *hotare*), most of the time used in singular form.

Hotar is a polysemantic term: as a noun it means “boundary”, but as a verb it means “to agree”, “to decide” and “to neighbour”. For example: *Noi ne-am hotărât asupra acestui plan*, means “We have agreed upon this plan.” *M-am hotărât să vin la tine*, means “I have decided to come to you.” *Obștea Păulești se hotărăște cu obștea Tulnici* means “Obștea Păulești neighbours obștea Tulnici.”

8) An earlier version of this section has been published in Măntescu 2012 (p. 242-4) in an open access format.

The first two meanings (“to agree” and “to decide”) are used in spoken language disregarding regional differences, while *hotar* as a noun is used more in the countryside and not in Romania’s urban milieu. In the urban, people will talk about *limite*, the limits of their individual private properties, and will not say *hotar*, unless they want to “sound like peasants.”

This is to say that, in my opinion, in the Romanian language, *limită* and *hat* are words that denote an externally imposed thoroughness. Likewise, in English language we find *mete* and *bounds* for land boundaries in the archaic language, while *limit* hints more toward externally imposed rigors with scrupulous and inflexible adherence. The limit is the terminal point, but in the capitalist culture is also the obstacle to be pushed further (Turner [1893] 1998). The word *hotar* however, denotes that “two or more than two parts have negotiated and mutually agreed on the boundaries of a property, or as a verb, that two or more than two social agents have mutually agreed or decided upon something, behavioural norms included. *Hotar* has, therefore, „an embedded sense of justice through its intimate link with the agreement of the parties involved” (Măntescu 2012, 243).

One more aspect of *hotar* as noun, therefore with the sense of “boundary”, is that it usually trails the natural development of the geographical surrounding. In Vrancea, *hotar* can be a river, no matter if the river naturally changes its stream. All these aspects should be subject to further inquiry and it is, obviously, debatable how much justice *hotar* embeds across present-day rural Romania. But during the process of village properties re-establishment in Vrancea, *hotar* was a crucial element in peacefully establishing the common properties of the villages.

Bogdan, still the president of *obște*a Păulești at this date, recounts how the collective bargaining of the boundaries of the *obște*a took place.

“People gathered in 2001 for the establishment of the limits of the obște (hotarele obștii). There were the elderly from the neigh-

bouring villages and we went into the mountains. We, the youngsters, were behind them carrying buckets of paint. And the elderly were talking, making jokes, and we were listening to them. We walked around the obște property (hotaru’ obștii) and as soon as they agreed (hotarât) on a point, we would paint an “H” on a tree, these “H”s with yellow paint that you saw in the forest.”

I heard the same story from Culiță many times, as he had also been there. “And there, in the mountains, we agreed upon the limits of obști (Acolo am hotărât obștile)”, Culiță told me. This last expression is confusing even for me as a native Romanian, because it can read: people “decided upon”..., or we “set” the limits. We see now the troubles that both vocabulary and customary property regimes caused to lawmakers in Romania.

The village of Păulești did not encountered difficulties in establishing its property rights. Most of the limits of its common property – of its *hotare*, are natural loci, such as rivers and mountain crests. But something interesting happened in the neighbouring village of Tulnici. Tulnici borders the village of Ojdula on the West, in Transylvania, in majority inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. Ojdula has common forests and pastures as well, in the form of compossessorate (Vasile and Măntescu 2009). The delineation between the two villages was subject to rough legal fights (including the European court in Strasbourg) and violent conflicts. After 14 years of trials, Tulnici won not only due to the documentation people from Tulnici presented, but also because *hotar* was understood as an element of local governance.

People of Tulnici and the neighbouring villages, including Păulești, blame the past expansionist attempts of the Habsburg Empire for the post-communist conflicts over property rights. The demarcation between Tulnici and Ojdula is not only a limit between two village properties; it is the past frontier between two major empires in world history – the Austrian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The borderline between the two villages is a geostrategic point of crucial



importance for continental Europe. Here, by the Carpathian Arc, major battles were fought, also counting the two World Wars. What is more, the borderline between the two villages is a borderline between two cultures and between two totally different idioms. Whereas the frontier between the Austrian Empire (from 1867 to 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and the Moldavian Voivodeship varied along the years, the limits of the common properties and the rights of land-use also varied. All this was at times seen just or unjust by the local people. It is common in Vrancea to hear “this where the limit is, but it is not *hotar*”. Bogdan, the president of *obștea* Păulești, explained this to me in very simple terms: “The frontier moved all the time, and now Ojdula wants to follow the old imperial limits (*limitele imperiale*). But *hotarul* was never the way they say, *hotarul* is where the waters split, and they have to admit this, for the mountains do not move.”

Bogdan refers to the geomorphology of the mountains. According to the local knowledge in Vrancea, the limits between the two villages are those places where waters start to flow towards the West. All valleys of the rivers that flow towards East belong to the villages from Vrancea and those that flow towards West belong to Ojdula. Consequently, the local geomorphology is profoundly entangled with *hotar*: the limits of property can vary, frontiers between states and empires can vary in favour of some and disfavour of others, but *hotar* is where both sides agree, and nature can be a witness. In this case, Nature is part of a principle of moral rightness; it is a bystander in establishing just governance in a form of socio-nature coordination.

Yet the re-establishment of property rights in Vrancea meant the establishment of new capitalist economic relations in the region together with new ecological pressures on the forest. After 55 years of communism, new economic relations got instituted in Vrancea. Former communist local leaders, such as mayors or managers of the former communist collective farms, benefited from

different political, social and sometimes financial capital than ordinary people. Starting with the early 2000s, local logging companies mushroomed in Vrancea. Almost as rule, the logging companies belonging to the former communist elite developed more than others. The new local and national timber market boomed in the years to follow. This led, in turn, to a further ecological crisis in Vrancea. No later than 2006, new conservation policies in accordance with the EU regulations were designed and instituted.

The episode of the re-establishment of property rights in the history of common property and economic relations in Vrancea, which I also witnessed during my first field-work campaigns in the region, shows that the re-establishment of common property rights was done in accordance with a local understanding of the just limits of property. This vernacular understanding of just limits is built upon a sound understanding of the natural environment, which can be considered as a bystander during the negotiation process. Local governance in Vrancea is reliant upon a social representation of nature, which is itself dynamic. Yet, the re-establishment of common property rights also fuelled the development of a local timber market which expanded the ecological pressure on the forest in the region. The social representation of nature is therefore once again brought into question and this deepens social inequalities at the village level.



The Implementation of the EU Nature Protection Policies

In 1971, 0.0042% of the Romanian territory was, according to scripts, a protected area⁹. The protected areas within the national territory grew at 4.8% between 1989 and 2000. These protected areas were established only by government decrees, without being back-up by a special law for nature conservation. In the following six years, from 2000 to 2006, the percentage of protected areas went from 4.8% to about 8% of the national ter-

9) In 1973, some projects were made to establish new protected areas, but they were not finalized.

ritory. But by the end of 2007, the percentage went up to 17.84% (Stanciu and Florescu 2009, 21-2). Within few months, 381 new protected sites were established in Romania, mostly in the Carpathian and sub-Carpathian areas. This rapid growth of protected areas in Romania was necessary in order to meet the EU requirements for Romania's EU accession (an issue developed at length in Măntescu 2012).

The property restitution process also started in the year 2000, first with National Law 1/2000 and continued with National Law 5/2005. Thus, in post-communist Romania there are two concomitant and antagonist processes happening: on the one hand, the process of establishing protected areas, and, on the other, the process of property restitution, among which, of course, the common village properties in Vrancea. Therefore, one process was that of enabling access rights, the other was restricting the newly established rights in the name of nature protection.

This tension generated confusion at village level in regard to what property rights represent in the context of EU environmental policy-making and what is the role of state as guarantor of property rights. "I do not understand what the word *owner* means nowadays", as Culiță bluntly put it¹⁰. People in Vrancea saw the establishment of the protected areas, made above their heads, as another political trickery meant, *de facto*, to dispossess them. With the memories of dispossession (Moore 2005) still fresh in the local discourse, from the Roznovanu trial to the transnational logging companies and the communist regime, the EU policies for nature protection had no support at the village level, with the exception of state representatives.

The process of establishing nature protection areas in post-communist Romania is also characterized by the lack of experts in the field of nature conservation. At the high level of state agencies this is a well-known problem, but, as one representative told me, "we have to deal with it in order to meet the EU *acquis*".

The protected areas in post-communist Vrancea were established in a big hurry and without a sound scientific basis - "they were made on the knees", to follow a common expression among local forest guards. This was actually a creative compliance strategy on the part of local agencies in response to state pressure that was eager to comply with the EU adhesion standards as soon as possible. For Vrancea, this state of art had tremendous environmental consequences.

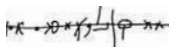
People in Vrancea view the implementation of the EU nature conservation policies as an act of injustice. As soon as they got their common properties back, new restrictions in accessing forest resources were imposed on them for meeting the EU *acquis*. This state of art had two consequences: first, a new social understanding of Nature was imposed onto them, that is the understanding of Nature as a protected space for the sake of planetary good; and on the other it had hindered people in Vrancea from participating in the local timber market. The new timber market was, and still is, monopolized by the former communist elites who have enough political power to not fear governmental controls. Their understanding of the forest is completely different from that of the environmental activists who want to protect it. To quote one of the wealthiest logging patrons: "the forest never ends, you cut it, and it grows anew".

On the other hand, if ordinary people are caught getting wood from the forest without permission, they are subject to hard sanctions. In order to repair this injustice, people have broken into village commons and cut trees illegally. The fear at the local level that more restrictions could be implemented following Romania adhesion to the EU has lately led Vrancea on the verge of a new ecological crisis.

This most recent episode in the history of common property and economic relations in Vrancea shows how EU environmental policies can generate new environmental crises at the local level when conflicting with property rights. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how agrarian differentiation based on access

10) See the quote in "Stronghold 2000" ethnographic film, min. 60, available freely on the vimeo online platform.

to natural resource is actually deepened by the EU nature protection policy-making.



Conclusions:

The Ecology of an Agrarian Question

In this study I showed how the dissemination of capitalist economic relations based on credit, commodification, creativity and competition changed the common property regime and negatively impacted the natural environment in Vrancea, Romania. Following a *longue durée* approach, the article revealed how the capitalist transition in the countryside can change the local socio-ecological relations. In this regard, the main conclusion of the study is that changes of the social representation of Nature, changes of the modes of appropriating Nature, and changes of the institutions that

govern the economic action in the natural environment, in this case 'obște', are intimately linked with market dynamics. Viewed from this perspective, the agrarian question in Vrancea comports a strong ecological dimension. Agricultural differentiation in post-communist Vrancea is closely linked with various forms of access to forested land. When access surpasses property rights, ecological crisis at village or regional level are imminent. An analytical framework for analysing the ecological dimension of the diffusion of capitalist economic relations in a particular socio-geographical setting should therefore take into account how such diffusion is reflected in the dynamics of property regimes and how these, in turn, impact the natural environment. More empirical investigation is required in this regard.

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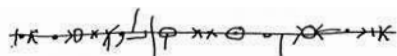
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The Rise and Fall of the Youth Republic in Rural Bulgaria: the Case of Momina Tsarkva



Aneliya Kuzmanova

Ph.D. Candidate

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the intricacies of rural transformations in 20th century Bulgaria through the lens of so-called Projects of Modernity. Combining this broad methodological tool with the micro-level analysis of fieldwork anthropology, the article offers insight into the complex agenda and unexpected outcomes of the unorthodox Youth Republic Project. In practical terms, the article serves to stimulate discussions and offer strategies for the sustainability of dying rural communities such as Momina Tsarkva, through the investigation of the history, everyday experiences and cultural legacies inherited from the various Projects of Modernity.

KEYWORDS

Youth Republic; rural ghetto; Strandja-Sakar; projects of modernity; rural transformations; socialism; neo-liberalism

According to Alan Dingsdale, Central and Eastern Europe has undergone three key transformative periods in the 20th century, which he terms Projects of Modernity, where modernity is understood as an experience of practice and way of thinking. Each Project is driven by the search for new futures and each Project has strived to clear out the past, and yet look to the past as a means of creating its vision of the future. The three Projects of key discontinuity in spatial development in the 20th century that he defines are the Nationalist Project after 1920, the Communist Project after World War Two and, finally, the Neo-Liberalist Project after 1989 (Dingsdale 2002).

The legacy of these Projects and the most recent one in particular can offer valuable insights into the present condition of the countryside in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Both the study of the Neo-Liberalist Project and also its practical implementation, however, has been dominated by the urban financial sector. This can be

evidenced in the focus on the macro-economic policies of the period, and as Unwin, Pallot and Johnson suggest, rural life in general and agriculture in particular have almost completely been ignored, as they were considered forgotten elements of the rhetoric of transition (Unwin, Pallot and Johnson 2003, 110-111).

As Duijzings (2013) reminds, the bulk of globalization literature, where globalization and neo-liberalism are treated in tandem, also deals with cities and leaves rural communities out, although processes that have occurred in global cities are equally true for rural environments, such as fragmentation, inequality and global connectivity (Smart in Duijzings 2013).

According to Unwin, Pallot and Johnson, another reason for the lack of attention paid to rural matters in theoretical approaches to transition is the fact that rural life is messy and complex, and it is very difficult to measure, conceptualize and theorize (2003, 111).

Nevertheless, the understanding of the

grand transformations of the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe would not be complete without a thorough investigation of agriculture, which, due to the far-reaching reforms, was kept central to perceptions of socialism (the Communist Project), and, as a result of that, it became one of the first targets of the new post-socialist governments (the Neo-Liberalist Project) throughout the region. In the same vein, as evidenced by Katherine Verdery, between 1990 and 1992 all the countries of the former Eastern bloc had passed a Land Law, which was to regulate the breaking up of state and collective farms that symbolized socialism in the countryside, thus placing agriculture at the epicentre of state reforms (Verdery 2003, 88).

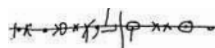
The history of strong agricultural traditions, which during the Nationalist Project in Bulgaria went as far as to unprecedentedly bring to power an Agrarian party, and which was used during the Communist Project in pursuit of a policy of agricultural concentration unmatched outside the Soviet Union (Creed 1998, 16), made Bulgaria an obvious choice for investigation.

The specifically Bulgarian trend of amelioration or 'domestication' of socialism, a term coined by Gerald Creed, was another motivational factor, which, coupled with my scholarly desire to look at a largely neglected, but hugely informative project named the Youth Republic led me to choose the village community of Momina Tsarkva. Its location by the Bulgarian-Turkish border, whose status during the Cold War years had hugely impacted the fate of the community, made it even more peculiar.

In order to investigate the intricacies of the rural transformations during the 1990s on a micro-level, I have relied on close-up fieldwork observation, which, as suggested by Chris Hann (2002, 7), is especially valuable in periods of uncertainty and institutional instability and which was facilitated by the existence of personal contacts and distant relatives in the village. During data collection, I have also relied on archival materials available through the

recently-opened State Archives, and the several local historiographies published in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Before turning to the fundamental dismantling of the socialist system and of the Youth Republic as its product during the 1990s and their effects on rural areas, I will pursue some of the vital paradoxes of the socialist system between the 1950s and the 1980s that spilled over to the Neo-Liberalist Project. Closer attention will be paid to the effects and defects of collectivization, industrialization, rural depopulation, and the Youth Republic, as the final attempt of the socialist state to rejuvenate the Strandja-Sakar region.



Rural Transformations during Socialism

At the time of the communist ascension, 75 per cent of the Bulgarian population lived in rural communities (*Entsiklopedia na Bulgaria* 1988, 153-154) and 68 per cent made their living through agriculture, stock raising and forestry (Znepolski 2011, 145). This predicament largely determined the dominance of agriculture achieved during socialism and the great focus on collectivization that the system immediately established. As Creed has reminded, the ideological linkage forged between communism and collectivization by the Soviet Union further encouraged such a focus and, in time, collectivization was to become a metaphor for the communist transformation of the countryside (Creed 1998, 33; Znepolski 2011, 145). The same centrality also makes agriculture a useful entrée to understanding political and economic forces in the local context (Creed 1998).

In a country where three-quarters of the population lived by the land, changing property rights and, with that, property relations the way socialism did, meant ending the economic and political independence of the large majority of Bulgarians. And as Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery have suggested, controlling the food supply had



paramount importance for state making, a revelation which the Soviet-imported modernization campaign skilfully utilized through collectivization (Kligman, Verdery 2011, 88).

In the early days of communist rule, the fear of collectivization was omnipresent and peasants were, to say, the least reluctant to take part in it (Sanders 1949, 212). Momina Tsarkva was no exception to the rule. From a total population of just over 2700 residents, only 18 men joined the socialist Cooperative farm (TKZS), which was founded in September 1948 as a department within the Universal Cooperative Farm Pchela¹ that had been set up back in 1925 (RDA, 709-1-1). According to Popov-Rumenov, the joiners contributed on average 30 decares (equal to 3 acres) of land per member, which set them in the category of the rural poor (1999, 156-157).

Similarly, in Zamfirovo, Creed has found that figure to be 32 decares per member. Contrary to the general belief shared by both Bulgarian villagers and outside observers that the early joiners were the poorest farmers, Creed suggests that this was merely a stereotype, as the land which they contributed to the TKZS was not all the land they possessed. This was based on the assumption that at this time [October 1948] they were not required to contribute all their land (Creed 198, 56). This thesis, however, is challenged by the Law on the TKZS that was passed in March 1948 and under which members of the TKZS were obliged to contribute all of their land to the cooperative farms, as well as their stock and agricultural tools (State Gazette 28th Feb 1948, cited in Znepolski 2011, 156). Thus, the initial postulation, which suggests that the villagers who had the motivation to join the cooperative farm were mainly those with little or nothing to lose, seems to be more plausible.

In this context, the community of Momina Tsarkva provides an interesting example. In 1945 and 1946 lists of low-income villagers were prepared by the Interim village council in line with the state policy to

provide up to 50 decares to landless villagers. The owing price of the land was due to be remitted once the new landowners joined the TKZS (Znepolski 2011, 149). The names of several of the 18 founding members of the TKZS appear on this list, curiously enough, headed by the future chair of the socialist cooperative (RDA, 156-1-1; RDA, 236-1-1). This provides clues to the economic status of the TKZS founders and confirms that they were not among the well-off villagers.

The experiences in neighbouring Romania where the first collective farms (GACs) attracted predominantly the poor and landless peasantry, who had little to lose and the most to gain if the GACs were a success, shows a similar trend (Kligman, Verdery 2011, 127). Despite the 'rural inelasticity' (Sanders 1949), the socialist regime pressed through with the project of collectivization, which would ultimately take away the attachment of the villagers to the land and turn the land reform into a long-lasting demoralizing factor (Langazov 1984, 129-130; Kaneff 2004, 172). Collectivization, however, changed not only people's connections to the land, but also to themselves and to the state, a tendency that would outlive the regime that had largely brought it into existence.

This tendency reveals one of the great paradoxes of the socialist system of collectivized agriculture, which, on the one hand, sustained the sense of community, but, on the other hand, greatly contributed to the atomization of socialist life (Kideckel 1993, cited in Creed 1998, 69). In the words of Ulf Brunnbauer, ideology became part of social life and vice versa; and while the state colonized the private, the private intruded into the public (2008, 47).

In Momina Tsarkva, very much in the same fashion as in the villages investigated by Deema Kaneff (2004), Gerald Creed (1998) and Lenka Nahodilova (2013), the socialist state increased its encroachment on the private space; on the one hand, through appropriation of time, and, on the other, by transferring traditions from the private to the public domain via the means of 'folklore'.

1) *Pchela* (transl. from Bulgarian) meaning a bee

This was also achieved through the transformation of village families into the primary unit of articulation with the state, whose strategies provoked reform programmes in agriculture (Creed 1998, 69). Traditional dress and customs were increasingly staged in the rural House of Culture [*Chitalishte*], while births, name-giving (aimed at replacing christenings), marriage, and death rituals were gradually arranged in a centralized socialist manner.

However, as the minutes of Momina Tsarkva's council meetings from the mid-1980s testify, none of these rituals was sufficiently adopted by the population four decades into socialist rule, the lowest being the ratio of name-giving rituals. This phenomenon is telling, on the one hand, of the questionable success of the state in replacing the Church with regards to civil rituals, and, equally important, of the dualistic nature and somewhat complacent cooperation of villagers with the state.

Another paradox concerns the fact that Party rule was established quite fundamentally through the all-encompassing land collectivization, which necessitated the 'self-creation' of the Party machine and not the other way round, as is commonly perceived (Kligman, Verdery 2011, 3). Between 1944 and 1958 when total land collectivization was completed in Bulgaria, the regime tested out different strategies in its campaign to 'tame' the countryside, beginning with the period of quota system for produce delivered to the state (so called *naryadi*), class segregation (the *kulaks*), psychological and physical pressure. There were also periods of alleviation of the strict measures (e.g. between May 1949 and the beginning of 1950), only to be followed by even more enhanced collectivization measures (Znepolski 2011, 155-158).

The two waves of increased pressure on landowners were articulated in 1950 and again in 1956. In Momina Tsarkva, from a modest membership of 18 at its establishment in 1948, after the adoption of the forced measures in 1950, the TKZS reached

a membership pool of over 450 members in a matter of a few months. Thanks to these forceful efforts, by the end of the 1950s, Bulgaria became the second country in the world to fully collectivize its agriculture (Creed 1998, 65; Creed 2013). This, however, did not mean eradication of private entrepreneurship or alleviation of the pressure on private proprietors. In fact, the pressure on them increased after 1956.

The pre-existing voluntary cooperative farms, which functioned on the basis of equity and membership fees were liquidated though the establishment of duplicate structures, the main one of which was the TKZS (see Znepolski 2011, 159). In Momina Tsarkva it was the village priest who had also worked as a financier before returning to the village, who was the inspirer and first chair of the Credit Cooperative Farm *Pchela* set up in 1925. By 1942 *Pchela* already boasted a membership pool of 104 men (RDA 127K-1-3).

In line with the TKZS law amendments of 1947 and 1948, however, the Momina Tsarkva TKZS was set up as a farm within *Pchela*, a farm that would slowly overtake its functions. The proponents of private property relations, who did not follow suit and join the TKZS in 1950, had joined the TKZS by 1956, after the ostentatious internment of 40 unruly families in the Balkan town of Kotel (Interview ZP, Dec 2013). Migevev (1995) and Yosifov (1998) document the various forms of economic, psychological and physical coercion exerted on Bulgarian villagers on a national scale between 1950 and 1956 and, thus, challenge the myth of the insular nature of such practices.

This traumatic 'taming' of the countryside, however, was supposed to fulfil one more task. It had to free rural labour that was needed in the cities to fuel the fast-track process of industrialization. This was also subordinated to the regime's modernization programme, which was in line with Leninist principles proclaiming that society would only reach the desired stage of 'communism' when the distinctions between

'men and women', 'physical and mental labour' and between 'town and countryside' have disappeared (Tucker 1975, cited in Nahodilova 2013). In pursuit of these tasks, all East European communist regimes were investing huge human and financial resources into dismantling gender, class and social differences, as well as the urban-rural divide (Nahodilova, in Dujizings 2013, 91).

The pressure on villagers was also exacerbated by another agricultural transformation introduced by the Communist Project, which was the mechanization of agriculture. Before 1944² as Sanders (1949), Kaneff (2004) and Creed (1998) have described, the standard cultivation tools in the country were quite basic, relying on the hoe and plow, and, as such, were in need of improvement. Mechanization technology also meant that rising numbers of villagers would lose their jobs, which was especially the case in the 1960s, when 'collectivization conveniently ensured that labour would follow capital' (Creed 1998, 37). By the 1970s, however, the process had gone too far, and rural areas were experiencing labour shortages. This turned mechanization into a necessary replacement for dwindling agricultural labour (Creed 1998, 80).

The remaining three interrelated processes, which formed the socialist state agenda to a great extent in Bulgaria, but which would also set the stage for the rise of the Youth Republic were the large-scale industrialization, urbanization and rural outmigration. Industrialization of the country, similarly to land collectivization, was a vital part of the Soviet development strategy, which included structural transformation from an agrarian to an industrial economy (Creed 1998, 126).

The first and foremost outcome of the national policy 'to industrialise the country as fast as possible' was rapid urbanization, paralleled with depletion of villages of their youths (Taylor 2006, 45). According to Mincho Semov, 1,164,811 people migrated between 1956 and 1965, and, crucially, 598,606 of them migrated from villages to

cities (Semov 1973, 18). This trend stayed largely unchanged between 1960 and 1975 when, as Ruskova has estimated, 1,299,775 people moved from villages to cities (Ruskova 1987, 27, in Creed 1998, 126).

Such transformation meant in effect that Bulgaria was no longer a rural country, at least not in terms of residence, and the urbanization project was a success, as far as the cities, which unequivocally gained from it, were concerned. This also signified the rapid growth of a 'rurban' population in the cities, a process also referred to as a 'ruralization' of the city (Simić 1982, cited in Nahodilova 2013, 91). A related tendency was the rise of the so-called worker-peasant category, comprising peasants that relied for their livelihood on both industrial wage and subsistence agriculture (Dorondel and Serban, this volume).

The Burgas region, part of which was and is the village community of Momina Tsarkva, will be used as an illustration of the process of rural outmigration. According to Avramchev and Vulcheva, in 1946, the town of Burgas numbered 50,921 residents, and, by 1965, that number had more than doubled, reaching 121,540³. Of these additional 70,619 residents, only 16,500 were due to natural growth, and the remaining 54,119 were migrants from other towns and villages (2/1970, 55). In other words, 70 per cent of the city's population growth between 1946 and 1965 was achieved through immigration, and, as statistics showed, that was immigration mainly from the surrounding villages.

One of the main motives for the mass migration inflow into Burgas, Avramchev and Vulcheva see in the construction and growth of the Petroleum-chemical plant *Neftochim* in the city, which attracted both specialist and unqualified labour in its thousands, reaching, according to some estimates, 20,000 employees in the plant's heyday⁴. To illustrate the place of the plant in the national economy it is worth noting that in 1970 *Neftochim* generated industrial production that was equal to the total in-

2) On the 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front usurped power after a successful coup.

3) According to NSI statistics, the population of Burgas as per the 1946 Census numbered 51,323 residents, and in 1965 it was 117,517 (accessed 20/10/2012).

4) The Neftochim Plant was officially opened by the First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov on 30th December 1963.

dustrial production of capitalist Bulgaria in 1939, as noted in the commemorative publication *Obnoven kray: 1944-1979* (Sharlopov ed. 1979, 12).

Another reason for *Neftochim*'s attractiveness was its provision of priority housing opportunities for its employees in a country where the average 22.5 units of housing per 1000 inhabitants ranked lowest in Eastern Europe in 1975, below the 26.5 units for Romania (Lampe 1986, 193, in Taylor 2006).

Avramchev and Vulcheva have made the ominous observation that rural population in the Burgas *okrug* was ageing intensively, and that of the 245 villages in the *okrug* 80 villages were considered 'futureless,' with an estimation that by 1980 they would be completely depopulated (Avramchev, Vulcheva 2/1970, 55). Their proposed solution to the crisis followed 'the only possible way' of improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of the rural population and overcoming of industrial concentration in the cities through industrial redistribution in rural areas on the basis of the so-called *mikrorayonnoirane* [micro-regionalisation].

This new take on industrialization was initiated in the late 1960s to promote the idea of dispersed industrial development, whereby industrial enterprises were to be set up in rural and small town locations – in response to outmigration and attendant agricultural problems (mainly shortage of labour) and was a direct contribution to the domestication of socialism (Creed 1998, 149). This is also one of the traits that distinguish the Bulgarian case from that of neighbouring Romania where the direction of industrial development was only in the direction of the big cities.

Theoretically, the dispersed industrial development was aimed at redressing the ideologically unacceptable rural-urban inequalities that had emerged in the headlong rush for industrialization, without sacrificing the industrial bias of the regime through a 'horizontal integration of agriculture' (Sharlopov, ed. 1970, 20). In effect, it was supposed to promote equal regional

development by advocating a more even geographical distribution of productive activities. Implementation, however, proved more complex than planning (Creed 1998, 151).

In Momina Tsarkva, the TKZS underwent seven transformations between 1944 and 1989. After superseding *Pchela* in the 1940s, by 1958 the TKZS in Momina Tsarkva merged with its smaller peer from the neighbouring village of Gorska Polyana (RDA 709-1-30). In 1970, in the next thrust of collectivization efforts, it was included in the newly established Agrarian Industrial Complex (APK) in the local town centre. In 1984, the TKZS in the village was converted into a Complex Brigade – a more autonomous unit within the APK. This was followed by a reversal process of partitioning of the APK, and in 1986 Momina Tsarkva's cooperative farm joined a newly set-up APK in the next-door village Fakia. Yet again, in October 1989 a new Collective Agricultural Farm was set up in Momina Tsarkva, which was replaced in 1991 by the Agricultural Credit Cooperative, symbolically named *Pchela* after the first village cooperative (RDA 1073-2-1).

The frequent and largely superficial re-organisations and experiments, as testified by Popov-Rumenov, compromised cooperative farming and the cooperative idea as a whole in Momina Tsarkva. The members' land effectively became no one's land, as it was neither private, nor cooperative, nor state property (1999, 160). What is more, the never-ending reforms of the Communist Project exhausted rural energy, a process that would have great influence on the level of participation in the post-socialist transformations. Meanwhile, the so-called 'village exodus' (Creed 1998) was promising to devastate the countryside.

On the other hand, as a result of the headlong collectivization and industrialization, matched with mechanization technology, urbanization and the zigzag reformations of the cooperative, the shortage of work opportunities in rural areas had become rampant. Between 1965 and 1970, in

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

Momina Tsarkva and the neighbouring villages, the employment rate was hardly 50% of the able-bodied population (Avramchev, Vulcheva 2/1970, 59-60), a phenomenon that has not received enough scholarly attention yet.

Another tendency, which was largely misinterpreted by policy-makers, and which contributed to village outmigration, concerned the increased influence of consumerism and individualism among young people in the wake of the 1960s. This tendency was not dissimilar from cultural expressions of youths in the West (Douglas, in Parman, ed. 1998, 94-106; Hall, Jefferson, eds. 1976). As Taylor and Konstantinov have commented, the pull of the cities in Bulgaria was equated with a shining road to modernity; and it was conceived to be a journey from the periphery to the centre (Konstantinov 2001, 47, in Taylor 2006, 46).

Creed has similarly observed the shaping 'distaste for village life' among the general population (Creed 1998, 136), caused by the attainability of the 'modest dream of domestic comfort for many in the course of the 1960s,' where many of the material and social trappings of a supposedly socialist lifestyle had started to appear in a decidedly 'bourgeois' form (Taylor 2006, 47, 49).

The distaste for village life in border villages such as Momina Tsarkva, however, was additionally fuelled by its inclusion in the *closed military zone* as required by the Cold War realities. Unfortunately, the detrimental effects of this status on stock raising, tourism, but, more than anything, on the movement of people in border areas, were hardly recognized in reports published in the 1970s under the Strandja-Sakar set of initiatives when the shock wave of migration to the cities had largely subsided (Peykov, ed. 1984, Vol. 1, 104-109).

And lastly, there was one more factor of a rather subjective nature, which greatly contributed to the youth outflow from Momina Tsarkva, and which becomes apparent if examined comparatively with the case of the neighbouring village of Fakia. Interestingly,

between the two Censuses of 1956 and 1965, when *Neftochim* opened doors and began mass recruitment, Fakia lost approximately 28% of its population, while for the same period the size of Momina Tsarkva's size dropped by a mere 15%. In the following decade, however, between the Censuses of 1965 and 1975, Momina Tsarkva suddenly saw a 41% drop in its population size, in comparison to the significantly lower 24% in the case of Fakia.

The only structural difference that distinguished the two villages, and which, according to my preliminary findings could explain the sharp contrast of outmigration in the latter period, relates to the short-lived existence of an Agricultural Technical School in Momina Tsarkva. Between 1958 and 1972 this institution prepared specialists in agronomy and zootechnics and, in the earlier period, not only kept the youths of Momina Tsarkva in the village, but also attracted youths from elsewhere (Popov-Rumenov 1999, 214). Evidently, three years after the School's closure, and already twelve years into the existence of *Neftochim*, Momina Tsarkva lost 937 residents, in comparison to Fakia's loss of 291 (according to Censuses of 1965 and 1975 respectively). Therefore, the pull of the city only became irresistible after the Agricultural Technical School had ceased to exist, and with that, the pool of potential social contacts and marriage partners had rapidly shrunk.

To sum up, there were two sets of factors that, together, contributed to the population exodus from Momina Tsarkva, Strandja and many other rural areas of the country, of objective and subjective character. In the former group, quite prominent were the shortage of work opportunities and excess labour caused by the transformation from agricultural to planned economy and the attendant collectivization, industrialization, mechanization and urbanization processes. And in the latter group fell events such as the closure of the Agricultural Technical School.

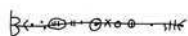
But there were also the unintended consequences, even paradoxes, of the system



(also termed 'conflicting complementarities' by Creed 1998). Such was the role of cooperative farms, which, on the one hand, sustained the sense of community through their intense promotion of largely mandatory social, cultural and political events; but, on the other hand, the same public ostentation of such events precipitated the withdrawal of villagers into their private world.

Another consequence of the cooperative structuration of work (and leisure) was the loss of attachment of the villagers to the land after its collectivization, as it thus ceased to belong to a person, or to a family for that matter, and was not cared for in a private, personal way any longer. This tendency would turn into one of the crucial stumbling blocks during the 1990s transition to market economy and would doom the re-privatization of land to failure.

Both intentionally and incidentally, the Communist Project aimed not only at moving villagers into cities, but also at resettling urbanites into villages. This trend of introducing modernity 'from above' was dissimilar from the experience of Western Europe, where modernization was based on movement in the rural-urban direction (Nahodilova, in Duijzings 2013, 91). The example of the Youth Republic, which will be investigated in the next section, was a case in point.



The Youth Republic in the Whirlpool of Reforms

Following the state-sponsored processes discussed in the previous section, the most viable rural capital, that was its youths, rapidly disappeared between 1960 and 1970. With very few exceptions, all villages in the Strandja-Sakar region lost substantial percentage of their inhabitants due to outmigration. By 1975, Momina Tsarkva's population had dropped to 1310 (from 2247 in 1965) (Balev 2002, 92; NSI online database). The response of the socialist state however was not adequate enough. The pro-natalist

policies, stringent urban-inhabitancy measures, bachelor tax and fertility stimulation measures of the 1970s only had superficial and temporary effects (Creed 1998; Taylor 2006; Kuzmanova 2013).

Apart from the political efforts, however, there was also a shaping tide of academic vigour devoted to the question of rural depopulation, pioneered by an unlikely figure. In 1972 Lyudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of state leader Todor Zhivkov, who was also a chair of the national Cultural Committee, began collaborations with the prominent Bulgarian archaeologist Prof. Alexander Fol on Thracian excavations in Strandja-Sakar that literally and metaphorically brought her in contact with the region and its many problems (see Kuzmanova 2013).

Zhivkova's partnership with researchers of the region gradually institutionalized and regular symposia devoted to the problems of the region took place biannually between 1978 and 1984⁵. Thus, the close relations between researchers and the state leader's daughter placed the region's fate high on the state agenda and, in effect, predetermined the choosing of the region as a pilot project for a large-scale rejuvenation campaign, initiated in 1982 by *Politburo*, which was officially proclaimed The Youth Republic. As the now accessible Communist Party Archives show, apart from the overt demographic and cultural-preservation tasks, the programme also sought a number of unofficial goals, the most prominent of which was to sustain the ethnically Bulgarian character of the border region (meaning to prevent the relocation of ethnic Turks from inner Bulgaria into the border area). In addition to this, another factor that precipitated this choice was the location of the area at the border with Turkey - a NATO member-state (TDA, 136-75-22, 36).

Being a pilot project, the fulfilment of the Youth Republic was accompanied by a number of setbacks of institutional, logistic and subjective character, such as insufficient job opportunities for the new settlers, inadequate housing, clashes between the

⁵ The symposia continued even after her death in 1981.

social norms and the customs of the locals and those of the newcomers (see Kuzmanova 2013). Despite all of these shortcomings, however, between 1982 and 1990 only in Momina Tsarkva a total of 248 adults and 116 children settled under the Youth Republic scheme. They had come from 70 different Bulgarian settlements, 25 of which cities and 45 villages, testifying, contrary to official statements, that the migration flows were not only urban-rural, but also rural-rural (Adresen Registur, selo Zhelyazkovo).

The Youth Republic did not, however, manage to 'inject' into Strandja and Sakar the young blood in its thousands as it had initially proclaimed, and from the so far uncovered archival data, it also did not succeed in raising its economy or infrastructure to the national average, which was its economic aim. Furthermore, a great part of the lofty capital investments were squandered and went into private hands, but as Momina Tsarkva locals still joked, in the interviews carried out in 2012 and 2013, 'there was so much to steal' that, despite these mishaps, the accomplishments of the programme were indisputably impressive.

In this light, one could argue that the programme was doomed to failure by its very conception since the misappropriation of funds had become the norm in many, if not all settlements in the country by the early 1980s, as well as the Soviet Union as Alena Ledeneva (2008) and Gerlad Creed (1998) have discussed. Radost Ivanova has beautifully summarized these sentiments in her similar observations in another Bulgarian village - Panaretovo, which was not part of the Strandja revitalization programme. Ivanova's informants maintained that there were no thieves in the village, just theft from the cooperative farm, and since the latter had become a semi-legal form of remuneration, villagers justified their actions with the affirmation that one could not steal from one's own father or government (Ivanova, in Kideckel 1995, 229).

Another (un)intended consequence of a more buoyant character was the unusual

way in which the scheme turned participating settlements into ingeniously cosmopolitan communities. Growing up in the concrete flats of the Momina Tsarkva Youth Republic provided its children with the opportunity to mingle with peers who had all come from elsewhere and had brought with them something unique and special. This was a phenomenon that was taking place in a society that did not favour entrepreneurial individual actions and encouraged free movement of people even less. Thus, it would be fair to say that if the utopia of the Youth Republic succeeded in something, it was definitely in providing its children with an 'incubated' sense of belonging to something unique, if ephemeral (see Kuzmanova 2013). It also empowered and stimulated these young pioneers to take their lives in their own hands, still within the limits permitted by the system.

On balance, the material achievements in Momina Tsarkva included, among others, new improved road links with the municipal centre and sizable industrial facilities as part of the cooperative farm (TKZS). The long-term value of these assets, however, did not deter the liquidation efforts of the new post-1990 political leadership that targeted cooperative farms, as a symbol of a denounced era. All infrastructures were left to decay, and, with that, the commendable social care facilities (such as nursery, school canteen, etc.) were also destroyed in the early 1990s. But, the more subtle and controversial aim of the programme - to retain patriotically-minded population at the border and prevent the settlement of ethnic Turks - had been unequivocally achieved.

In sum, in a matter of less than forty years, Momina Tsarkva underwent a great leap from manual agricultural production before World War Two to an enhanced collectivization, urbanization and even more accelerated depopulation in the latter half of the 20th century. Against this background, the Strandja-Sakar initiative turned the village into an even more peculiar 'amphibian' settlement, neither a real village, nor a



real town, with its miniature blocks of flats, miniature sewing workshop and miniature pool of urbanites gathered in some cases by mercantile, in others by idealistic motives, but relatively and seemingly free and able to reinvent themselves. The youthful urbanites seemed to coexist with another host population consisting largely of elderly villagers, whose patriarchal norms were never fully eradicated (see Kuzmanova 2013).

The programme's greatest merit, which would ironically also turn into its greatest vice, was its voluntary, generous and de facto non-binding nature. In order to grasp the significance of its voluntary nature one only needs to be reminded of the context that it was implemented in, i.e. the overwhelming state campaign launched at more or less the same time, calling for the forced name-changing campaign and exodus directed against the Bulgarian Turkish population. The recently opened secret files of the Bulgarian State Security Agency, a small part of which is devoted to Strandja-Sakar, pose important questions regarding the influence of the Turkish exodus, or Revival Process as it is colloquially known in Bulgaria, on the Strandja-Sakar efforts themselves. In the so far consulted archive materials, there are a number of statements of intelligence and counter-intelligence operatives, claiming that no less than 90% of the participants in the Youth Republic scheme were spied on and monitored in one form or another by the State Security Agency. Such findings trigger questions regarding the effects of such supervision on the implementation of the programme, but can be plausibly answered only after thorough consideration of the above archive materials, which is still pending.

Only eight years after the birth of the Youth Republic, the socialist system that had been its main proponent was (self)-defeated. The young families, who had left their hometowns and villages behind, in order to settle in Strandja-Sakar and who earned their living directly or indirectly through the TKZS, soon discovered that they had to relocate again. This time it would be moti-

vated by the manipulation of agriculture for political purposes by both former communists and the new democratic forces (Creed 1998, 226).

Once again, big politics would decide the fate of remote rural communities such as Momina Tsarkva. The ensuing dismantlement of the TKZS and with that of the Youth Republic will be analysed in more detail in the following section.



From Communism to Neo-Liberalism

Between 1989 and 1991 the Bulgarian Communist (in April 1990 renamed Socialist) Party made several attempts at reformation, a more-or-less universal trend among communist regimes throughout the region. Despite these attempts, however, it was forced to resign by unprecedented street protests in Sofia, the capital, as well as by the efforts of the newly-formed political opposition and trade unions (Znepolski ed. 2011, 445).

In this context, following a narrow victory at the elections held in October 1991, the reformist Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) began a large-scale campaign of clearing all vestiges of the Communist Project, starting off with the cooperative farm system, which as Creed and Verdery have suggested, symbolized socialism in the countryside, and which the UDF believed to sustain socialist sentiments among villagers (Creed 1998; Verdery 2003). Bulgarian farmers, on the other hand, strongly resisted de=collectivization, which made their preference of the BSP inevitable.

The irony in this is that, in just under 50 years, Bulgarian farmers were forced to radically change their methods of land cultivation twice – the first time round they had to totally 'collectivize' their land and means of land cultivation, and the second time, to un-do collectivization completely. It seemed that, in the end, both communist and democratic governments relied on one and the same means – coercion. Many other former fellow socialist countries, such

as Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, chose a very different path of solving the complex agricultural legacy of socialism and with visibly greater results.

Returning to the Bulgarian Neo-liberal path, from its very inception, the implementation of the project at the political top resonated at the everyday level in rural communities, turning the agrarian question into a political matter. Between 1989 and 1995, parliamentary control shifted between democrats (UDF) and socialist (BSP), and, with that, the nature of state land policy oscillated between reconstitution of the cooperatives (advocated by the BSP), and their complete abolition (promoted by the UDF) (Creed 1998, 222). Thus, the socialist-era dynamic of alternation between reform initiatives and reversals was perpetuated in the post-socialist context.

1991 was a crucial year for property relations in Bulgaria. The national parliament adopted two crucial land laws in this respect: *The Cooperatives Act* and *The Ownership and Use of Agricultural Land Act*. Both of these acts were passed under the parliamentary control of the BSP, which explained their bias towards cooperative cultivation (see Creed 1998; and, Znepolski, 2011). *The Cooperatives Act* allowed TKZS farms to re-register and specified voluntary membership. In line with this provision, in Momina Tsarkva, as well as in many other villages in the country, a new cooperative farm was registered. The name that was given to the new farm did not reverberate communist allusions, but instead bore reference to the more distant pre-socialist cooperative farming in the village that boosted private property relations. The new farm Pchela also added to its name the new year of institutionalisation being 1991 (RDA 1073-2-1).

The generally smooth transfer of registration between cooperative farms in the country allowed for some carryover of old abuses, as Creed and Duijzings indicate (Creed 1998; Duijzings 2013). In Momina Tsarkva the chair of the TKZS overnight became chair of *Pchela*-91 (Popov-Ru-

menov 1999). Village rumour has it that the same chair's fortune that he accumulated in the 1990s was gathered through personal profiteering in the privatization campaign, through manipulation of the public tenders of the cooperative farm property.

The October 1991 elections, which were won by the UDF, immediately changed the course of land reforms. Thanks to the newly adopted amendments of 1992, the Cooperatives Act provided for the complete liquidation of TKZS in Bulgaria. Purposive Liquidation Councils were set up throughout the country to facilitate this process. As Creed has summarised, the Liquidation Councils had the schizophrenic task of managing farm production while liquidating farm assets.

Momina Tsarkva was a prime case in point. As evident in the available archive materials, *Pchela*-91 was liquidated in 1992, again, under the new amendments to the Cooperative Act (RDA, 1073-2-12). Its assets were placed under the jurisdiction of the Liquidation Council set up in August of the same year (RDA, 1073-2-2). The outcome of the Council's management was a catastrophic loss of 5.5 million leva, which was unheard of in the history of the cooperative (RDA, 1073-2-2). The archive materials also testify to the numerous thefts from the inventory of the TKZS. The looting of the cooperative farms by Liquidation Council members was symptomatic for the whole country. For the villagers across the country this process was simply destructive and led them to call for the resignation of the government and the dismissal of the Liquidation Councils.

The polarized political climate in Bulgaria inevitably affected life in the now defunct Youth Republic. Crisis at the top led to rupture of the fragile peace between 'indigenous' villagers and the so-called 'newcomers' of the former Youth Republic. The split in Momina Tsarkva became evident in the exclusion of the Youth-Republic's settlers from both liquidation process and the decision-making in the Liquidation Council. The rift between 'old' and 'new' villagers,



which was initiated during the Youth Republic's days and the de facto favouritism of 'new' over 'old,' intensified after 1991 with the establishment of a parallel cooperative farm by the pro-reformist 'new.'

As testified in interviews, the pro-reformist 'newcomers' named their cooperative farm *Nadezhda*-10⁶, after the number of founding members. Immediately after the institution of their farm, two of the pro-reformist members who were still employed in *Pchela*-91 were unlawfully dismissed, which even led to a law suit won by the employee. The membership of one of the 'newcomers' in the trade union Podkrepa only exacerbated relations between the two factions. Thus, paradoxically, the de-collectivization efforts of the UDF, led to an increase in cooperative farming throughout the country and even amongst its supporters, as was the case with *Nadezhda*-10.

With the relaxation of the liquidation campaign during the BSP-backed expert government between 1992 and 1994, and rightfully assessing the vital importance of the cooperative farm for the economic viability of the community, the board of the liquidated cooperative farm in Momina Tsarkva set up a new *Comprehensive Cooperative Farm Pchela* in February 1993 (RDA, 1073-3-2). The name of the new farm was a carbon copy of the pre-socialist farm that existed prior to the onset of collectivization. The symbolism of return to the true cooperative beginning in the village was apparent. As testified in Popov-Rumenov (1999, 162-163), as late as 1998 land restitution was still undergoing.

If the political climate was favourable to *Pchela*, the economic situation of the early 1990s had quite the contrary effect on *Nadezhda*-10. As reflected in interviews (2013), former members of *Nadezhda*-10, had fallen victim to the double burden of the increasing monthly repayments of the bank loans, which they had taken to purchase machinery, and, on the other hand, of the lack of arable land, since land restitution had not effectively commenced.

As already mentioned, in Momina Tsarkva these processes also put social relations to the test. The genuine struggle of the 'newcomers'⁷ to sustain their cooperative farm and stay in the village despite the hardships of the 1990s illustrated in a nice way their sincere motives to make Momina Tsarkva their home, beyond the framework of the Youth Republic. One of the most vocal attempts at ascertaining this position was the aforementioned decision of a dismissed member of *Pchela*-91 to pursue her rights in court. In September 1992 she won the case and was duly reinstated at the cooperative (RDA 1073-2-6).

Meanwhile, the overall situation of Bulgarian farmers continued to deteriorate, aggravated by the suspension of state subsidies, which in turn was necessitated by the pressure handlers in economic finance exercised over all East and Central European governments. Instead, as Verdery observes, 'they were pressing for free markets with no subsidies and low tariffs – next door to an EU agriculture built on subsidies and protection' (2003, 92). In this vicious circle, the economies of the former Eastern bloc were sinking into a deeper crisis that between 1988 and 1993 was more profound than the Great Depression of 1929-1933 (Szelenyi cited in Verdery 2003).

In this climate, as documented in the archive materials, the *Comprehensive Cooperative Farm Pchela* liquidated its stock-raising branch to accumulate fast profit; not long after, the board acknowledged this to have been a grave mistake (RDA 1073-3-1). In 1994, however, it did generate a profit of 1 million leva, and boasted a membership pool of 1100 members, reaffirming the strong cooperative sentiments in the community.

At the elections in January 1995 the BSP came out victorious and, unsurprisingly, set about suspending the Liquidation Councils. Instead of improving the condition of the cooperatives, however, the economic policies of the socialists eventually undermined cooperative production (see Creed 1998, 262). When the government changed

6) *Nadezhda* (transl. from Bulgarian) meaning *hope*.

7) In everyday conversations in 2012 and 2013 the Youth-Republicans were commonly referred to as newcomers by the locals, although they settled in Momina Tsarkva over thirty years ago.

in 1997, as Verdery suggests, things were up in the air again. In the same vein, Bulgarian property rights remained insecure for most of the decade (Verdery 2011, 90).

In Momina Tsarkva, the late 1990s and early 2000s were a period of slow, but imminent social and economic downfall. Young families were forced to relocate to other towns and villages, after the closure of the nursery in the village (early 2000s) and school (2002). Many villagers were denied entry into the *Pchela cooperative*, due to personal preferences of its long-term chair (Popov-Rumenov 1999, 163), doom-ing many to a meagre livelihood.

In this context, a new category of unique capitalist entrepreneurs, popularly known as *arendatori*, who rented land from the new owners, appeared in many agricultural regions of Bulgaria. As Kostova and Giordano observed in the Dobrudzha region, the success and resulting wealth of the *arendatori* was attributed to the forms of social knowledge and capital acquired in socialist times (2013, ed, 2014, 111). Several *arendatori* set up house in Momina Tsarkva as well. The first mention of such activity was recorded in 1992 (Popov-Rumenov, 1999, 161). By 2012 public registers of farmers show 8 such enterprises in Momina Tsarkva. In 2013 their number had risen to 11, only to fall again to 8 in 2014. The economic input of the *arendatori* seems to be of mixed blessing to the community in Momina Tsarkva, providing some economic opportunity to those employed in the business, also financially supporting annual festive events such as the village fair, but little, if any large-scale effect on the rural economy of the village or the region for that matter.

Overall, the disappearance of the conflicting complementarities of Bulgarian socialism with the onset of the Neo-Liberal Project made cooperative farming dysfunctional. The land was restored to its 'real boundaries', but the rural population had little vested memory of traditional ways of rural life than those of the more Western countries of the region (Bradshaw and

Stenning 2003, 120). Momina Tsarkva was provided with the unique opportunity to have under its belt young and agriculture-prone population, an asset that was easily squandered. The delayed land restitution, short-sighted factionalism in the village, the personal profiteering at the expense of the cooperative farm, the closure of all village enterprises and the ultimate loss of means of income forced the young families one by one to abandon Momina Tsarkva. Looking back, some villagers shared deep regret and self-implication that some of the capable and hardworking people that had come thanks to the Youth Republic scheme were chased away recklessly (Interviews, Momina Tsarkva, 2013).

A similar sentiment was shared by those who had left the village, reminiscing in conversation of their subsequent returns to the village where some of them still have property, but were put off by the economic stagnation and mere lack of income. As they said, they had given the village their most productive years and wherever they were at the moment, they carried a part of it with them (Interviews, Burgas, 2012).

~~РЪАКНЕ~~

Conclusion

The transition from Nationalist through Communist to Neo-liberal modernity brought about important changes to the development of rural communities. Under communism, a negative attitude towards the capitalist, 'retrograde' and 'reactionary' rural beginning was methodically cultivated (also Brunnbauer 2008, 57).

On the other hand, however, efforts to urbanize, modernize and 'tame' the countryside were also premeditatedly pursued (Stenning 2004, 91). In this respect, in Bulgaria, as well as elsewhere in the Communist bloc, particularly prominent were meritorious titles such as 'exemplary home,' 'exemplary village,' and 'exemplary collective,' and in later years efforts such as cultural and folkloric reserves, comprehen-



sively studied by Angelova (2008, and this volume) and Kaneff (1998). Even the Youth Republic scheme investigated in this study can plausibly be ascribed to this strategic effort to create an exemplary countryside.

There is yet another take on the socialist conceptualization of the village that offers valuable insight into its contemporary status. The idea that the village was not necessarily a powerless and victimized backwater, but instead consciously or unconsciously managed to gain a powerful position in the socialist order, can be illustrated by the findings of Ulf Brunnbauer and Gerald Creed among others. Brunnbauer contends that during the rapid urbanization process of the 1950s and 1960s, more than 1.5 million Bulgarians left their villages for good. These rural migrants carried habits that were not in tune with the socialist way of life, habits of former peasants and their offspring, which created a serious problem and a hard task for the Fatherland Front to socialize into the new urban, socialist society (Brunnbauer 2008, 57).

The 'pulse' of the third Project of Modernity, as defined by Dingsdale, however, revoked the socialist power model, and in its place produced winners and losers, 'by re-evaluating and reconstructing the rural and urban fabric, revising the text of representation and reimagining the identity of villages, towns and cities' (Dingsdale 2002, 180). The most prominent effect on most rural areas since 1989, as evidenced by Turnock (1999, 173), was some degree of impoverishment. Even more worrying are the findings of Arabajieva, cited by Duijzings (2013), which testify that poverty in rural areas of Bulgaria is twice as high as in urban areas, with the main problems being low birth rate, negative natural growth, ageing of population, higher mortality rates, depopulation, low wages, high long-term unemployment, poor and deteriorating infrastructure, low levels of agricultural productivity and weak agricultural performance, limited access to basic services, such as water, health, etc.

From this context of domesticated state

socialism, Bulgarian villages were thrown into a post-socialist state, which left them outside of economic development altogether, and thus precipitated the appearance of the paradoxical 'socialist nostalgia' (Creed 2010, 30). In line with Creed, this article argues that socialist nostalgia, also a particularly prominent phenomenon in Momina Tsarkva, signals the impossibility of going back. Thus, its rise in Bulgaria is clear evidence for the end of transition. This comes in stark contrast with the earlier discouragement by communism of pre-war and capitalist nostalgia, which served to sustain people's memories of pre-socialism as viable options in the future.

Also, in contrast to the 1990s, the socialist state stepped in to cure 'the traumatized countryside' of the 1950s and 1960s (Creed 2010, 38), which is another reason for the unfulfilled nostalgia. Ironically, as Creed concludes, by trivializing capitalist discontent and commodifying socialist contentment, socialist nostalgia, in fact, facilitates neo-liberal programmes (Creed 2010, 31).

Another element to the neoliberal rhetoric, especially valid for Romania and Bulgaria, as Ger Duijzings (2013) has suggested, is related to the fact that the state has not withered away as classical neo-liberalism postulates, but, instead, has been facilitating a path-specific East European form of neo-liberal restructuring, where the main beneficiaries are the former nomenklatura, who have used (and abused) their control over the state apparatus to privatize assets and enrich themselves in the process of it. The paradox of this arrangement, as suggested by Steven Sampson, lies in the fact that the same informal loyalties, which help groups survive oppression, are also those which carry out smuggling operations, corrupt police and keep silent (Sampson 2002, 31).

In this context, the rapidly disappearing community of Momina Tsarkva, in concurrence with Creed's observation of the village of Zamfirovo, resembles 'a shell of its former self' (2010, 35) and does not have bright



perspectives of survival and sustainability. Moreover, the spectre of the 'rural ghetto' as defined by Osha Grey Davidson (1990) is becoming a greater threat than ever. This would possibly become true, unless certain strategies are implemented with urgency. A starting point for an academic discussion on the subject has been provided by Creed and Kaneff (Duijzings 2013), suggesting a certain expansion of the experience of space

/ place. The other valuable recommendation made by Creed demands from researchers to specify the particular qualities and attributes that impact rural locations, while also looking at how the understanding of rurality is shaped by its articulation with other analytical and cultural categories, such as nature, agriculture, community and modernity.

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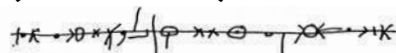
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Social Structure and Land Property in Romanian Villages (1919-1989)



Cornel Micu

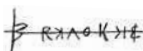
Lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

The article compares two different cultural meanings of land property: the modern one, developed in Western societies in the context of modernization, and the traditional one, which still prevails to some extent in Romanian villages. I argue that in the traditional environment of Romanian villages, land was rather the collective property of groups (mostly or families), regarded less as merchandise to be sold or bought and more as a survival mean.

KEYWORDS

Land property, modernization, collective property, merchandise, survival mean.



Introduction

The collapse of socialist regimes led to a resurgence of the concept of “private property”, considered one of the key ideological elements of the newly-emerged democracies. Even the “reformist” regimes, such as the Romanian one, which strived in the first years to create a “human socialism”, as defined by Ion Iliescu, the president at the time, recognized the need for private property and used different strategies, from reconstruction of property rights to privatization, in order to promote its development.

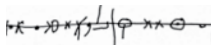
This article deals with a specific form of property, namely land property, and the social and economic factors that shaped the attitude of Romanian villagers toward land. I argue that the concept of “property”, as it was introduced in Romanian legislation during the 19th century, was appropriated for socio-economic structures developed following the modernization process in Western Europe. It was less compatible with the traditional social and economic relations specific to the Romanian rural area, so it had little practical

relevance for the peasants.

Throughout the article I will focus more on the social and economic structures specific to the Romanian rural area during the interwar and communist period, in an attempt to show that the cultural definition of land property reflected by field interviews was closely connected to the realities of the peasants’ daily life. To this purpose, I will make use of interviews collected in the summers of 2006 and 2007 in Bordei Verde commune, situated in the South-Eastern part of Romania, statistical data and documents from the local archives.

The main hypothesis which I will try to validate throughout this article is that, in the case of the Romanian rural area, land is culturally defined more as “means of subsistence” and “social connector” rather than as an economic asset or means of production. To this effect, I have structured the article in several parts: the introduction of the main used concepts in the theoretical section, a concise description of historical specificities of national policy toward agriculture in Romania, a short presentation of the studied area and, in the last two sections, the role land played in Bordei Verde during the in-

terwar period and to which extent this role really changed following the collectivization of agriculture.



Theoretical background

In this article I will make use of two main theoretical concepts. The first one is the distinction between peasants and farmers as social and economic categories. They are used in this article based on the distinction drawn by Eric Wolf, according to which the peasants represent the social category practicing mainly subsistence agriculture, with most of the outcomes consumed inside the households, hence the term "subsistence". In contrast, most of the production obtained on a farm is sold on the market and the farmer actively takes part in the economic exchanges at the social level (Wolf 1998[1965], 2-4). This distinction should be regarded as an ideal type in the Weberian sense, since even the peasants may sell some of their products on the market and the farmers may even consume some of them. Nevertheless, the pattern of production is oriented toward subsistence in the first case and toward market in the latter.

The terms are also connected to an evolutionary perspective, with the market agriculture being associated with modern societies and the subsistence one with traditional ones. Indeed, the high degree of urbanization in contemporary societies and the substantial growth of population require a growth of hectare yield and, subsequently, an investment of capital difficult to obtain by subsistence households. Following this evolutionary aspect, one can see changes in the political status of the two categories, with the peasants being most often a subordinated group, subject to taxation from other social categories in order to meet the nutritional needs of a given society. In contrast, since they are engaged in exchanging the products on the markets, farmers enjoy a higher status, equal with the other social and economic categories, or, given the sensitive nature of the food market, even better be-

cause of the support programs developed by modern states. On the same line of thought, which tends to value more the farmers as a modern socio-economic category, the introduction to this volume by Ștefan Dorondel / Stelu Șerban presents the attempts of the newly-established South-Eastern European states to transform traditional peasants into "farmers" and "citizens".

Such a distinction is closely connected with the wider definition of "property" in anthropological literature, where "property in the most general sense concerns the ways in which the relations between society's members with respect to valuables are given form and significance" (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2006, 14). Such relations are highly dependent on the social and economic context in which they are constructed and, hence, under the wider term of "property" one may find different cultural constructs, dependent on the social and economic structure of a given society. Among these constructs, the most known is native to Western Europe which has spread relatively recently to the rest of the world: "a piece of native theory implicit in Western property concepts: it emphasizes <rights> or entitlements and sees the subject of property relations as inherently right-bearing; hence the prevailing language of property rights. A final pseudo-theoretical element is that if property involves persons, things and their relations – the standard anthropological conception – then those persons and things are clearly bound, have integrity and are easily recognizable as separate kinds of entities" (Verdery and Humphrey 2004, 5).

This understanding of "property", which I will describe through the attribute "modern" because it is connected to the development of the modern world, was directly connected with the emergence of capitalism, where the transfer of goods (including land) gained importance, and led to a redefinition of the way in which social relations around goods were constructed (Wolf 2001[1983], 259, 261-262). It was associated with the need to register the right of property through



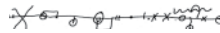
deeds in order to prove ownership in the eventuality of transactions, and the tendency to personalize the rights, in order to ensure that the eventual selling negotiations took place between as few persons as possible (Verdery and Humphrey, 2004, 2-5).

Yet, in the case of Romania, both meanings associated to land, as “means of subsistence” and “social connector”, are hardly compatible with the Western perception of property since it makes it very difficult to really differentiate between things and persons as separate entities. Therefore, the general conceptual framework of this article would be a neo-Marxist one, according to which the economic relations constructed around culturally defined objects (in this particular case land), deeply influence the meanings granted to them. The perspective that I propose is that of cultural materialism promoted by American anthropologist Marvin Harris, for whom particularly relevant for understanding culture are the relations of society with the environment (the etic aspect of culture), which Harris defines as “cultural infrastructure”, compromising the modes of production and reproduction. They are the foundation of social structure, consisting of domestic and political economies of a society, on top of which one can find the superstructure, represented by emic behavioural and mental aspects of culture (Harris 1979, 46-54).

Both cultural materialism and the distinction between peasants and farmers based on their dominant production mode show that, in order to realize what the peasants understood as “land property”, it would be a good idea to take a closer look at the role that land played in traditional peasant communities. This may seem strange, since the definitions of property are to be found predominantly in the collections of legal texts mostly published by the state, sources which are easier to come by than the local social relations in the village. Nevertheless, following anthropologists such as Erich Wolf or John W. Cole, I argue that the peasantry has its own history, which does not necessarily overlap with the wider, canonical national history (see Ștefan Do-

rondel and Stelu Șerban in the introduction to his volume). Instead, due to the fact that they are not entirely integrated into the modern capitalist economy, the peasants’ history is rather locally determined, integrated into a system of dependence on the local land owners or political elites.

One may argue that the best way of finding out the meaning of land property for the peasants would be just to go out and ask them, an enterprise which I undertook during two stages of field work in the summers of 2006 and 2007. Nevertheless, the importance of national and local history for anthropological studies is hard to deny, as peasant communities have their own history and are influenced to various degrees and ways by the national history (Șerban and Dorondel 2004, 46-50). Furthermore, a historical perspective may bring insights into the process of transformation of culture throughout the time under the impact of global and local factors. It would explain why, despite the expansion of modern capitalist system throughout the world, the peasants continue to exist as a social and economic group closer to the traditional societies.



State attempts to transform rural areas during the 20th century

In the areas which entered into the capitalist sphere of influence later on, the Western concept of property replaced the native or traditional concepts due to its association with important topics in modern political thought: civil government, citizenship, etc. A good example in this regard is the study of Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli in this volume, according to which the purpose of the 19th century agrarian reforms in Greece was to create a nation of small owners who would support the power of the newly-established monarchy. In the case of Romania, the concept of “property” gained use at the beginning of the 19th century. It started to be applied to the economic and social relations constructed around land, in the first constitutional texts,



namely the “Organic Regulations” in 1831-1832, although only in reference to the land estates owned by the nobility (boyars); it was first applied to the peasants through the agrarian reform law in 1864 (Müller 2010, 209-211). Although an important part of the political discourse during the last two centuries, it overlapped social realities that were not entirely compatible with it. This was noticeable even at the level of legal doctrines, which made a distinction between “small” and “large” property, reflected by interwar legislation regarding the sale of “small” property gained through the agrarian reforms and the distinction between “estate owners” and “peasants” applied by the communist regime (Micu 2012, 81-82 and 84-85).

This dual form of land property partially reflected the traditional political differentiation between “boyars” and “peasants”, which were social categories constructed based on their access to land usage. Yet, its persistence was not associated only with a traditionalist, conservative perspective regarding social relations, but also with the modern formula of “Staatsnation”, widespread in Europe in the 19th century. In this regard, the study of Christian Giordano in this volume emphasizes the role of agrarian reforms as instruments of territorial policies which pursued the strengthening of national cohesion and unity of the new states that emerged in South-Eastern Europe during the 19th century.

Nevertheless, if state land was associated with social and national policies, for the peasants it was in the first place the way of ensuring their basic subsistence needs. A hint about the pragmatic nature of intra-family relationships with respect to land is shown in the study of Andrew Cartwright in this volume. The key role land plays in ensuring basic subsistence means is particular to traditional societies with reduced social mobility and low urbanization rates (Roberts 1951, 40-47; Mitrany 1968, 415). With most of the population living in the rural area and land by definition limited, a strong competition for it as the sole means of survival results. In the particular case of Romania, the first half

of the 20th century was characterized by an overall growth of the rural population and a slow pace of urbanization. The economic model promoted before the great economic depression (1929-1933) focused on economic protectionism, which slowed the rate of industrialization and creation of new jobs in the cities (Murgescu 2010, 250-260). The great economic depression led to the contraction of the industrial sector which further amplified the problem during the ‘30s.

Meanwhile, the agrarian policy focused on the development of subsistence households, in an attempt to calm the social unrest in the countryside (Roberts 1951, 31). Both agrarian reforms implemented during the first half of the 20th century distributed small plots of land, 2.3 hectares in 1921 and 1.3 in 1945 (Axenciuc 2000, 100-103), in order to be enough for everybody, with little concern regarding the economic efficiency of the newly-created households. In the long run, as shown by Jennifer Cash’s study in this volume, the plots were too small in order to eradicate the poverty in the villages. The development policy during the first half of the 20th century encouraged the peasants to regard land as a “survival mean” and even the political discourse of the period emphasized the role of subsistence households for the development of Romanian agriculture (Madgearu 1999[1936], 75-85). Besides, the slow industrial development and low urbanization rate meant that there was a very limited internal market for agricultural products, while the taxation of grain exports and high prices of agricultural implements determined the average household to specialize in subsistence production (Mitrany 1968, 434-440).

During the communist period the approach toward agricultural production was radically different, as the regime emphasized the importance of merging the land in larger units of production. By the mid-‘60s, most of the land in Romania was worked by two forms of enterprises: collective and state farms. The state farms were managed by state-appointed managers, financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and using exten-

sively mechanized technology. The collective farms consisted of associations of land owners, working the land together and sharing the harvest. A specific aspect was the fact that they granted a small plot of land to their members, in order for them to practice subsistence agriculture. The distinction between the two forms of enterprises was legally reflected by the distinction between two forms of property: "state" and "collective" property (Lipan, 1977).

The agricultural policy during the last three decades of the communist period was little researched by historians, who focused more on the process of collectivization (Dobrincu and Iordachi 2005; Iancu et al. 2000; Kligman and Verdery 2011; Roske et al. 2007). Nevertheless, some general trends of this period are supported by sources and / or field interviews: a growing state control over collective farms, the usage of state monopoly in order to drain value from the collective sector and use it for industrial development, the slowdown of internal rural to urban migration and a gradual worsening of living standards in the countryside (Micu 2012, 104, 213-215). Especially important for this article are the policies promoted during the '80s in order to preserve the working force in agriculture. They were deemed necessary because the slow rate of mechanization and the tendency of rural population to migrate toward cities or other economic sectors led to shortages of labour in agriculture (Shafir 1985, 95-104, 143).

The available statistical data support the idea that the decline of living conditions in the villages was actually a part of the national policy. This indicates that the communist regime regarded the rural population rather as peasants (a subordinated category) than as farmers (fully integrated citizens). Such a policy is reflected by two different sets of data: the proportion of income spent on food by the rural and urban population and the differences in rent paid to these categories.

The first one represents the proportion of income spent by peasants (members of the collective farms) and wage earners on

basic commodities such as food and drink (table 1). The data show they spent more of their income on basic commodities, which meant that generally they earned less than city workers. The variation between the two closest intervals, which indicates how the expenses for basic commodities varied on short term, proves the existence of a national policy deliberately disadvantaging the countryside. The villagers managed to partially close the gap with the urban area during the 1970s, as the expenses of basic commodities diminished in the former at a higher rate than in the latter. However, this tendency reversed during the 1970s, in an interval when the economic crisis experienced by the Romanian communist regime did not affect the general living standards. It closed once more between 1980 and 1985, most probably because the crisis firstly affected the more market integrated urban area, and widened again during the last years of the regime, due to the enactment of the new legislative measures to boost the agricultural production after 1982.

Table 1: Proportion of income spent on basic commodities (food and drink) for wage earners and peasants (INS 1990, 131)¹

| | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1985 | 1989 |
|---|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Wage earners | 53.0 | 48.9 | 45.6 | 50.1 | 51.1 |
| Variation between the two closest intervals (%) | | -7.74 | -6.75 | +9.86 | +1.99 |
| Peasants | 74.4 | 65.8 | 63.7 | 66.9 | 69.9 |
| Variation between the two closest intervals (%) | | -11.56 | -3.2 | +5.02 | +4.48 |

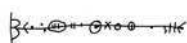
1) For the peasant category, the table includes also the products made in their own households. The variations between intervals were calculated by myself.

The second category of data concerns the rent paid during the communist regime in the rural area (table II). Rent is an important component of modern societies which rely on it in order to ensure material support for the elderly population. For the purpose of this article, it is important because a high enough rent would affect the perception of land as only means of survival and also the traditional practice of children taking care

2) In the sense that it affected an important part of the population.

of the parents in exchange of land. The rent system as monthly sums paid regularly to retired workers appeared in Western Europe at the end of 19th century and was generalized in the interwar period. In Romania a large scale² system of social insurance was developed during the communist regime. Nevertheless, table 2 shows that the rents paid to the members of the collective farms were substantially lower than the ones paid to the workers, which meant that rents played only a marginal role in the villagers' life.

Data is especially relevant if one takes into account the fact that both the rent and wage levels were established by the state, according to the principles of a planned economy. In fact, as I will show in the section dedicated to the specific case of Bordei Verde, this deliberate policy of regarding the inhabitants of villages as "inferior" played an important role in the preservation of the traditional cultural patterns, which valued land as a mean of survival.



Particularities of the studied area

Historically, most of Brăila county (including Bordei Verde commune), was directly administrated by the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century until 1829. This peculiarity affected the land distribution during the 19th century: due to unclear or inexistent property rights, great estates were distributed not to private owners, but to different autonomous establishments, such as "Eforia Spitalelor Civile", the foundation administering the public hospital system in Romania. Therefore, at the beginning of the 20th century, estates with more than 100 hectares

represented 73.2 percent of the arable land and the ones up to 10 hectares 26.1, making Brăila the county with the highest ratio of great estates in the Old Kingdom (Axenciuc 2000, 126-127).

Another peculiarity of the area was the low population density in the first half of the 19th century. This facilitated the migration of Transylvanian shepherds into the region, a group which traditionally used the swamps around the Danube as seasonal grazing fields for their flocks. As a result, at the end of the century 67 percent of the inhabitants were emigrants from Transylvania or other regions of the Old Kingdom (Mihăilescu 1933, 89). A second wave of migration took place during the '30s, following the interwar agrarian reform. As the county still had a low population density, inhabitants from more populated nearby counties such as Buzău, where there was not enough land to grant to the whole entitled villagers, received land plots in Brăila.

Statistical data indicates that the state itself had little influence in the area before World War I: of the total rural population of 88,954, even the official information registered 2,192 persons without any citizenship and the literacy rate was of only 49% for men and 23% for women (Vasilescu 1906, 112). The mayor's office archive in Bordei contains no less than seven requests for identity documents coming from people whose birth had not been registered and needed a birth certificate in order to register their marriages (DJBAN/PBV 5/1926). All requests were filled in 1926, by people in their twenties, a fact which shows that at the beginning of the 20th century the Romanian administration had little information about the population

Table 2: Rent values for the urban area, the members of the collective farms and the individual households during the communist regime (INS 1990, 126-127)

| Average monthly rent | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Urban area | – | 576 | 755 | 1124 | 1473 | 1505 | 1524 | 1556 | 1665 |
| The members of the collective farms | – | – | 61 | 184 | 232 | 238 | 245 | 253 | 261 |
| Individual households set by peasants | – | – | – | 100 | 120 | 121 | 123 | 125 | 127 |

in the villages, let alone the land.

The fact that the land was concentrated in large estates meant that the state administration had in fact very little power to directly influence the villages as compared to great land owners. Therefore, the local elites consisted mostly of people who had worked with / for estate owners before World War I. Such is the case of Manta and Motoc families in Bordei Verde, whose members are mentioned as mayors no less than 13 times in the documents issued by the Mayor's Office in Bordei Verde during the interwar period. Yet, people from both families occupied key positions in the local administration even before the agrarian reform in 1921: Milea Manta held the office of mayor from 1913 (DJBAN/PBV 5/1926) to 1919 and Apostol Motoc in 1899 (DJBAN/PBV 5/1919, 12).

The land seems to have been more of a last resort to survive, a means to satisfy the basic need for food in a society that had fresh memories about famine, rather than a road to gain elite status. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that, during the 19th century, landownership was not guaranteed by the state because of the estate owners' power (Chiot 2002[1976], 203-207) and the lack of registration to prove the property.

During the communist period, Brăila county retained a strong agricultural importance. The collectivization was relatively swift, without noticeable incidents and was finished at the end of the '50s. Thereafter, the regime focused on the development of irrigation systems and embankment of the swamps around the Danube, in an attempt to increase land productivity and to gain more agricultural terrain. The exploitation of limited oil resources in the area diversified - to a certain extent - the possibilities of employment for the rural population, but the agriculture remained the most important economic sector.

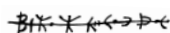
Bordei Verde was established as a village in 1855 when 108 inhabitants were granted land by "Eforia Spitalelor Civile". In 1906 it had the status of commune or basic division of the Romanian administrative system, with

a total population of 1,873 souls that inhabited two villages, with a church and a school as main institutions (Vasilescu 1906, 157). Bordei Verde retained the status of commune between 1917 and 1989, although it faced several reorganizations. In 1989 it consisted of three villages: Bordei Verde, Constantin Gabrielescu (or Șcheaua) and Lișcoteanca.

During the '30s, a great number of colonists moved into the part of the village that is today still informally known as "Vintilești". The relations between the locals, or "cojani", as they defined themselves and the colonists or "munteni" were initially tense, leading sometimes to fights (Bănică n.y., 87; G.D. 2006). The communist party exploited this situation during the collectivization period by using the colonists as agents of the new regime, a policy which stressed even more the relation between the two communities. Harmony came slowly, due to two different processes. Firstly, there was the intermarriage between the two groups (N.D. 2007). Secondly, the collectivisation managed, not without problems, to bring people together in the collective farm. However, some distinctions were maintained during the communist period, at the beginning by creating two collective farms (one for *cojani* and one for *munteni*), which were not merged until the '60s, and then by maintaining different brigades of *cojani* and *munteni* which continued to work separately (M.F. 2006).

In Bordei Verde the collectivization took place without noticeable resistance (Bănică n.y., 122-123). Initially, two collective farms were established in the village, although some interviewees mentioned attempts to create a third one (I.J. 2007). The existence of more than a collective farm is also mentioned by a respondent from the Lișcoteanca village (R.N. 2007), so, most probably, during the '50s between three and five collective farms functioned in the commune. After the collectivization was officially declared concluded in 1962, the regime slowly merged some of the existing collective farms and strengthened its control over them through the establishment

of a National Union of Collective Farms. In 1989 only two collective farms existed: one for Bordei Verde and Constantin Gabrielescu villages and another one for Lișcoteanca.



Meanings of land during the interwar period in Bordei Verde

The traditionalism of the Romanian villages was expressed by the importance of personal relations in daily life. The villages preserved strong traditional aspects of social and economic relations, dominated by personal contacts that acted as a social net in time of crisis, and land was an important aspect of these, as it regulated relations between generations. Children inherited parents, which gave them identity and social status, but in turn they took care of the parents once the latter reached old age. Land, a material good in a society with little use for money, was a tangible commodity suitable to be passed on to the next generations. The modern concept of personal, clear-cut property relations, was developed in societies which offered other possibilities of living aside agriculture, such as jobs in the industrializing cities, or / and different social structures that took care of the poor. The development of asylums in Western Europe, noticed by Michael Foucault in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, was an answer to the destruction of traditional social networks following the industrial revolution and reconfiguration of cultural attitudes toward property.

In contrast, sources in the local archive show that the community or state support in Bordei Verde was almost inexistent at the end of World War I. The “social” expenditures from the local budget were kept at a minimum: for example, in the fiscal year 1919-1920 only 300 lei were spent under the “public assistance” column, for the help of orphans, war cripples, widows and old persons. As compared to the total expenses of 14,242.75 lei the sum represents around 2.10 percent, much less than the total expenses

for the lighting and heating payments for the mayor’s office’s, which amounted to 500 lei (DJBAN/PBV 1/1919, 80-81).

In this context, when neither the community, nor the state could be relied on for help, the relationship between generations was based on splitting the land among the inheritors the moment they became adults through marriage. Therefore, the land was the most important asset when it came to marriage, as a way of ensuring some economic stability to the young married couple that had no other possibilities to make a living except for the land (M.Z. 2007). Besides, it provided also a form of social insurance for the parents, since the children were expected to take care of them later.

The economic value of land, as means of production and commercial asset was limited. Land provided the basic food needs for a family and was important in establishing social relations with other groups or families. In this regard, I would refer to the study of Jennifer Cash, who shows that in present Moldova most households still try to avoid selling agricultural products and seek other ways of obtaining cash. Nevertheless, land was not the main income source and the possession of a larger surface of land was not compulsory a sign of social power.

For the specific case of Bordei Verde, I consider the relation between “munteni” and “cojani” as relevant for the role of land in the social structure of the villages. At a first glance, one could consider that the conflicts that followed the arrival of colonists and their subsequent inferior position in the village fits a classical scenario of the poor immigrants facing the rejection of the richer locals. Yet, this was not the case as the surfaces of land belonging to the colonists and local were equal, in light of the 1921 agrarian reform. Indeed, through the 1921 agrarian reform, the state granted the peasants either whole plots of five hectares or “completion plots”.

According to the sources in the local archives, most of the peasants in Bordei Verde had, in 1921, less than five hectares of land

(see table 3). In interpreting the data, one should take into account the fact that the land was granted only to adult males. In most cases that meant either family heads or unmarried youngsters who were over 21 years old. The standard measure for the amplitude of the land-granting process is in this case the families and not the individuals. The data basically covers the whole population of the commune, as in 1919, according to the registers of the local budget, there were 1,349 inhabitants and 261 families in Bordei Verde village and 776 persons and 197 families in Constantin Gabrielescu village (DJBAN/PBV 1/1919, 34).

Table 3: Data regarding the land needed for land granting in Bordei Verde commune (1921) (DJBAN/PBV 1/1921, 40)

a) Bordei Verde village

| Inhabitants | No. | Owned ha | Needed (Ha) |
|-------------|-----|----------|-----------------------------|
| Up to 5 ha | 46 | 60 | 170 |
| Nothing | 274 | – | 1370 (with the school plot) |
| Total | 320 | | 1540 |

b) Constantin Gabrielescu village

| Inhabitants | No. | Owned ha | Needed (Ha) |
|-------------|-----|----------|----------------------------|
| Up to 5 ha | 27 | 32 | 103 |
| Nothing | 144 | – | 720 (with the school plot) |
| Total | 171 | | 823 |

Of course, the numbers represent estimates proposed by the local mayor and shouldn't be considered entirely reliable. Most probably, at least some of the families worked more land than included in the official statistics, and hence, after the reform, ended by using more than five hectares. Yet, this situation is representative for a reality observed in other case studies: in order to gain usage of more land, one needed the social connexions and status, which shows that, in the end, land usage was determined by one's social capital and not the contrary (Verderly 2003, 213-216).

Therefore, the land was not the element

that ensured the dominant position of the "cojani", but rather the fact that they were better socially connected than the newly-arrived colonists. Actually, interviews with the descendants of colonists showed that in some cases entire closely related family groups left their villages and moved to the colonization area, in order to maximize their social capital (G.D. 2006).. The importance of social connections and the specific aspects of "rural moral economy" still persist, as shown Jennifer Cash's study in this volume.

A hint of the role played by social connexions in determining the amount of land one could have worked is provided by a report issued by the Mayor's Office in 1926 about one hectare of corn arbitrarily cultivated by an "unknown person" on the communal pasture (DJBAN/PBV 4/1926). Yet, Bordei Verde village is located in a steppe region and I find it difficult to accept that the villagers become aware of the corn field only after it had been sowed. Most probably, the "unknown person" was allowed to tile that parcel by the local elites, and his deed was "discovered" only after the mayor had been replaced (actually, the report was issued shortly after a new mayor took office).

This example shows that the access to land, and probably other factors of production, was determined by one's social connections and status. Therefore, despite the fact that every family owned certain parcels of land, their access to other parcels, which were either not registered or parts of the communal land, was not regulated through the usage of property rights. The interesting fact about the case quoted above is that the author of the deed was never discovered. As it is hard to believe that no one knew who tiled a part of the common pasture, it seems that the usage of communal land was not considered misbehaviour, as long as the mayor was the one deciding who should be entitled to use it. Such cases were not particular to Bordei Verde; Liviu Mantescu's study in this volume shows the existence of the same pattern of conflict between the traditional property regime and the newly

state-defined one in Vrancea region.

Nevertheless, the examples quoted above tell very little about the effects of the interwar agricultural policy over the cultural definition of "land property". In both cases one may argue that such instances are representative for the relations constructed around land in the traditional society of the 19th century, which was transformed by the agrarian reform in 1921. Indeed, social connexions were especially relevant for the 19th century, when, due to the existence of large estates, access to land depended on the relation between peasants and land lords. After 1921 peasants became owners, so they should have enjoyed their property rights and stop constructing such a complex system of social relations around the land.

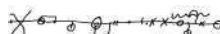
Yet, I argue that the interwar agricultural policy rather contributed to the preservation of traditional social structures and, implicitly, to the cultural definition of land in two ways. Firstly, it emphasised the role of small, subsistence-oriented households and secondly, due to the weakness of the state bureaucracy, it didn't manage to really implement its long term objectives.

In the first case, the general taxation policy and attempts to discourage the concentration of property created an economic environment in which it was very difficult for the small households to engage in systematic trade. The effects of the national policy were amplified by the global context, as the decline in agricultural prices that had started in 1928 and continued during the great economic depression, augmented the risks associated with product trade on the markets and discouraged the usage of paid labourers or of investments in technology. In fact, throughout the entire interwar period, the agricultural income represented at most a third of the whole household income and the rest consisted in other income sources, such as wages and or small enterprises (Stănculescu and Ștefănescu 1941, 252).

An aspect which is less noticeable at the national level, but better reflected by the local history, is the effect of state intervention-

ism promoted during the interwar period. The agrarian reform in 1921 can be regarded as an attempt to replace the role played by estate owners in villages with state bureaucracy. This was reflected by the State's attempts to avoid a reduction of overall agricultural production through interventionist policies by rationalising agricultural practices according to modern standards. Unfortunately, as state bureaucracy in the villages was underdeveloped, this strategy granted more power to the local elites and increased the importance of traditional social connections.

In the case of Bordei Verde, this is best expressed by a document reflecting the activity of the local commission in charge of the modernization of agricultural production patterns (DJBAN/PBV 4/1935, 227). In this particular case, the commission decided that the corn on the commune territory was ripe enough and allowed the villagers to start harvesting it. The document is relevant for the interventionist policy promoted during the interwar period, but the most striking aspect is the fact that the members of the commission were: the mayor, the priest, the school principal, the public notary, the tax collector, the commander of the local gendarmes post and... the medical agent. Besides being the local notabilities, no other quality recommended them as better suited than the average peasant in determining if the corn was ripe enough in order to be harvested. This is a good example of how modernization policies may rather support the persistence of traditional social and cultural patterns, according to which social relations and status in the community are more important than the professionalization or wealth in the individuals' daily life.



Limits of the communist transformation

The importance of local elites against the background of inefficient attempts of state interventionism continued during the communist period. A topic less approached by



the studies regarding collectivization is the complex relation between the kulaks and the communist party. Despite the fact that the official ideology presented the kulaks as enemies of collectivization, the party didn't allow them to join the collective farms until 1956 (ANR/CC of PCR 93/1956, 97-98), a decision which shows that at least some of the kulaks were ready to cooperate with the regime. This actually makes sense if one takes into account the fact that the local elites were the most aware of the importance of social and political connections and, most probably, considered them more important than the land. Case studies, such as the Hâreseni village, in Braşov county, where all nine members of the first collective farm leadership owned more than ten hectares of land during the interwar period (Kideckel 2006[1993], 88) further support this hypothesis. In the case of Bordei Verde, the only list of kulaks which I have identified has 19 names, among whom four are listed as members of Communist Party or Ploughmen's Front (DJBAN/PBV 24/1950, 119).

Social connections were important especially during the '80s, against the background of growing state interventionism in the peasants' daily life. N.D., interviewed in 2007, remembered the problems he had with the local authorities because of a horse he had bought: *"I had bought a horse and because of it I was summoned to the prosecutor's office, during Ceauşescu's rule; they accused me of theft. Some police colonels came, announced by the mayor... they called me once, they called me twice (...) I went to see the commander. The commander told me so: <The horse must disappear within 30 days! If you keep it, you will have to transport five tons of manure with it every day!> so I sold it!"* Interesting to notice it is the fact that the police invoked no law in order to "convince" N.D. to sell his horse, which shows that, in the end, he had to capitulate under the pressure of the local authorities.

Yet, C.B. has different memories about the same period. Despite the fact that sacrificing big animals, such as cows or calves,

was an offence against the law, punishable by prison, he admitted that he had sacrificed numerous calves, for himself or for other villagers (C.B. 2007). As for the possible consequences of his actions, the interviewee seems to have been perfectly aware of the risks: *"During Ceauşescu's regime, they would have thrown you in prison! Oh, my God! I had some courage! One must have some!"* (N.D. 2007). Such practices were by no means limited to the case of Bordei Verde, as shown by Liviu Măntescu's study in this volume.

C.B. may have been more courageous, but he was not the only one to break the law. He recollected that he would butcher calves not only for himself, but also for the priest and the commander of the police station. The calves were, thereafter, with the help of the policeman, declared as stolen and, of course, the thief was never found. C.B. was better integrated into the local social networks. He was a "cojan" - living near the centre of the village - that had worked his entire life for the collective farm, in the animal breeding sector. In contrast, N.D. was "muntean", living on the outskirts of the village. His life trajectory was also different: he started to work at the local collective farm, but during the '80s he found a job as a driver at the local oil exploitation, an episode which determined a conflict with the president of the collective farm.

Yet, one may notice that, despite the fact that the social networks preserved their importance, the social relations constructed around land and, implicitly, its cultural definition changed as the land was merged into the collective farms. Indeed, at a first glance we may argue that the large agricultural enterprises created through collectivization cut the link between the peasants and the land and transformed them into agricultural workers, receiving a wage at the end of each month. In the next pages I argue that the collective farm was more than a state "capitalist" enterprise, such as in the case of state farms, and that the relation between peasants and land was more complex than the



3) According to various respondents, the process of determining someone's work share was rather complicated.

The basic unit of measurement was the "norm", and various tasks accomplished inside the collective farms were quantified in "norms", according to their difficulty (corn harvesting, for example, was considered one of the most difficult works and one would get more norms for it). The accomplishment of a certain number of norms was registered as a "day of work"

4) Everybody agreed that they have the option to choose money or agricultural products as payment for their work. Yet, in most cases the respondents talked more about products than money..

one between workers and their work place.

Besides their different legal status, several functional elements differentiate a collective from a state farm. The first and the most important one is the fact that the members of the collective farms didn't receive wages. Instead, their work was measured in norms or "days of work"³ and, at the end of the year, the farm's profit would be divided to each according to how many "days of work" they had had. The yearly share one was receiving consisted in money and agricultural products⁴. The latter could be further divided into two categories: alimentary products, among which oil and sugar were mostly mentioned, but sometimes also cheese or honey and grains, mostly corn and wheat. Interesting to notice is that the respondents mentioned the grains more, so they seemed to consider that more important. They were used to feeding the animals in the households which consisted in pigs, sheep and poultry. Large animals, such as cows and horses were subject to restrictions regarding their trade and were difficult to keep as they required more food during wintertime. During the '80s, as they ceased to bake their own bread at home, some of the wheat was exchanged for tickets which gave them the right to buy bread from the collective farm's bakery. Besides the products, villagers were granted yearly a small plot of land and they chose what to grow on it. Most of the respondents told me that they preferred to have corn on these small plots, in order to be able to feed more animals.

Another important peculiarity of a collective farm was the low mobility of its work force. Although in certain instances they used day labourers, it was rather difficult for persons outside the commune to join a collective farm. Because they had no land to bring in, their membership needed to be approved through a complicated procedure which required an agreement from the general assembly of the collective farm. Furthermore, it was very difficult for the presidents of the collective farms to fire their members, as according to the last published statute of

the collective farm (UNCAP 1972) the only possibility to leave was as a punishment measure decided by the general assembly. As a result, the working relations inside the collective farm remained very informal, possibility varied from farm to farm and preserved some traditional elements. Villagers mentioned that each year they would receive certain plots of corn, which they had to weed out several times until they harvested them. Sometimes very complex negotiations took place in order to determine which parcels one would get, since the ones that had been worked better in the past were easier to weed out. This preserved somehow the idea that the right to use certain lands was important in the daily life.

The relation with the collective farm and, implicitly, with the land remained very personalized, dependent on the local social networks. Despite the fact that land ceased to connect the generations through the system of dowry like in interwar period, some examples of the role played by the collective farm in the personal relations between children and parents appeared in the interviews. Such were the agreements according to which the children worked in place of their parents, the latter taking care of their young grandchildren in exchange (S.C. 2007). In this particular case, the work in the collective farm connected the two generations, as the mother, too old to work, took care of her grandchildren at home while the daughter worked in her place.

A more interesting aspect, although less analysed by the specialized literature, is the informal role of the collective farm in supporting the elders of the village. Although it was by no means an official policy, one interviewee hinted to the existence of a special brigade, consisting in older villagers, who got easier tasks (R.N. 2007). Such cases may not have been a general rule, but they were not incompatible with the working environment of the collective farms.

Yet, two aspects of the communist period are especially relevant for the preservation of traditional connections between land

and survival. One is the failure of planned economy, which became especially noticeable during the '80s; the second one, the slow rate of modernization of production patterns in agriculture and the subsequent policies to stop the migration of labour toward other economic sectors.

The fact that the communist regime had a rather traditional perspective on the rural population, regarding them as a subordinated category of "peasants" and not an emancipated one of "farmers" is reflected in the differences in income between rural and urban areas presented above. The interviews showed that, generally, the villagers were aware of such a policy, as described by a respondent who quoted a saying popular back then: *"Our grain is beautiful (good) / But its ear points towards the state's silo!"* (C.Z. 2006).

In fact, the system according to which the income of the collective farm was distributed seems to have been specially designed in order to support traditional subsistence patterns: the members had the option to be paid in products, which the villagers transformed in food by breeding animals and consumed in the households. During the periods of economic prosperity the members of the collective farms could have opted to receive money instead of products. Yet, during the '80s, when food was scarce and rationings were being implemented, it was more advantageous to be paid in products than in money.⁵ The subsistence production of the households complemented the scarce food resources they had access to and provided some even for the relatives in the cities.

One respondent revealed an interesting aspect of the communist period, namely the fact that during the '80s any kind of food rights was distributed through the collective farms. Back then S.C. enjoyed better food rations as a mother of three children, but the management of the collective farm decided not to grant her these rights because she had refused to come to work (S.C. 2007). In the end, she managed to obtain her extra rations only after she had petitioned Ana Mureşan, the leader of the National Asso-

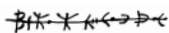
ciation of Women.

The story of S.C. shows that during the '80s access to the basic means of survival was dependent on the work of the land. It is also representative for the problem of labour shortages in agriculture which was the reason why the managers of the collective farm tried to pressure her into working. The need of labour and the subsequent policies applied to preserve it in agriculture gave few options to the inhabitants of Bordei Verde. Until the '70s it had been relatively easy for peasants to move toward the cities and find work in other economic sectors, as the regime was actively promoting urbanization and industrialization. These trends were reverse during the '80s, when restrictions in changing the residence or work place were put into effect.

In this regard, N.D. remembered the difficulties he faced when trying to find a job at the local oil exploitation platform: *"I went to the oil platform because the money was not enough. (...) Now I have a criminal record because I couldn't get the papers to change my job. The platform needed men, but the people at the collective farm didn't let us go. I needed a notification from them that they dispensed with my work services. They should have written and given us the notification, but they wouldn't do that. In the end, I found the stamp, I sealed and signed the paper with it, but they eventually got us. I got hired on the 2nd of February in 1980 and in June 1980, I was brought before the court in Făurei (a nearby city with a legal court - a.n.). We were close to being sentenced to jail!"* (N.D. 2007).

Yet, despite his new job at the oil exploitation, land continued to play an important role in N.D.'s life. The oil exploitation offered a good wage, but the food was rationed and he was not allowed to buy it in the cities. Therefore, his wife continued to work for the collective farm in order to get her rations of food. According to N.D., there were even years when he used money out of his wages in order to pay labourers that would help him to work for the collective farm.

5) This would explain why everybody considered the products so important: most probably they remembered the last years of communism.



Conclusion

The legal difficulties of defining property during the 20th century reflected the real relations constructed around the land, which were actually very different than the ones in Western Europe. The field interviews collected in 2006 and 2007 in Bordei Verde showed that for the villagers the notion of “land property” was constructed around two key elements: “land as means of subsistence” which meant that selling it was unconceivable and “land as family property” whose usage and disposal concerned a whole group of individuals. In the case of “land as means of subsistence”, the small rents and lack of jobs in the villages forced the villagers to rely on the small plots of land in order to feed themselves and their family after the dissolution of the collective farms. The definition of land as “inheritance for the children” was best expressed by the short answer of a respondent questioned about the possibility of selling her land: “I won’t sell it because I have children!” (F.B. 2007). The idea is best reflected in the novel *Ion*, published by Romanian author Liviu Rebreanu in 1920, in which a poor peasant asks his father: “Why did you drink and eat my land, old man?” (Rebreanu 1966[1920], 82).

Throughout the 20th century, the Roma-

nian rural area retained strong elements of traditionalism, which generated a conflict between the legally-defined concept of “land property” and the real social and economic relations in the villages. The concept of property started to be used in Romanian legal practice during the 19th century as a new legal institution borrowed from the occidental juridical practice. In its occidental form “property” was used in order to define social and economic relations specific to modern societies, in which transaction of goods, including land, are common. Such a perception of social and economic relations was directly connected to a specific social background which didn’t really develop either in interwar, or in communist Romania.

In contrast, the field interviews collected in 2006 and 2007 in the Bordei Verde area brought forward two elements central to the concept of property, namely the “land as subsistence means” and “land as group or family possession”, which are rather incompatible with the expansion of land transactions. Nevertheless, a closer look at the agricultural policy promoted during the interwar and communist policy show that native perspective on property was more adequate to the social and economic realities of the Romanian rural area, which preserved strong elements of traditionalism until the end of the 20th century.

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F.B., b. 1942, woman, Constantin Gabrielescu village, interviewed in 2007

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I.J., b. 1929, man, Bordei Verde village, colonist, interviewed in 2007

M.F., b. 1941, woman, Bordei Verde village, autochthon, interviewed in 2006

M.Z., b. 1925, woman, Bordei Verde village, autochthon, interviewed in 2007

N.D., b. 1948, man, Bordei Verde village, colonist, interviewed in 2007

R.N., b. 1928, woman, Lișcoteanca village, interviewed in 2007

S.C., b. 1956, woman, Constantin Gabrielescu village, interviewed in 2007



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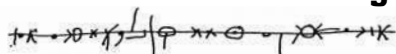
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Neither Peasant, Nor Farmer Transformations of Agriculture in Serbia after 2000



Jovana Diković

*Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology
University of Zurich*

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to point to the current problems of Serbian peasantry. Even though the title indicates that the paper deals predominantly with identity issues of Serbian peasants, yet it rather depicts and explains a deeper, complex and layered process that has been influencing their identity vagueness. It reveals the historical, political and social background of the process through the entire 20th century and their repercussions on peasant identity. Special attention, though, is devoted to the period after 2000, when Serbian agriculture was promised new paths of professional development within the new democratic governments. Questioning and re-examination of officially-proclaimed professionalization of agriculture and its progress make, therefore, the main focus of this paper.

KEYWORDS

Peasant, farmer, transformations,
Serbia, Vojvodina, Gaj

Serbian villages have remained beyond broader anthropological interests in the second half of the 20th century. During the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s, there was partially increased interest of foreign anthropologists in this region. A few social anthropologists - mostly from the United States of America - Joel M. Halpern, Eugene A. Hammel and Christopher C. Gaffney conducted a fieldwork research in Yugoslavia and among other fellow countries in Serbia. Halpern (1963, 1972) mostly published articles on peasantry and a monograph about a Serbian village in Šumadija (central Serbia). Gaffney (1979) published an article on a former German village in the Bačka region (Vojvodina province). Hammel (1969 a, b, c,) wrote several articles on kinship and traditional family relationships in urban and rural areas. After this period, almost total anthropological silence had arisen which lasted until the 1990s when Serbia again became the "topic" due to the civil war and dissolution of

Yugoslavia. However, the village remained neglected because of the primacy of studies of nationalism and the investigation of the social and political consequences of the war.

However, as Dorondel and Șerban notice in the introduction to this volume, the general problem not only with Serbian, but also with South-Eastern European peasantry, is that its social and political history is widely neglected by peasant studies, despite the fact that it still does make a significant percentage of population in these countries. Even the attempts of the communist regime' to modernize the countryside in this area, mainly through collectivization, expropriation and forced industrialization, have not lead to the disappearance of the peasantry from any of these countries' (Dorondel and Șerban, 3). Many factors might be in play: economic – permanent national or recent global economic crises which were induced by unstable and corrupt governments; political factors – wars, civil rebellions, authoritarian governments; institutional ones

– underdeveloped institutions of democracy and the rule of the law. Yet all of them did have tremendous impact on current demographic trends in rural areas (see Bryceson et al. 2000; Spoor 2012; 2009, 26-28).

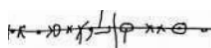
In Serbia, for instance, rural dwellers make 43,6%, while in Vojvodina province – which will be of special concern here – they make 43,33% of the overall population (RS Ministarstvo poljoprivrede 2009, 8). This paper, therefore, represents an attempt to gain a closer insight into the current state of the Serbian countryside and its population, and to emphasize the main trajectories of the latest rural transformation and development.

The paper has two tasks. The first is to highlight and summarize the main aspects of agrarian reforms in 20th century-Serbia, since there are limited national and international anthropological sources on this topic. The second task is to present the general transformation of Serbian agriculture after 2000. Within the second task, special attention will be devoted to problematizing the imperatives of progress and modernization that have been imposed by state agricultural politics and strategy after 2000.

The main argument of this paper is fairly simple. Due to the lack of political and economic continuity since the first agrarian reform in 1919, Serbian agricultural development has been first and foremost a political (ideological) project than the aim in and of itself. Due to this fact, agricultural producers¹ mostly suffer from professional and identity disorientation, which has been blatantly obvious since 2000. I argue that this has had an effect on the perception of semi-independency among village populations. More importantly, this has influenced the emergence of paired paradoxical and very complex relationships between the state and agricultural producers. The first represents the relationship between the ‘patronising’ state and the ‘demanding’ agricultural producers. The second presents the relationship of the ‘neglectful’ state and the ‘uncontrolled’ agricultural producers.

The first section of the paper is devoted

to the historical overview of the main aspects of the agrarian reforms conducted in the 20th century. The second section presents an introduction into local setting of Gaj village in the South-Eastern Banat region in Vojvodina province, where fieldwork research has been conducted. The village of Gaj is taken as an example of a relatively prosperous Serbian village where all controversy of the latest agricultural transformation is obvious and deeply rooted in society². The first part of the third section is devoted to the theoretical overview of the notion of “peasantry” from the perspective of the urban-rural continuum. This sheds light on the whole complexity of the notion of peasantry and its burden. Since one of the transition aims of Serbian society from 2000 onwards was modernization and transformation of peasants into farmers with the support of the state, this section in the second part also discusses why the process itself is highly superficial and contradictory. The last section tries to demonstrate how cooperation, i.e. ‘partnership’, between agricultural producers and the state functions on a daily basis. A few clustered examples of everyday strategies of people from Gaj aim to give more insight into the nature of this cooperation, i.e. ‘partnership’, which is based – as I will argue further – on manipulative strategies from both sides. These examples are also chosen to bring closer the complex relationship between the ‘patronising’ state and the ‘demanding’ agricultural producers, and the ‘neglectful’ state and the ‘uncontrolled’ agricultural producers. Finally, the paper tries to contribute to a better understanding of very vague professional and identity designation of agricultural producers, bearing in mind their constant juggling with the state on one side, and their identity on the other.



A look back: Agrarian Reforms and Politics in 20th Century-Serbia

The agrarian question in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1941)

1) I am using agricultural producer as value-neutral term, and as a ‘third way’ between the terms “peasant” and “farmer”, which have strong symbolic connotations.

2) This paper partly reflects the topic of my ongoing Ph.D. research that analyses the impact of official agricultural policy on everyday life, as well as discrepancies between the official policy of rural development and its actual accomplishments since 2001. The fieldwork in Gaj lasted from February until September 2013 and was based on extensive participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

and, later on, in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991), was one of the most important issues that was sometimes acquiring even 'sacred' character (Milošević 2008). As every reform, these were also ideologically-inspired and driven within two completely different political contexts. The First Agrarian Reform was conducted in the interwar period from 1919 to 1941. The Second Agrarian Reform was conducted from 1945 to 1953, but it was officially in force until the adoption of the 1991 Republic Law that marked the end of existing regulation in agriculture imposed by the state, and enforced restitution of agricultural land.

The First Agrarian Reform aimed to solve the problem of landless people who made 38,8% of the overall population in Vojvodina province in 1910, as well as to terminate outdated and backward ownership and property relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia and in Southern Serbia (Kosovo and part of Macedonia) that belonged to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Erić 1958). Since the majority of big landholders not only in Vojvodina, but also in Bosnia and Hercegovina and South Serbia were of non-Slav origin, one of the reform goals was 'Slav-ization' of the territories by internal colonisation of people from the Kingdom (Gaćeša 1995).

Within the First Agrarian Reform, the state determined the agrarian maximum for the big estates depending on the type of land, region and average big estate in the respective region. The agrarian maximum ranged from 87 to 521 cadastral acres (Lekić 2002, 104-117). All the land exceeding this particular maximum was allotted to the land fund, and the state had redeemed all land from its previous owners at market prices³. Peasants-beneficiaries were paying temporary lease for the land they got until the final liquidation of the reform that lasted from 1931 to 1941 when it stopped due to the Second World War. In this second phase of the reform, known as liquidation, peasant-beneficiaries were supposed to redeem the land from the state and become its own-

ers. As for the beneficiaries of the agrarian reform, the following categories had priority: war veterans and army volunteers, colonists, landless people and poor domiciles.

According to Gaćeša (1995), this reform undoubtedly had a civil character, particularly because it eliminated remains of feudal ownership structure on the one side, and, on the other side, it enabled continuing capitalist production relationships in agriculture (238)⁴. This process changed the ownership structure in Vojvodina province, as well as in other parts of the Kingdom, except in Serbia and Montenegro, where free, private small and middle estates were dominant even before the reform. Due to the elimination of backward property relations, a significant number of peasants had become landowners by 1941 (while many of them were only leaseholders at the beginning of agrarian reform). Nevertheless, there were unsatisfied parties, especially among ethnic minorities, war veterans and army volunteers, who did not receive any land, or compensation, even though they had priority over other parties. That was the result of unfinished and inconsequent conduction of agrarian reform and tremendous political influence on the process itself.

Despite the fact that the rural population made 84% of the Kingdom at that time, politicians from the biggest Radical and Democratic Parties, the latter being less influential than former one, did not see in it reform, but partisan capacity (Isić 1995, 229-247). They had dealt only nominally with the problems of the peasantry, until they won the elections. The Radical Party, for instance, did not have any integral party program on the social and political aspects of the peasantry and its development. On the other hand, Democrats were using the peasants' voting capacity primarily to overthrow the Radical Party (Isić 1995, 232). Overall, both the Radicals and Democrats supported the interests of the bourgeoisie in rural and urban areas rather than those of the mainstream peasantry.

The mainstream peasantry were faced

3) At the beginning of the agrarian reform, the law from 1922 had anticipated that land would not be redeemed from the Habsburg dynasty, or from those who had gotten the estates as a reward from the Habsburg dynasty, or from the Turks and all others who had enlarged their estates due to the plunder or illegal conversion of the peasants' land. But due to different political influences that came particularly from the biggest Radical Party, which was almost continuously in power between 1919 and 1941, a large number of these big estates were redeemed by the state. That is how numerous previous owners became incredibly rich in a very short time (Lekić 2002, 117-139).

4) Many controversies surrounded the reform itself. To mention only a few: a selective conduction and interpretation of the law on Agrarian Reform by state bureaucrats (Milošević 2008), and often political misuses and bribery which, as a goal, had to increase the maximum for certain big estates (Lekić 2002).

with extremely low productivity due to outdated tools used in land cultivation, the lack of modern machinery and technology competences, education, health and other services, the lack of infrastructure and so on. Because of this, a large number of peasants were deep in bank debts and could not redeem the land they had obtained thanks to the agrarian reform. The interest of the peasants was advocated mostly by parties which were less influential. Interestingly, parties such as the Coalition of Agricultural Workers, the Yugoslav Republican Party or the Peasant Party which were trying to penetrate the dominant political scene, were closer to the real needs of peasants and were more aware of what their reality really looked like (Isić 1995, 238). However, after the Second World War, peasants entered into new stage of their professional transformation inspired by the communist visions of agriculture.

The Second Agrarian Reform began under the slogan 'The land belongs to its cultivators'. The targets of land expropriation became the large estates of banks, churches and monasteries, companies, as well as the big landlords' estates that were spared, or partially embraced, by the First Agrarian Reform. The expropriated estates of previous owners were not compensated. One of the priorities of the new communist government was to establish state and collective agricultural cooperatives with compulsory membership by 1953 (Gaćeša 1984). Since cooperatives had very bad economic performance, poor work organisation, faced great resistance from the peasants and other side-problems such as massive thefts of cooperative goods and livestock, and misuse of position within the cooperative hierarchy (Tošić 1959; Halpern 1963), the conclusion was that such state of affairs was no longer sustainable. The Law on the Agrarian Land Fund of Common People's Property (Zakon o poljoprivrednom fondu opštenarodne imovine) was passed in 1953. The law represented a new stage of the collectivization of property and the politics

that further encouraged indirect subsidies to state farms, limitation of peasant holdings and imposing high taxes on private farming (Halpern 1963, 162). This kind of agricultural regulation lasted until the 1991 restitution of agricultural land.

The law introduced the agrarian maximum for private land up to 10 ha for agricultural workers, and up to 5 ha for workers. All expropriated land was allotted to collective cooperatives without any compensation, while membership in cooperatives became voluntary. Alongside this change, the emergence and strengthening of 'mixed' worker-agricultural households (that were active partly in agriculture and partly in industry) had become prevalent.

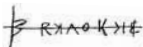
The peasant-worker living on his holding and commuting to a job outside his village is an important component of the Yugoslav labour force. According to a special agricultural census in 1960, it is estimated that there were some 1,306,000 peasant-workers in a total labour force of 2,985,000 (Halpern 1972, 80).

Until the restitution of agricultural land in 1991 – that has not yet been completed⁵, three forms of agricultural production organisation and ownership had dominated in Serbian villages: individual / private, state and collective.

After 1991, state strategies in agriculture were oriented primarily towards privatization of state-owned enterprises and collective cooperatives, which would become an imperative of the new democratic governments in later years, i.e. after 2000. One of the goals of the Ministry of Agriculture since 2001 has been the abolishment of 'mixed' worker-agricultural households, professionalization, privatization and modernization of agricultural sector. Such policies resulted in the increased number of registered agricultural producers and changed ownership structure to some degree. According to the statistical data gathered in 2009, 67% of land was in private ownership, 30% in state ownership, 2% in collective, and other types of ownership made only 1% (RS Ministarstvo

5) The 1991 Republic Law acknowledged rights and restituted land to private claimants whose land passed into collective ownership according to the Law on the agricultural fund (1953), or by means of confiscation due to unfulfilled duties towards obligatory redemption of agricultural goods from 1947 to 1953 („Sl. glasnik RS“ br.18/91). This meant taking away from collective ownership and giving land back to its former private owners regardless of their occupation (Čurović 1998, 3-8). The state had started to restate only agricultural land, but the process was suspended in 1992 due to financial sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro imposed by the United Nations. During this short period, approximately 150,000 ha were given back to the real owners, but the process has not yet been completed.

poljoprivrede 2009, 13). Nevertheless, the current state in agriculture is far from being an example of order and law. Nowadays, the agricultural sector binds different political, private and state interests in common machinery to exploit resources, with informal practices and non-transparent contracts as an inevitable way of doing business, which, overall, represents a serious obstacle in furthering agricultural progress.

 RAAOKH

Local Setting

The village of Gaj belongs to the Kovin municipality and is located in the South Banat district, within the Vojvodina province. Gaj lies on flat and fertile soil with the Danube River flowing along the south edge of the village (about 7 km). Gaj is strategically very well located between four cities: Kovin, Bela Crkva, Smederevo and Pancevo. It is a highly multicultural community with Serbs forming the majority, and Czechs, Romanians, Hungarians and Roma as minorities. With a population of almost 3.000, this village is among the most populated ones in the area.

The village of Gaj experienced the same transformations as every other village in Serbia through the whole 20th century. In the eve of the first agrarian reform, the cadastre area of Gaj had approximately 1230 ha. Ploughs made approximately 454 ha, i.e. 36,6% of total surface (Pavković 2009, 260). Even though there is no exact data on how much land was distributed to peasants, Pavković (2009) provides very insightful social background of the period from 1919 to 1941 in Gaj. Apart from the lack of agricultural machinery and advanced knowledge in cultivating the land, many people coped with very high state taxes and credit debts since they could not redeem the land they got. There were cases when peasants were using bank credits aimed for land ransom for celebrations, weddings or building houses instead (Pavković 2009, 261-262). The village also mirrored the micro-political scene of the state where representatives of Radical

Party were the most influential and dominant political factor on the local level, and, occasionally, these were representatives of the Democratic Party. Others, such as the representatives of the Social Democrats and Communist Party of Yugoslavia were significantly less influential (Pavković 2009, 259).

The socialist period brought about, up to some extent, the diversified professional orientation of the villagers. Apart from those who were mere agricultural producers, a part of the village population was employed in state companies and industries or the public sector, predominantly in Kovin and Smederevo, while Pancevo was a medical and educational centre. State vineyards nearby Bela Crkva were attractive for seasonal workers and wage labourers.

After the collapse of state agricultural cooperatives and forced collectivisation, the state began to found agricultural holdings in so-called collective ownership. This is how the Collective Agricultural Good 7th July was founded in 1955. This company possessed 1200 ha in collective ownership, out of which 2 / 3 of the land was expropriated land in the name of the agrarian maximum of 10 ha within the Second agrarian reform, and 1 / 3 consisted of village pastures converted into ploughs (Pavković 2009, 293). The company peaked at the beginning of the 1990s when around 150 people were employed – predominantly from Gaj.

7th July became private in 1993 due to ownership transformation. Privatisation in Serbia from the beginning of the 1990s and particularly from 2000 onwards, resulted in massive shut downs of mentioned companies or their resale through auctions. Many people from Gaj lost their jobs during this time. 7th July, for instance, was bought by a local businessman, but, since 2010, it has been going through the insolvency process. Many believe the owner's reason behind the purchase of the company was not its improvement, but rather a significant amount of land which is in the company's possession until the end of the restitution process.

On the other hand, the 1990s brought

about Kovin Mine, a new company, to Gaj. The company was founded in 1995, only 7 km away from Gaj. The mine exploits lignite beneath the water surface, which is a rare mining technique, as well as a distinctive feature of the village of Gaj. The mine has been operating profitably ever since and, even though it has undergone several changes in ownership, they have not affected its positive balance and success. Today, the mine, as well as very few successful companies in nearby cities, has created a strong competitive atmosphere for every potential job, but also the terrain for political corruption and clientele relationships.

A great part of the local population, whether unemployed, or employed in state or private companies, cultivates their private or rented land. According to many informants, even small pieces of land cannot be left uncultivated. In the socialist period, those who belonged to mixed worker-agricultural households would focus primarily on land and agriculture during the harvest season, and later on their second occupation (Pavkovic 2009, 340-377). One can suppose that the reason for this was the additional income from the land, but also the strong social stigma in the local community related to uncultivated land⁶.

The average amount of cultivated land, whether private or rented, per household ranges between 5 ha and up to 20 ha, which usually depends on the number of people living in one household, age structure, and additional professional occupations of the family members. Among those who do not possess any land (or possess very little) are mainly professionals such as doctors, vets, lawyers, professors, teachers, and Roma in a large percentage. For 30% of inhabitants, agriculture is the only occupation, 10% are employed in construction and other industries, 6% are employed in the trade sector (predominantly private one), while 4.5% are employed in the public and state sector⁷. Besides these categories, pensioners and so-called 'gastarbeiter' (people temporarily or permanently employed abroad) have an important impact on the local economy.

For professional agricultural producers, meeting modern demands such as up-to-date mechanisation and technological competences is inevitable. Competition represents one of their driving forces, but also one of their biggest worries. Strong competition over potential free land is increasing sale prices, but also the amount of annual land rent. According to many informants, at present, some 20 people from the village stand out from the others in the sense that they cultivate more than 100 ha. They dictate the prices, but they often represent political factors in local council, or they are either leaders or members of local agricultural associations. The strongest agricultural producers often support the ruling political party, whether on municipality or republic level. Isić (1995) emphasized one characteristic of Serbian peasantry from 1918 to 1925 which seems to be applicable to current agricultural producers. According to him, conservative in nature, the peasantry rather opted for parties in power, believing that this way they would be spared the arbitrariness and abuses of local bureaucrats. Peasantry never opted for the party program, but rather for the authority, personal connections and influences, as well for the economic power of the local and republic candidate, hoping to benefit from it when the time came (Isić 1995, 240). Much of this presents the common way of understanding politics and the way things function towards the state and vice versa. The political clientele, therefore, seems an inevitable ingredient of success on the local level.

The close proximity of Gaj to several urban centres made the outflow of people to be much less than in other parts of Serbia. Existence of private land plots, which enabled people to cultivate the land or to rent it out during socialism, was probably the determinant factor in keeping people attached to the village despite their other professional occupations. Today, due to the generally unfavourable economic conditions and high unemployment in the country (20,8%), agriculture and land might, at least, be additional sources of income, if not the main means of

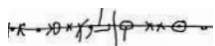
6) Only one of my informants resigned in the second half of the 1990s from a state company because he could not commit to agriculture, while many others have never considered leaving the job. Even today, many work additional jobs to agriculture, such as painting, repairing of car, agricultural machinery, electronics etc.

7) For more information on local population, see: http://www.selogaj.rs/?page_id=103

work. Apart from this, Gaj faces typical problems of Serbian villages such as high mortality rate, aging, outflow of youth, negative population growth and increasing number of single persons (man=402, women=253)⁸.

The locals' everyday life is very much centred on 12 different agricultural, cultural, sport and artistic associations, which demonstrates their very developed sense of belonging, and awareness of political and social participation. The infrastructure is relatively solid due to the fact that it is one of the principal commitments of almost all representatives within the local council of Gaj. Very often it may be heard that Gaj represents an avant-garde village in comparison to other nearby villages due to its very developed political, social, cultural, economic activities and infrastructure.

With all its facets, the village of Gaj is representative of the topic of this paper, that is, the transformation of agriculture after 2000. Later in the text, special attention will be devoted to everyday strategies used by the people from Gaj who predominately work in agriculture. Their strategies point to their understanding and adaptation to transformations in agriculture and, particularly, to different state politics.



Lost in Modernization

Many studies on peasantry have often emphasized general ideological or political perceptions of peasants as backward, conservative, traditional, incapable of self-organization and of focused political activity. The rural-urban dichotomies based on differences in quality and lifestyle between urban and rural areas, provisions of state, market and health services, infrastructure problems etc., made rural areas become subordinated to the urban centres (see Leonard and Kaneff 2002; Ellis 1988). However, the notions of subordination and rural-urban dichotomy are the common tread in all classical theories of the peasantry, while 'peasantry itself is presented as the antonym

of progress' (Leonard and Kaneff 2002, 7).

In their study on rural sociology of advanced societies, Buttel and Newby (1980) summarize the theoretical problems the discipline has had since its beginnings. One theory from the 1930s that had dominated the discipline for many generations was on the rural-urban continuum and originally came from Sorokin and Zimmerman (1929). This theory influenced the anthropological approach to peasantry (Redfield 1947, Kroeber 1948). The idea of the rural-urban continuum is based rather on generalizations on urban and rural societies that were inherited from classical political economic theories. It emphasizes specific characteristics of both societies such as occupational, cultural and social, which, overall, were not obstacles for their parallel survival and development. Such perceptions of peasantry were often benevolent and sentimental and had nurtured an image of life which was lost in urban areas long time ago. The main problem with this approach was the recognition of the "specific" culture of peasant societies, that 'they are a law unto themselves and cannot be accounted for, as are other social groups', demanding, therefore, special sociology for rural people (Buttel and Newby 1980, 7). Nevertheless, the step forward was made when the limitations of the rural-urban continuum approach were revealed and when it was subjected to questioning (Lewis 1953).

In the 1960s, the rural-urban continuum approach slowly lost its impact. More and more scholars began to problematize the conditioning of space with specific types of social, economic and cultural behaviour (Buttel and Newby 1980, 7-10). They believed that 'distinctive' features of rural and urban society actually exist in both societies equally, meaning that space does not necessarily determine social, cultural and economic behaviour. 'Any attempt to tie patterns of social relationships to specific geographical milieux is a singularly fruitless exercise' (Buttel and Newby 1980, 8).

Despite different attempts in the academia to deconstruct the image of the peas-

8) For more information on local population, see: http://www.selogaj.rs/?page_id=103

antry, the perception that there is an essential peasant nature, most likely because of the still very strong influence of socialist and classical economic political theories that have created such image (Leonard and Kaneff 2002, 26), is generally still present.

Peasants became part of communist ideology in a very particular way. Since Marxism was the first total ideology with definite vision of the world, the place of peasants was determined by their backwardness. Marxism and, later on communism, advocated the transition of peasants into industrial workers. The final result was supposed to be the abolishment of their private property, intensified state industrialization and collectivization of agricultural production. One of the aims was also to liberate peasants from their 'chains', i.e. land, subsistence production and strong family and kinship relationships. Liberation also implied increasing awareness of political activism, participation and organization of peasants. On the other hand, classical economics was very critical towards traditional reliance of peasants on subsistence production and small and middle-sized land plots, believing that, under such conditions, profit maximization and achieving economy of scale is almost impossible.

Even though there is causality up to some extent between space and social, cultural and economic behaviour, the main problem with the notion of peasantry today does not rely in its particularities based on the urban – rural dichotomy, but rather in the politicization and instrumentalization of the notion of peasantry that is limited to several typified or desirable images⁹. Bearing in mind the predominately negative association that comes along with the notion of peasantry, in the changed post-2000 political context, one of the aims of the official Serbian agricultural agenda is to get rid of the category of peasants in favour of rural modernisation and progress, embodied in the new term – farmers. We will now see why this process was highly problematic for parties, the state and agricultural producers.

Transition in many East European countries brought on new discourses on modernity and progress based mainly on liberal democratic values and free market (see Hann 1997; Leonard and Kaneff 2002). The same occurred in Serbia. As mentioned before, some of the goals of the new democratic governments and the Ministry of Agriculture were modernization of outdated concepts of 'mixed' worker-agriculture households, privatization of state enterprises and collective cooperatives, large investments into irrigation systems, rural infrastructure, updating agricultural mechanization by providing state-subsidized loans, and subsidizing agricultural production¹⁰. Even a slight look at different development policies and Strategy for Agriculture Development (2014 - 2024) of the Ministry that have been published since 2001, reveals they are very suggestive of the Ministry and the state as important actors who are going to 'fund', 'help', 'stimulate' or 'subsidize' different agricultural sectors. Within these policies, the state is presented as a benevolent partner of the agricultural producers rather than as a tax collector, thus aiming to humanize the perception of the state. One of the obvious purposes was building the new image of the relationship between the state and agricultural producers that are no longer on opposite sides, as it was often the case in different stages of socialism.

The term that describes the new level of cooperation is "partnership" between the state and agricultural producers. In the spirit of the new democratic politics, rhetoric and growing political correctness, the term peasant was slowly replaced in public speeches and addressing by the new term farmer. There are several reasons for this. First, the term peasant has very strong negative connotations, as we have seen in the previous pages. Bearing in mind that "partnership" implies mutual equal respect and cooperation between two parties, the term does not apply anymore, since it usually refers to the social and economic inferiority and subordination. Secondly, the term peasant with

9) The image of peasants in Serbia is strongly embedded in both national history and politics. They had often been used in different political campaigns throughout the entire 20th century (see Naumovic 1995). Nevertheless, on the global level, peasants represented revolutionary and army forces, and, contrary to their subordination to urban centers, i.e. to the state, they were its main driving force. It is understandable, therefore, why different ideologies wanted to tie up the desirable image of the peasant to their vertical value.

10) For more information, see: http://www.mpt.gov.rs/articles/list_titles/14/1/agrama-politika-i-ruralni-razvoj.html?menu_id=55

all its connotations can hardly be associated with the modernisation discourse. The term farmer had become more suitable instead¹¹. The state, i.e. the Ministry of Agriculture, has taken over the role to intensify education and to organize courses, workshops, conferences and seminars aimed at improving knowledge, skills and economic performance, and to assist the smooth transition of peasants towards professional farmers.

On the other hand, agricultural producers have had representatives in the National Peasant Party in the parliament since 2012. The party was founded in 1990 and, until 2012, has had significant ideological and inner-party transformations, from social democracy to far-right¹². Agricultural producers have been organizing themselves mainly since 2005 / 2006 within different sorts of agricultural associations, and have participated to some degree in deliberating and drafting of agricultural laws.

Looking from the outside, everything seems to be ideal. However, the main problem lies in the fact that the whole new agricultural ambient seems transformed only on the surface. The real causes of such state are deeper and go back to the 1990s when the process of privatization started. The party in power (the Socialist Party of Serbia – SPS) at the time was building its own structure of interests, based on the “economy of favours”, both financial and logistical. Many of the former managers of successful socialist enterprises, politicians, parts of intelligence and criminal clans, joined in one common goal: to support the regime in power, i.e. the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. Ever since, cartelized economy has started to develop, while former socialist agricultural enterprises, state and collective land, were among the first interest spheres where new business class of so-called tycoons started to dominate. This state of affairs has continued after democratic changes in 2000, while these structures have become stronger, more complex and sometimes even absolute (cf. Ledeneva 1999). Instead of the post-socialist “retreat” of the state, the process that emerged could

be defined as “privatization of the state” or “emergence of the private state” (Hibou 2004). Ruling elites, either state bureaucrats or political representatives, private actors, tycoons, foreign middlemen and other parts of the hierarchy of ‘private state’, actually use the space that used to belong to the state, (it is not anymore or it is a semi-state due to inefficient law regulations or non-existing laws). That is the space where the whole machinery of different actors, based on non-transparent, semi-private or private contracts and favours, emerges. In one word, that is the space that is being privatized.

The agricultural producers feel their interests are being neglected and subordinated to those of the ruling elites. A large number of informants and representatives of local agricultural associations from the village of Gaj usually complain about the low protection state provisions, the lawless state in the agricultural sector, the uncontrolled operation of tycoons regarding privatisation and lease of state land and so on. Interestingly, among agricultural producers themselves, there is one predominant belief that those who run agricultural associations want to become the part of the “system” and to profit from different acquaintances by supporting the party in power. That is indicative of local or republic elections, particularly in the period of campaigns. The last local elections in 2013 in Kovin municipality were particularly important for agricultural associations, simply because they should have indicated and anticipated the results of republic elections. Judging according to campaigns, the local elections were taken very seriously. Many campaigns were not often in accordance with democratic standards. Bribing and electoral indoctrination of potential voters seemed to be most successful among Roma and agricultural producers¹³. Their voting capacity was very important, if not decisive, on the local level because it might have contributed to the perpetuation of the “system” in the sense Ledeneva is using it (1999).

Such a situation creates actual political isolation of one part of agricultural popula-

11) The term “farmer” in the Serbian language has strong semantic connotations and is associated with big professionalized, private independent agricultural holdings like those that exist in the U.S.A.

12) In 2012 this party was in coalition with the Serbian Progressive Party that won elections and formed the government.

13) Many informants said that campaigners were bribing people in accordance with their social status. Roma and pensioners, for instance, were getting packages containing meat, sugar, oil and other food supplies, or they got free ophthalmological and cardio check-ups. Indoctrination of agricultural producers was more subtle. It was often accompanied with gifts in shape of a small bag consisting of a cup with the candidate's face on it, his program and a pencil. Campaigners were secretly leaving those bags in front of the doors of agricultural producers.

tion that does not have proper representatives, neither within agricultural associations, nor within political parties. Therefore, agricultural producers often feel they are left on their own which, actually, fosters their perception of semi-independency on one side, and encourages them to rationalize some of their manipulative acts on the other, which will be later analysed in more detail.

Further on, ambitiously-conceived agricultural policies since 2001 were supposed to imply a high level of responsibility and professionalism on both sides, institutions and their representatives, and agricultural producers. But the current situation in the agricultural sector is very contradictory. The most common example is the imposition of standards and new rules of doing business in agriculture without actual laws that would support and protect parties, institutions and agricultural producers.¹⁴ In an institutional sense, there is no predictability which is *conditio sine qua non* for their successful functioning. That is how a paradox of empty modernization and progress emerges, where that which needs to be changed remains almost intact, while improvements are either individual (spontaneous or intended) achievements, or are side-results of a “system”-based machinery. In other words, those who are part of the “system” may enjoy the fruits of advocated modernization and progress.

As a consequence, agricultural producers who remain outside the process do benefit from it in the sense that they do not have to perceive responsibility towards the state and its institutions as highly obligatory. In such moments, the old label of peasant has its applicable value. The label peasant, burdened with a lot of negative meaning, in semantic connotation does not comprise the idea of professionalism and business responsibility as the label farmer does. That is probably due to the decade-long neglect by the state, and, more importantly, their even longer status of “special”, “autonomous”, “conservative” and “traditional” parts of society. Leonard and Kaneff summarized the

identity shift in peasants in the sense that they have become ‘highly skilled in manipulating the peasant label for their own purposes. Rural inhabitants apply the term to themselves when it suits them and distance themselves from it when they feel it is not appropriate’ (Leonard and Kaneff 2002, 34).

Specific political, economic and identity adaptations to the current state are particularly obvious in the agricultural producers’ daily routine and business. Therefore, in the following pages, everyday strategies which reflect the essence of above-described tensions between agricultural producers and the state will be presented and analysed.

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The “Partnership”: the Upper Level of Cooperation

Taking the risk of expressing very strong statements, it seems that the “partnership” between the state and agricultural producers is very much based on manipulative strategies from both sides. On the part of the state, it is the matter of uncontrolled machinery of the “system” which cannot be turned off easily, while on the side of agricultural producers, it is the matter of minimizing the risk and coping with uncertainty. Here are presented a few of the most common examples of everyday manipulative strategies applied by agricultural producers from Gaj. They are also chosen because they illustrate the weaknesses of the state in controlling and coping with the corruption and misuses of different sorts. These examples, on the other hand, can be interpreted as agricultural producers’ expressions of resistance to the current state of agriculture, to the local and republic bureaucrats and, more generally, to the “system”. However, the main reason for their manipulative strategies is access to different resources (whether state or market), or maximization of existing resources.

The most common type of manipulative strategies among agricultural producers appears in the sphere of agricultural state-

14) The most recent case is very illustrative. The state advocates different sorts of economic associations (and among others, agricultural), but the law on associations and cooperatives has not yet passed the parliament procedure because of re-drafting and editing since 2005. This law would define the terms, rights and obligations of parties that want to enter the association.

subsidies and market access. The subsidies are aimed at agricultural producers who cultivate between 0.5 ha and 99 ha. But, in reality, people who also use these subsidies actually cultivate more than 100 ha. They usually transfer a half or more of their property to their family members, who are also registered as agricultural producers, or, only nominally, as a separate agricultural household at a different address, but, actually, all family members within the same household benefit from the subsidies.

On the other hand, agricultural producers who cultivate a far less amount of land usually employ other strategies regarding the subsidies. At the end of a year, agricultural producers often seek recourse for oil, fertilizers and seeds. The Ministry of Agriculture accepts only oil bills from one favoured oil company that is more expensive than its competition. In such a context, people developed their own mechanisms for acquiring oil bills from that company and also “the black market of oil bills”, which functions according to the trade rules of demand and supply. Moreover, they buy much cheaper smuggled oil for agricultural mechanisation on the black market.

In the context of access to the market, for ordinary agricultural producers, buying cheaper seeds and fertilizers, as well as selling their products directly on the market, i.e. beyond private agricultural cooperatives that are mediators between the producers and the market, is not possible. Theoretically, they can sell their products directly to the stock market, but they need to meet many demanding criteria such as large quantities, special conditions for storing and keeping crops which almost no one can fulfil. Under such circumstances, many producers do not have any other option than to sell their products to a local cooperative for a lesser price than elsewhere. Because of this, many producers develop their own illegal channels of buyers to whom they sell their crops for a higher price. When they sell a significant amount of crops, they do not make legal money transfers through their bank account in order to avoid enroll-

ing into the tax payment system. Instead, agricultural producers find a third confidential person who appears as the nominal seller and whose bank account is used for the respective money transfer.

However, the following example, even though not connected to manipulative strategies of agricultural producers, actually summarizes the most common problem. That is the issue of tycoons in almost all bigger villages of Vojvodina and their tremendous influence on politics. This was one of the main reasons for the foundation of the Association of Agricultural Producers from Gaj. The triggering event was when the owner of the agricultural company 7th July got the state land on lease from Kovin (approximately 1600 ha), that belonged to the village cadastral unit, without any public tenders and competition. Moreover, the monthly rent for the state land was far less than the commercial price. The agricultural producers within this Association organised themselves and protested against this decision in front of the city hall in Kovin in 2012. They informed the Ministry of Agriculture about this abuse, arranged media broadcasting and publicly and openly addressed the issue. Likewise, apart from combating monopoly, the reason of the Association was to create more transparent access to state land in accordance with commercial conditions, as well as to enable dispersion of the market and political participation on the local level. Even though the epilogue of this action remains to be seen, this Association tried to engage and to bring everyday problems in agriculture to a higher level.

This example and other examples of manipulative strategies of the agricultural producers of Gaj, as it has already been indicated, rather depict coping with market uncertainties and minimizing business risks, than tendentious frauds. Their acts are based on the rational and dynamic planning of their lives in the long and short term, by using the means at hand in a society which is unpredictable and burdened with serious economic and social problems.

According to Milles and Blossfeld, people living under conditions of uncertainty often use a dynamic, rational choice model in order to 'find the best action that fits their given beliefs and desires, to develop the most appropriate belief given the evidence at hand, and to collect the correct amount of evidence' (Milles and Blossfeld 2005, 16).

Applied to agricultural producers who use manipulative strategies, one common argument might explain their actions. Almost every day, they face unstable market conditions, high inflation, strict regulations for access to the market, monopolization of prices and the market itself, frequent changes in agricultural policies, raising standards for doing business in agriculture often without proper laws, politicization of export-import products, favouritism of different sorts and so on. In fact, agricultural producers compensate for their professional dissatisfaction by manipulating subsidies, by operating in the black market; by keeping open all formal and informal means of access to different resources and, finally, by protesting. Interestingly, many of the interviewed producers agreed that they do not need subsidies to improve their agricultural production, but only predictable market conditions, rules and prices. Nevertheless, subsidies actually substitute losses and uncertainties in their business, so all those who do not have the official right to apply for subsidies by these means want to protect themselves and their investments in agriculture. On the other hand, agricultural producers who manipulate subsidies, or who, at the same time, deal with formal and informal markets, rationalize their strategies with believes that entire Serbian agriculture is "on their backs", so the pressure is huge, in addition to the considerable harvesting risks. Unlike other professions, in a number of cases, they do not have any alternatives to agriculture, because they were educated and trained only for agriculture. Their success or failure is directly linked to their means of production, i.e. the land, which, therefore, requires the calculation of risks much in advance.

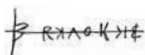
It seems that the "partnership" between agricultural producers and the state is currently coloured by the latter's distrust. This is particularly evident in the situation of the so-called 'neglectful' state¹⁵ when the state does not have the institutional capacities to monitor, or to provide certain institutional and business ambient to agricultural producers, while, on the other hand, this situation favours the ruling elites of the "system". Consequently, such state of affairs creates an environment for uncontrolled operations of agricultural producers who, by disobeying existing regulations, express their protest, resistance and professional dissatisfaction.

The other side of the "partnership" between the state and agricultural producers is also very contradictory in itself. Namely, they understand what the market is and how it functions, particularly on the basis of demand and supply. Since 2001, the state's role in agriculture has been, apart from providing services (financial, infrastructure, institutional, educational), that of building the image of the trustworthy party agricultural producers can rely on. In other words, to patronize agriculture. Even though one of adopted principles in official agricultural agendas was, nominally, free market exchange, the reality has proven the contrary. Very soon it was clear that there was a monopolized market, with the high influence of politics on the exchange of goods, with favoured export and import companies. Realizing that there is no free competition, agricultural producers have demanded protection and guarantees in the sense that the state should provide fixed prices and regular purchase of their agricultural products. This has created a paradox, because agricultural producers act according to free market rules in informal spheres (illegal markets), while they demand more regulations in formal economic sphere.

The "partnership" between the state and agricultural producers is, actually, the litmus paper of a dysfunctional system where agricultural policies serve only to

15) Conditionally speaking, distinctions between the "neglectful" state and the "uncontrolled" agricultural producers, and the "patronising" state and the "demanding" agricultural producers, appeared as my personal conclusion from the fieldwork experience and as the general impression from over 70 in-depth interviews.

meet the standards on the surface, while, in fact, promises of transformations and modernization have remained mostly in the sphere of political marketing. And, instead of integrating agricultural producers in the process, paradoxically, the process itself is moving away from them, as they do not have enough political power to influence the change.

 RAAKHE

Conclusion

Throughout the entire 20th century, the agricultural sector in Serbia represented a political issue and an ideological project. In the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes the first agrarian reform was aimed at enabling ownership of land for landless people and at strengthening capitalist production relationships in agriculture. The second agrarian reform in socialist Yugoslavia was aimed at limiting private ownership of land and at strengthening collective and state-controlled production relationships in agriculture. Post-socialist agricultural transformation after 2001 has brought ideas of professionalization of agricultural producers, elimination of state agricultural enterprises and collective cooperatives, free market economy based on free competition and, predominantly, on private ownership.

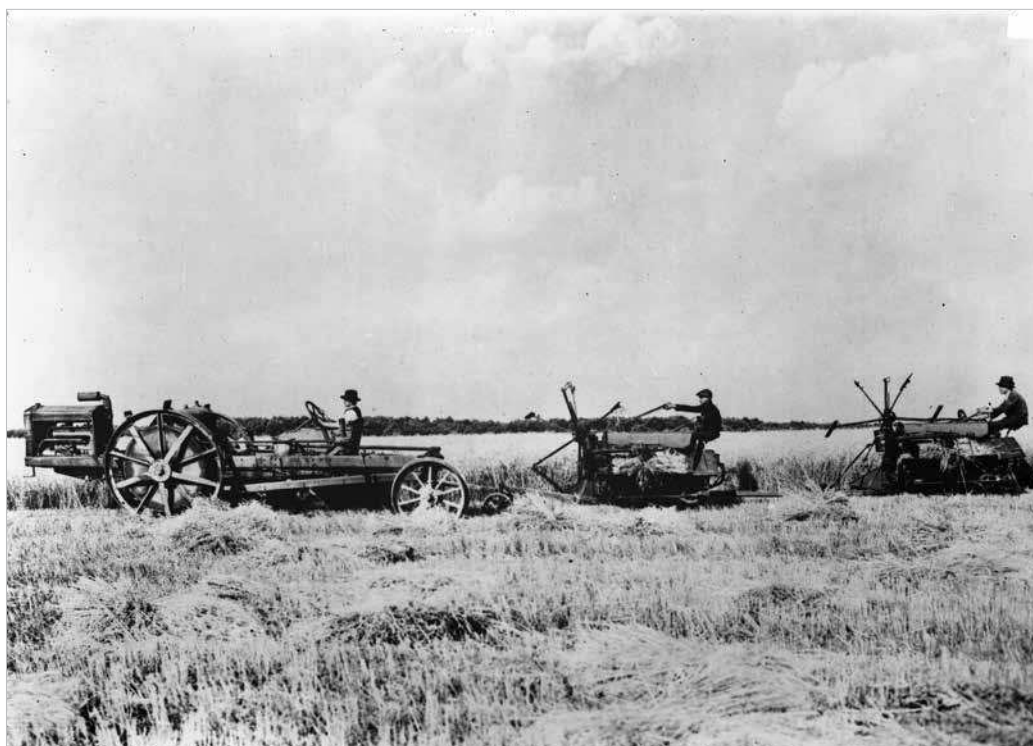
In the later phase of agricultural transformation, one of the aims of development policies was creating an environment where the partnership between agricultural producers and the state would be recognised as the common interest of both parties. Such cooperation was supposed to result in placing Serbia on the regional or even European map of most competitive exporters of agricultural goods. The actual outcomes of this partnership turned out to be failed promises and hopes of the progress of Serbian agriculture. Whether because of the weaknesses of the state in controlling power and dominance of the ruling elites and their interests, or the lack of institutional capacities, willingness and know-how blueprints, agricultural producers have not benefited significantly from having the state as their partner, or from supposedly liberated economic conditions.

Serbian agriculture, under the domination of monopolies and cartelised economy, has not achieved its goal. It did not become one of the largest agricultural exporters in the region, or in the European Union. But more importantly, as an everlasting ideological project, even in the 21st century, agricultural producers still search for their own professional and social identity expression. So, for the time being, they are neither here, nor there, neither peasants, nor farmers.

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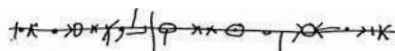
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What Do Peasants Want? Equality and Differentiation in Post-Socialist Moldova



Jennifer R. Cash

Associate of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle / Saale, Department of Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia

ABSTRACT

This article addresses several aspects of the “agrarian question” that have remained unanswered in the historic territory of Bessarabia and the post-socialist Republic of Moldova. Drawing on recent ethnographic fieldwork, national calculations of household poverty levels and consumption patterns, and the legal dimensions of property distribution, I reveal the degree to which “peasant” desires for both social equality and differentiation remain poorly understood by social scientists and policy makers. I conclude with a preliminary sketch of some aspects of the contemporary moral economy in the villages of the south-eastern portion of the county

KEYWORDS

Bessarabia, Moldova, poverty, moral economy, land reform

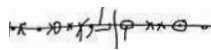


Introduction

As the editors of this volume point out in their introduction, in recent decades, some of the most eminent historians and social theorists have declared the peasantry “dead” and the “agrarian question” “solved” by definitive technological changes in agricultural production and markets.

The countries of southeastern Europe, however, as well as several other regions of the world, continue to have high rural populations engaged in agricultural activities primarily for household consumption. The desires, activities, and strategies of these populations, therefore, remain socially, politically and economically relevant. In the following pages, I use ethnographic data drawn from fieldwork in southeastern Moldova, during 2009-2010, to explore some aspects of the contemporary “moral economy” that shape economic decision-making at the individual and household levels and

that also contribute to patterns of social differentiation (and its obfuscation)¹.



The Agrarian Question: Solved or Re-formulated?

During the second half of the 19th century, the “problem” of the peasantry was a generalized one across Europe, as politics and science attempted to chart the course of impending economic and social development. In fact, there was not one problem to be resolved, but several which varied in importance by region, country and interest group. In some countries, such as England and Belgium, the peasantry was already quite small, and the “problems” of industrialization were more acutely felt. In contrast, rural issues could become central to the national debate where there was less industrialization. In the Romanian lands, for example, the productivity of the countryside was of great concern to elites who profited from the export of grain, while early social scientists drew at-

1) Fieldwork in 2009-2010 was conducted under the auspices of the research group “Economy and Ritual” at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. I gratefully acknowledge the institute’s support; however, the analysis and interpretations presented here are my own.

tention to the poverty and disease suffered by the peasantry (Mușat 2011). Moreover, early solutions to the problem, such as the Romanian land reforms of 1864, generated further problems (e.g. Chirot 1976, 1989).

The attention of national governments, political parties, intellectuals, social reformers and urban society was thus drawn to the countryside as a problematic area that required intervention by understanding and changing the habits of the “peasants”. Generally speaking, peasants across Europe were considered to be “backward”: often ignorant and uneducated; having low standards of health and over-succumbing to preventable diseases (Roberts 1951); pursuing inefficient means of crop production, over-working the land and often weakening their long-term profitability through partible inheritance (Stahl 1980); pursuing self-exploitation by accepting market prices below the cost of production (Chayanov 1966); and supporting conservative political agendas that furthered their disenfranchisement (Kotsonis 1999). As indicated by the above-citations, the peasantry of Bessarabia fit nearly all of the general descriptors.

In the Romanian lands, the problems of the peasantry were often described as the *chestiunea agrară* (see Mușat 2011, 1), but, across the European political spectrum, the particular phrasing of an “agrarian question” remains most commonly associated with Marxism and other specifically socialist agendas. The phrase, made famous by Karl Kautsky’s *Die Agrarfrage* (1988 [1899]), refers most concretely to the question of rural class dynamics under the influence of capitalism. European Marxists were concerned with understanding what role the peasantry would play in the impending revolution. As described by Alavi and Shanin (1988), the concern was both theoretical and pragmatic; not only were Marxists seeking to better understand the laws of economic-political development as they applied to agriculture and rural areas, in part to foster revolution, but they also sought to expand their political base into the countryside. For Kautsky

and others, “the agrarian question” was thus one about class formation in rural areas: would the peasantry also be polarized into two classes - a rural proletariat and capitalist farmers - by processes that paralleled those described by Marx for industrial workers?

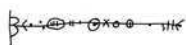
Throughout most of the 20th century, the “agrarian question” remained an important one in Marxist-inflected peasant studies, only to disappear from the intellectual, political and policy agendas of rural and agricultural development shortly before the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Leonard and Kaneff 2002). In recent decades, it has been declared that the “agrarian question” has been “solved”. The laws of capitalism now apply equally, it would seem, to industrial and agricultural production, and class has become politically irrelevant in both urban and rural areas. Yet, other observers note that many aspects of the “agrarian question” remain unsolved or have even reappeared under new conditions: family farms persist in even the most industrially-developed systems of agriculture (McLaughlin 1998); and peasants have re-emerged on the political scene, not as classes within national systems, but as “indigenes” on a global scale (McMichael 1997). In Europe, the collapse of state socialism ushered in land reforms that created family farms across Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union (Hann 2003); and “peasants,” who were reified as a social category under socialism, persist as a symbolic category even as they are being legally re-defined as “farmers” (Leonard and Kaneff 2002).

The “agrarian question” in its narrowest formulation might well be considered irrelevant in light of political and economic history. Indeed, communist movements and socialist states have generally met their demise, and global capitalism has thoroughly created and shaped large-scale agricultural production. But “solving” the “agrarian question” in this way sidesteps the broader questions that it embedded about social differentiation in the countryside and how it is connected to both political interests and



household economic strategies.

In this paper, I therefore argue that the “agrarian question” need not be abandoned because of its initial political and theoretical ambitions. To the contrary, as the peasantry is uniformly declared dead and “peasants” are re-labelled “farmers” by development agencies and economists everywhere, it becomes all the more important to raise the question of whether urban / rural differentiations have truly been overcome. Are “farmers” fully enfranchised vis-à-vis the state and market and on an equal footing with urban professionals (see Diković, this volume)? Or do rural communities still need to be understood on their own terms? In short, I suggest turning the “agrarian question” from a theoretical one to an ethnographic one. In the immediate context, this means that the question becomes one about the social identity of “peasants” themselves: who are they? how do they organize their social, economic and political affairs? what do they need? what do they want? how are they likely to go about achieving their desires? In the longer view, however, making the “agrarian question” an ethnographic one also serves to reconfigure the theory to confirm with observable data as Kautsky originally sought to do.



Differentiations among Peasants in Moldova

Today's Republic of Moldova consists of two historically distinct territories. Between the Prut and Nistru Rivers, lies the majority of historic Bessarabia; Transnistria, which lies east of the Nistru River, had no administrative identity until the formation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) within the Soviet Union in 1924. For the sake of accuracy and simplicity, I have narrowed my account to the Bessarabian portions of Moldova. Contemporary Moldova, and Bessarabia with it, shares in the social history of Romania, Russia and the Soviet Union. The political

dimensions of this history are relatively well-documented (e.g. Clark 1927, Dima 1982, Dobrinescu 1996, King 2000), but little attention has been given to the history of social and economic conditions under either Romanian or Russian rule. The most accessible information about Bessarabia's social and economic conditions from the mid-19th century until the end of the Soviet period appears only in comparison with other regions (e.g. Hitchins 1994, McAuley 1979) or in wartime assessments of the region's prospects for integration within the Romanian state or, correspondingly, of the prevalence of Russian and Soviet irredentism (e.g. Kaba 1919, de Martonne 1919). Although detailed treatments of economic and social history are lacking, the picture that emerges is one of both regional and local level diversity among the peasantry.

When it was initially incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1812, Bessarabia's peasantry was largely free. Unlike in Russia, landless peasants in Bessarabia were personally free and could move at will. In addition to villages that were composed of peasants who leased land from monasteries or landlords, two other types of villages (*răzeși* and *mazili*) had been established during the Ottoman period when Bessarabia was still part of the principality of Moldavia, which eventually became a foundational of part of Romania in 1859. In *răzeși* villages, the peasants owned land, but paid no tax; they were obliged only to perform military service. The *mazili* were yet more privileged; they had received land as compensation for previous military service and had been released from service to the state (see Hitchins 1994, 241). Under Russian rule, bonded serfs also appeared in Bessarabia until their emancipation in 1861, while land-grants to foreign colonists in southern Bessarabia expanded the types of free peasants.

At the turn of the 20th century, successive reforms in Romania and Russia meant that both countries had ceased to legally recognize distinct estates in rural areas. The various types of peasants that had once ex-

isted were combined into a singular “peasantry”, and early sociologists and rural economists joined agronomists in attempting to define social differentiations in rural areas. When Bessarabia returned to Romanian rule during the interwar period, studies revealed several levels of differentiation between peasant households based on their ownership of land, animals, tools, patterns of hiring workers and ability to meet their own needs from working their own land (see Hitchins 1994, 339-40). Such studies, in particular, assessed the correlation between the size of landholdings and self-sufficiency in an effort to identify the prevalence of abject poverty along with patterns of social stratification and stability.

The results of early sociological and economic research in Bessarabia revealed a profound disjuncture between the region’s productive capacity and the population’s poverty. John Kaba’s report on the state of agriculture in Bessarabia in the first year of re-unification with Romania noted that between 60-80% of the land was suitable for agriculture, but the rich soils were under-fertilized (and only by manure) and worked with excessively primitive tools (1919, 15-17). Kaba attributed lower than normal crop yields during the war to the ravages of war itself; the Bolsheviks, he noted, had destroyed the more advanced machinery of large land owners. But he also found that land reforms undertaken in 1918 by the Romanian government had little impact on the structure of ownership and were “very unsatisfactory” (22). Budget studies conducted in the 1930s would conclude that the majority of peasant households across Romania (including Bessarabia) could not supply their own basic food on holdings that averaged fewer than three hectares (Hitchins 1994, 341). After the 1918 reforms, some 42% of Bessarabia’s peasant families had less than one-half hectare and, therefore, almost certainly could not aspire to self-provision. It is these landless and nearly landless peasants who aroused Kaba’s concern because they had evidently sold their new land holdings or their numbers were increasing through

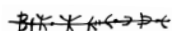
other processes (1919, 22); either way, poverty connected to landlessness had possibly been worsened by reform. Earlier reforms taken during Russian rule seem to have maintained a social structure between 1905-1918 in which more than one-third of families fell within the range of self-provisioning (later documented at 3-10 hectares), approximately one-quarter could produce a surplus for local sale or export and fewer than 7% of the families could be considered large landowners with more than 50 hectares of land. Moreover, the 1918 reforms also aimed at reducing the holdings of the few landholders to fewer than 100 hectares through state purchase and limited the purchase of new land to 20 hectares (Kaba 1919, 23).

Yet land reform alone was not enough to produce a prosperous peasantry. By the 1930s, even households with the 3-10 hectares necessary to produce adequate food found that the costs of doing so outstripped the value of production (Hitchins 1994, 341). The response of individual households to the dilemmas of land ownership varied and certainly included efforts to send some members to engage in various forms of wage labor. Yet, as Chayanov (1966) had documented across Russia during the later imperial period, peasants in Bessarabia and elsewhere under Romanian rule also engaged heavily in “self-exploitation” by limiting their consumption of food and being satisfied with inadequate clothing and substandard housing. As a result, they suffered from preventable diseases and childhood mortality at extremely high rates. By most measurements, peasants in interwar Romania - Bessarabia included - were among Europe’s poorest. The social differentiations observed within peasant communities were economically-coded, but almost all peasants appeared disenfranchised by objective criteria.

The abject poverty documented in Bessarabia during the interwar period was proclaimed to have been overcome in Soviet Moldova. Economically-based differentiations were initially leveled through deportations and collectivization. Soviet rule also



officially reduced the complexity of pre-war social categories to three: workers, intellectuals and peasants. By the Brezhnev period, the republic had gained the reputation of being “a little piece of heaven” renowned for its abundant production of fruits, vegetables and wine. In comparative terms, Moldova remained one of the poorer republics of the Soviet Union and, certainly, the poorest among the European republics (McAuley 1979). But Moldova’s population also benefitted from Soviet policies that did not determine poverty lines, but rather established “normal” levels of consumption (McAuley 1979).



Land Reform, Poverty and Hunger: New Sources of Differentiation

In the post-Soviet period, the newly independent Republic of Moldova undertook de-collectivization and the privatization of land as part of the broader political processes of de-Sovietization. Land reform occurred later than in neighboring Romania and garnered far less political and scholarly attention. The architects of land reform in Moldova did not champion private ownership or restitution over concern for actual economic repercussion. Rather, they anticipated the possibility that privatization would rapidly produce social inequality and sought to avoid such an occurrence. Current legislation continues to promote and protect small land-holders and household agricultural activity against large land owners and commercialization. Most of the relevant legislation is specifically related to land ownership, but it is worth noting that social benefits are also scaled to promote household agricultural activity: those who own land are not eligible for unemployment benefits even if they have no other sources of income.

Legislation facilitating de-collectivization was passed in 1991 and 1992, but most redistribution took place during the National Land Program of 1998-2000 (Gorton and White 2003, Csaki and Lerman 2001). All individuals who were registered as working for

or pensioned from collective farms (including in the services, such as the kindergartens) in 1992, received a full share of land that included village-specific quantities of arable land, orchard and vineyard. More complex formulas were applied for distributing land to state employees (e.g. teachers, administrators, doctors) that took the land holdings of their immediate family members into consideration. In effect, the distribution of land provided nearly all village households with members born before 1976 with the means of provisioning their own food. The equal size and type of shares was intended to preserve social equality whether the food and wine produced on the plots was consumed by the producers themselves or sold on the market. Other legislation introduced throughout the 1990s and 2000s restricted land sales to prevent foreign sales or the consolidation of large tracts by commercial owners (Lerman and Cimpoeș 2006).

Such equal distribution of land, however, hampered efficient farming on two fronts. First, individual owners often complained that their land was distributed in multiple parcels, making it difficult to farm individually. Second, “leaders” of the agricultural cooperatives which rent arable land from villagers complained that the large fields suitable for mechanized farming of grain formed through such rentals were still pocketed by parcels that had not been rented to them. By the late 2000s, the Ministry of Agriculture had been charged with re-organizing the distribution of land in select areas to encourage more efficient agricultural production (Guțu, Gorgan and Guțu 2009). Great care was being taken, however, to ensure that landowners were satisfied with the new allocations.

The result of these reforms on social differentiation in rural areas is unclear. From the perspective of poverty statistics, rural areas have become universally and deeply impoverished in the post-Soviet period. National statistics have improved greatly since 1999-2001 when some 90% of Moldova’s entire population fell below the poverty line



(Laur 2005). Since 2004, individuals with regular employment generally cross the poverty threshold; but, in rural areas, few individuals have such employment. Even in 2010, employed individuals in rural areas rarely achieved the income-levels necessary to bring a household across the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2011).

High-rates of labor migration abroad might seem to suggest (as does the international media) that Moldova's peasants are on the brink of starvation, but socio-economic survey data seem to indicate that the majority of labor-migrants belong to the "middle classes" (Goerlich and Luecke 2011; cf Baumann, Malcoci, Paglietti 2009). Although migrants self-report that their migration was "necessary", it does not seem to have been a choice of desperation, but rather one economic strategy among others intentionally selected to maintain or improve existing standards of living. Similarly, in my own research, I have repeatedly encountered assertions that national and international reports of poverty misrepresent the state of affairs in the countryside: rural areas are poor, indeed, for lack of employment and access to cash income, but no one is "dying of hunger". The plausibility of this assertion is borne out in the results of my survey research on household self-sufficiency in the village of Râscăieți in southeastern Moldova during 2009-2010 (Cash forthcoming a) and the more extensive calculations of agricultural economist Martin Petrick (2000).

Petrick calculated that it is possible for a household with an average land share to produce most of its own food and a surplus that can be sold (2000). In market terms, comparing the "price" of labor and other inputs against the "value" of total production, agriculture is not rentable. Yet Petrick found that households that undertook agriculture with a view to sustaining themselves succeeded in doing so; the market costs did not actually make it impossible for them to farm successfully. How they succeeded, however, was a question that could not be answered by considering only the

economics of agriculture; it would have required a broader analytic scope. My ethnographic research produced similar conclusions to those of Petrick; even households in a village with substantially smaller holdings than the national average could successfully self-provision. But, by 2009-2010, while most households engaged in some gardening, few households actually attempted to achieve full self-sufficiency in food.

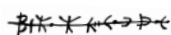
Instead, most households assume that it is not possible to survive without cash income and actively seek ways to acquire cash that do not involve the sale of agricultural produce. As for their land, most households rent their parcels of arable land to village "cooperatives". These cooperatives, generally considered to be smaller versions of the former collective farms, are run by a single individual (i.e. lider) who hires a small staff of accountants, specialists and workers to cultivate wheat and sunflowers. In return for their land, landholders receive a government-set payment in cash or kind, regardless of the cooperative's actual profits. Almost all cooperatives pay landholders in kind, which means that villagers are guaranteed a fixed quantity of wheat and oil without having to work their land. For most households, these payments in wheat are enough to supply their annual bread intake (Cash forthcoming a). With their remaining land parcels (i.e. vineyard, orchard and home garden), most households invest enough labor to produce their annual supply of wine and meat, but they are less uniform in their dedication and capacity to produce and preserve adequate fruits, vegetables or dairy products. In general, villagers have allowed vineyards and orchards to become overgrown when there are no additional possibilities of selling surplus fruit or grapes to bulk buyers. Interestingly, the households that do attempt self-provisioning do not rent all of their arable land to the cooperative, but retain all or some of it for additional vegetable production. Aside from these generalizations, household strategies regarding land acquisition and use are highly variable.

Re-opening the “agrarian question” in post-Soviet Moldova thus promises to present some interesting findings. In its original and strictest version, the “agrarian question” was concerned with understanding how class dynamics in the countryside would affect political development. More broadly, the “agrarian question” was asked with a view to creating legal and economic structures that would stave off rural discontent, improve agricultural productivity and improve peasant well-being in various combinations. The “agrarian question” has, thus, normally been one concerning the potentially negative and disruptive effects of increasing socio-economic differentiation in the countryside, while “answers” sought to expand or restore equality.

In historical perspective, post-Soviet Moldova might well be seen as having produced a level playing field for peasants engaged in household agricultural production. Moldova’s rural population is now relatively homogenous in terms of land ownership. Every household is now a “peasant” household with just enough land to ensure survival, and the state protects them against a variety of forms of “capitalist” exploitation. Those who are determined to survive from small plots of land succeed and even produce a surplus. The successive reforms undertaken by multiple states since the mid-1800s have now succeeded in guaranteeing Moldova’s population with “subsistence” (see Micu, this volume). But subsistence may not be all that villagers want. Villagers commonly complain about the lack of markets: for land, produce or agricultural products. Without such outlets, there seems little motivation either to work one’s land productively (even for one’s own self-sufficiency), or to abandon it entirely by selling it. After a decade of de-collectivization, poverty is widespread in rural areas, but few households are really “starving”; equally, few are truly wealthy; almost all are scrambling to increase their cash income from non-agricultural sources; and investment in expanding agricultural activity is one of the

few identifiable keys to improving a household’s overall well-being².

Under such conditions, however, continued focus on the “agrarian question” is necessary. Moldova’s peasantry is not (yet) satisfied. They demand political rather than market solutions. And individual households are engaged in complex economic decision-making that has so far baffled the attempts of social scientists and policymakers to fully grasp, record or systematize. Once again the question of class dynamics in the countryside seems relevant, but somewhat changed. Now, the phrasing with respect to Moldova should be: how will patterns of social differentiation and dissent emerge or fail to emerge under formal structures that apparently privilege equality?



Moral Economy: Differentiation and Dissent

In the final section of this paper, I do not answer the question of emerging differentiation and dissent directly. Many of the studies already conducted on the post-socialist transformations of rural areas have identified local, national and international factors that affect emerging patterns of differentiation along both class and ethnic lines. In his contribution to this volume, Andrew Cartwright reviews the initial discussions of privatization and restitutions, markets and the influence of pre-socialist social organization on the early post-socialist period. In comparison to the indistinct patterns of differentiation produced in the 1990s, since the 2000s, labor migration has produced the most visible and tangible forms of social differentiation. Not only does labor migration provide substantial income to individual households, but the differential access to labor markets experienced by national and sub-national groups (e.g. to EU and non-EU markets, or through preferential treatment of some minorities in kin-state scenarios) accelerates the processes of socio-economic differentiation (e.g. Anghel 2013; Stahl and

2) On the significance of investment in agriculture, see the report by Baumann, Malcoci, Paglietti (2009). Johannes Stahl (2010) has also produced a thorough study of differentiation between villages in post-socialist Albania that identifies income from migrant labor (but less so remittances) as essential to the short-term improvement of household and village well-being, as well as longer-term investment in agricultural productivity.

Sikor 2009). Thus, the different trajectories of labor migration should be expected to impact Moldova as well, and further study is certainly merited.

Instead, I turn to the problem of moral economy. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, because – so far – social differentiation in post-socialist Moldova has proved difficult to identify. As noted above, this may be a weakness in the methodologies that have been applied. But it is also, as I suggest below, the result of persistent leveling-strategies within rural communities that involve both the denial of difference and the redistribution of resources. The second reason is that even when the processes of differentiation are well-documented, they are not necessarily explained. What, after all, do peasants “want”: equality or differentiation? Or some of each, with certain boundaries and qualifications? Also, to what extent is the moral economy temporally specific and subject to change? What will cause the balance between the desirable or acceptable forms of equality and differentiation to shift?

As E.P. Thompson illustrated at length in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), collective ideas of fairness and justice regulate the behavior of individuals and groups in matters pertaining to the economy. The moral economy of local communities is thus implicated in both the acceptance and contestation of new economic models or practices. In his own work, Thompson documented England’s slow and highly contested transition to market capitalism over a period of nearly 200 years. In the countryside of the 1700s, for example, all social classes held as immoral “any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of the people (1963, 63).” Thus, well into the 1800s, widespread rioting was the dominant social response to the efforts of early capitalists to produce bread more cheaply by applying “market principles” to the purchase of grain, milling standards and sale of flour and bread. Initially, the law also supported the rioters, as did social and political elites.

The history of economic transition was thus one of gradual transformation, on multiple fronts, of the moral strictures on economic behavior in which social groups were also re-formed and re-distinguished in relation to each other, sometimes in wholly new configurations such as the “working class”.

In other words, one way to pursue the “agrarian question” in post-Soviet Moldova is to reconfigure it as a broader question about the transformation of the rural moral economy. Following Thompson’s lead, we might well expect that older “moral economies” continue to influence collective understandings of fairness, justness and proper conduct in the economic sphere, even as the country re-encounters capitalism. Such understandings also regulate the recognition, coding and display of social differentiation and the appearance and form of dissent. Moral economies operate, as Thompson so clearly illustrates (and Micu too, this volume), at the interface between law and collective practice. And we should expect that emergent forms of social differentiation and dissent are not merely mechanical responses to recent structural change, but linked to older social models and economies. To this end, I provide a few details collected in the course of ethnographic fieldwork:

During my fieldwork in Moldova since the early 2000s, I have found that the categories of “peasants” introduced by different states are still present in the social imagination. In central and northern areas of the country, for example, the old categories of *răzeși* and *mazili* are still widely invoked to distinguish the character of villages and their neighborhoods and to comment on political behavior. In the early 2000s, some urban intellectuals expected to see these villages become more entrepreneurial than others, but the evidence supporting such conclusions remains anecdotal (see Cash 2011, 141). Across the country, the Soviet classification into three social types (peasants, intellectuals and workers) is the most prominent in public discourse and effectively silences further discussion of socio-

economic differences.

In the southeast, during extended field-work in 2009-2010, I found that what might have been a class discourse was conducted in other terms. Even the use of “peasant” was avoided as much as possible, and families were distinguished on the basis of their members’ level of education or profession as “oameni simpli” (simple people) or “intelectuali” (i.e. teachers and administrators). Differences in wealth were discussed in absolute terms as “having” or “not having”, but even households that actually had very little were sometimes described as “having” because they were generous. Other adjectives used to distinguish individuals and their families were “muncitor” (hard-working) or “leneș” (lazy). Households might be nevoiți (needy), but still have the moral qualities associated with being gospodari; and they might be mai săraci (poorer) or mai bogați (richer), without differences in their moral evaluation. Normally, people avow that “noi nu suntem oameni bogați” (we are not rich people) and disparage individuals and families that think they are “mai sus” (above) others.

In this moral economy, part Soviet and part pre-Soviet, tendencies towards accumulation and differentiation are tempered by the superior morality ascribed to generosity and hospitality. Hard work, industry and good household management are idealized, but they must be displayed through acts of generosity. Those who “have” must “give” to avoid being labeled stingy and being threatened with social or supernatural punishment. In turn, the objective “poverty” of those who have little, but give generously, is normally overlooked in their social evaluation. At the level of ethnographic analysis, this dynamic of demonstrating sufficiency through generosity can result in the widespread distribution of bread and other basic necessities; but it also contributes to each household’s quest to be generous beyond its means. While such data is difficult to document through standard socio-economic questionnaires, it is more evi-

dent through the analysis of various ritual activities (e.g. Cash 2013). Demonstrating sufficiency through generosity perpetuates both collective wealth and collective poverty; and it may well keep villages relatively poor as large surpluses of wealth are invested in apartments or other urban holdings.

One particularly good example of rural moral economy can be seen in the relations of households that pay day-laborers with wine. As I have written elsewhere (Cash forthcoming b), this arrangement causes considerable discussion and concern among the households that hire day-laborers. In some respects, the relationship is one of straightforward exploitation. Households that hire day laborers are objectively among the better-off in a village: by hiring additional labor they are able to self-provision at higher levels and are, thus, among those who purchase less of the food they consume; in fact, they have a surplus of wine (and usually other food) which enables them to hire additional workers. In contrast, those who are willing to “work for wine” are among the most socially marginal and least well-off villagers: they often have little or no land and have rented what they do have to the cooperative; moreover, they have not sought other sources of cash income; and at least one member of the household is usually on the brink of alcoholism – i.e. in local terms, regularly incapacitated for work by the consumption of alcohol. By paying near-alcoholics in wine, some households benefit from nearly free labor and perpetuate their workers’ dependency on them. Not only do the hiring households exploit alcohol dependency, but they also contribute to foreclosing their workers’ opportunities to pursue other forms of livelihood: one man once complained to me that he was so busy helping others to prepare their gardens that he did not have the time to prepare his own. Yet the relationship is not so simple. The “exploiting” households point out that their workers demand wine as payment, even when they are offered something else; and that they also feed the workers who would otherwise not have food to eat. The rela-



tionship between the households is also one between “neighbors”. The people involved know each other well; personal histories and personalities are considered as well as economic needs (i.e. that the “workers” have often long been “weak” individuals who were unable to establish themselves independently); and workers often enough approach their “employers” for food, assistance and advice.

Under the conditions of a model capitalism, households might be concerned to keep their workers just alive enough to continue working. But, in rural Moldova, households that pay workers in wine feel a moral pressure to moderate their workers’ consumption of wine. Similarly, they might exploit their workers’ poverty further by charging them (in cash or with labor due) for the bread or other food they sometimes seek. But they do not; rather, they give bread freely, unaccounted and quickly “forgotten”, in accord – they say – with popular Orthodox customs. Similarly, religiously-infused ideas of showing honor and mutual respect through shared wine-drinking symbolically invert the relationship at every meal partaken during a work-day. By serving workers wine, the better-off households become indebted; the sacrifice of labor can never be fully re-paid. For this reason alone, households that pay workers in wine are made uncomfortable by the relationship and try to periodically introduce other elements that modify the dynamics of dependency.

As in Thompson’s extended study of early modern England, the moral economy of present-day rural Moldova contains ideas and values drawn from a variety of institutions. The legal and ideological frameworks of prior states, as well as the Orthodox Church, are invoked in contemporary economic relations. What is perhaps most interesting is that the frameworks that supported socio-economic differentiation through the end of the 19th century seem to have been thoroughly abandoned and replaced instead with an ethos of shared wealth and shared poverty that is supported by the new legal

structure. Even those who seek social differentiation within this shared poverty cannot be certain of finding it (Baumann, Malcoci, Paglietti 2009).

B. R. 2009

Conclusion:

Class and Status in the Countryside

In light of the old “agrarian question”, what conclusions can be drawn about rural society in contemporary Moldova? Is it, as it professes to be, a moral community in which differences in material status and personal capacity are habitually leveled and equalized through social practices that function so smoothly as to be unseen and unnoticed? Or do the ideologies of self-sufficiency and equality combine with moral evaluations of people to mystify deep social inequalities? Did the land reforms of the past 150 years, and especially Soviet collectivization, definitively interrupt earlier desires for and patterns of social differentiation? Is the peasantry politically conservative, inert, or revolutionary? As these questions indicate, the “agrarian question” has not been resolved everywhere. Moreover, as the last section of this piece documents, the “agrarian question” cannot be answered only by marshalling economic and social data; such data must also be complemented by attention to the moral economy which regulates economic behavior and patterns of social differentiation.

In the introduction to this volume, the editors ask whether – in fact – there is something unique to the countryside that makes the “agrarian question” especially relevant to more general theoretical discussions? The ethnographic and historic specificity of each case presented in this volume would tend to work against such a conclusion. And yet, perhaps attention to moral economies would also help to draw out the theoretical contributions still to be made by the “agrarian question”. In Moldova, as in many other places, one further component of the moral economy is to be found in the widespread rural and urban assertion that “villages” are



particularly moral spaces. The morality and conservatism of the “village” is often contrasted with the immorality of modern urban life, and villages are looked to as models for their (traditional) ways of awarding status and respect. In this construct, villagers and the state share the task of configuring rural social relations as equitable and displacing inequalities to urban areas.

Yet in this effort, we must be careful not to romanticize the moral economies of rural areas. As Scott (1976) long ago pointed

out, the moral economies of peasants are rarely as egalitarian as they might seem; social arrangements are organized to ensure that villagers do not starve, and the result of ensuring the survival of the poorest may be considerable social leveling of those with access to greater resources. In this respect, moral economies can and do change with new social, economic and political opportunities, and with them – forms of social differentiation.

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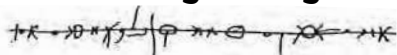
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AFTERWORD

Europe's Guinea Pigs: Globalizing the Agricultural History of Southeastern Europe



Frank Uekötter

Reader in Environmental Humanities, University of Birmingham

One of the most remarkable features of the peasantry is its resilience to obituaries. No other social group has shown such stubborn resistance towards predictions of social disintegration throughout modern history. The peasants survived Marxist analysts who laid out that the peasants were oppressed and should thus join forces with the proletariat. They survived a comprehensive transformation of markets and modes of production that changed virtually all parameters of agriculture, save for a few biological fundamentals. They persisted through Communist social engineering. They even survived historians such as Eric Hobsbawm who presented the death of peasantry as a *fait accompli*. It is no coincidence that the academic study of peasants ended up in the hands of anthropologists, whose core competence is to make sense of behaviour that nobody else understands. After some two centuries of industrial-capitalist modernity, the peasants are still out there, ready to outlive concepts and categories as they may come to them.

That alone makes this collection of essays a worthwhile endeavour. South-Eastern European peasants are still with us and will be for the foreseeable future, and we better engage with them, lest our view of societies and their histories displays a gaping hole. This holds true for numbers: one can safely guess that between eighty and ninety percent of the people that have lived in Europe throughout human history have been, in one way or another, engaged with

agriculture. And that holds true for our culture: the rural world was the quintessential sphere of European life before the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and it continues to leave its imprint in modern times. When it comes to the peasantry of Europe, the past is not just history. In fact, in South-Eastern Europe, it is not even past.

But then, it is probably time to move the frame of reference beyond the European sphere. Taking stock of the parameters that defined the peasants' existence in South-Eastern Europe in the preceding essays, most look strikingly familiar: precarious economic conditions and the persistence of subsistence production; repeated shifts in the general political and economic framework; the coexistence of nationalistic and ethnic vigour and transnational connections; leftovers from large development schemes born out of bygone utopias; authoritarian states and endemic corruption. None of this is a peculiarity of South-Eastern Europe. From a global perspective, and, particularly, with a view to the colonial and post-colonial world, these conditions are the rule rather than the exception.

Of course, such a designation runs the risk of undue generalization. The concept of the colonial and post-colonial world glosses over a whole host of national, regional and local specifics, as it highlights common experiences at the expense of variations. But then, these remarks follow on the heels of case studies that look at countries, regions, and even single villages in great detail, and,

if that exercise teaches us anything, it is that place and context matter: the previous stories all have their peculiar social, economic, ethnic and ecological conditions, and none of the following shall be construed as denying the significance of these specifics. Yet it seems that there are some common themes that run through these essays, and we should take stock of them both for a better understanding of these case studies and for raising the profile of the field. That is what this essay intends to do.

The history of the European peasantry is usually phrased in terms of diminishment and dissolution. A whole cosmos of morals, along with trades and social strata, disappeared from Europe, but, at least, the peasants had a chance to trade their legacy in for something better (cf. Mooser 2000). That narrative does not work for South-Eastern Europe, lest one wishes to depict an entire century of peasant history as a state of limbo, a kind of waiting room of history that multiple generations of peasants occupied because of some unscheduled delay in the execution of their predestined fate. In fact, looking at South-Eastern Europe may help us recognize alternative paths in modern history. For instance, the persistence of subsistence modes may look less anachronistic when we recognize that West-German peasants were doing exactly the same thing in the years after 1945. After all, you can make a good case for the merits of subsistence agriculture under conditions of uncertainty. After the devastating defeat in the Second World War, with the future of Germany in the hands of foreign powers, maintaining a foot in agriculture was playing it safe (Teiwes 1952, 137).

With that, situating the agricultural history of South-Eastern Europe within a global context does not mean pushing it outside the European context. One can even argue that the peasants of South-Eastern Europe were more exposed to the vagaries of European history in the 20th century than most of their fellow agriculturalists. Perhaps no other social formation in Europe has been

exposed to such a sustained barrage of shifting political currents: nation-building and ethnic conflicts, autarky policies and forced development, socialist collectivization and neo-liberal reforms, land speculation and, most recently, European nature conservation policies. And even when socialism reigned supreme for some four decades, the reality on the ground was full of dynamism and, thus, more akin to a permanent revolution, as Anelyia Kuzmanova shows in the case of Bulgaria. Just like the guinea pigs in a children's playground, these peasants have been toyed with perennially throughout the 20th century.

As countless children have learned, guinea pigs may look defenceless, but they can bite. The same holds true for peasants, and it is gratifying to see how these articles seek to stress their agency under adverse conditions. In retrospect, the Greek currant crisis of the early 1900s looks like the overture to a century of peasant protests. And the tradition continues: as Jovana Diković shows in her article on Serbia, a National Peasant Party can still thrive in the 21st century. But then, the peasants' response does not need to be a political one. They can also seek jobs outside agriculture or become a reservoir for children whose parents migrate abroad for work, as Andrew Cartwright shows for present-day Romania.

Ștefan Dorondel and Stelu Șerban note in their introduction that South-Eastern Europe does not fit any of Terrence Byres' models of agrarian transformation. One could add that the peasants themselves do not perform any better when it comes to matching preconceived models. The peasants in these volumes take on jobs outside agriculture, nurture children that are not their own, migrate to cities and back, and they even display a notably unemotional relationship to their own land holdings. None of that fits squarely with established clichés of peasant behaviour, but that may say more about fading ideas of an idealized peasantry than about the realities on the ground. None of the essays in this volume

suggest that South-Eastern European peasants spent much time reflecting on eternal peasant ideals. But they all attest to their desire, and their struggles under adverse conditions, to make a living.

While the peasants of South-Eastern Europe were somewhat averse to utopian thinking, others were less reserved when it came to imposing their own ideas upon the rural populace. Soviet-style collectivization was merely the most spectacular among a wide range of experiments where peasants figured as mere guinea pigs, and these projects felt no reservations to interfere with things as intimate as personal hygiene; just look at Milena Angelova's discussion of the Bulgarian Model Villages. Furthermore, these Model Villages drew on German and American precedents, as if experts in other countries would know more about the ideal way of rural life than the people of South-Eastern Europe. It is perhaps unsurprising that peasants did not readily adjust to their precast roles, and sometimes the results ran directly counter to the authorities' intentions. As Kuzmanova shows, the socialist project ultimately contributed to the individualization and atomization of Bulgarian society.

Authorities also toyed around with land ownership patterns. Of course, collectivization was the most glaring example, but states were also deep into the land business before and after the socialist period. It is rewarding to look into this issue more deeply, as it was a constant source of trouble and conflict all over the regions. There is probably no need to elaborate on the reasons at great length. Peasants have been many different things all over the world, but they always had land, and, as Cornel Micu stresses in the case of Romania, land was a means of subsistence and a social connector, not just a mere economic asset and means of production.

Of course, land reforms were a pan-European concern, as ownership of land was a key dimension of social inequality. But the chronology is different; in fact, one can justifiably speak of a deep rift between Western and Eastern Europe when it comes to land

reform in the quest for social justice. When Lloyd George, who had waged a hugely popular Land Campaign in Britain in 1913, tried an encore with his Land Programme of 1926, the cause fell through with the voters, and the issue never returned from its grave (Thompson 2010, 259). In South-Eastern Europe, land reforms had barely started at that time, and they became a defining force for agricultural system, if not the single most important factor, as Edvin Zhllima and Klodjan Rama argue for Albania. People also learned how land reform was as much a matter of economy and livelihoods as of political power: Christian Giordano shows the intrinsic links between land reform and nation-building for interwar Yugoslavia. Only Greece had an earlier start in the land redistribution business, as Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli shows, but it seems that is mostly due to the relatively early end of Ottoman rule. Furthermore, there was a notable absence of a sense of urgency in 19th century Greece when it came to redistributing land, something that might deserve more scrutiny.

In short, the land question divided Europe, and it will be interesting to watch whether the redistribution of collectivized land and the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s have closed this gap for good. In the Western half of Europe, peasants saw a lot of things coming their way throughout the 20th century, but, at least, they could be sure that nobody would take away their land. South-Eastern European peasants never had that type of certainty: they worked their land only as long as nobody found that they were too big, too small, had the wrong ethnicity, or that Soviet-style collectivization was the way towards the future. Liviu Mantescu rightly highlights the ecological toll of deforestation in the Vrancea, Romania, but the people's rationale is painfully easy to understand. In a region where land titles were in a state of flux, getting rich quickly with logging permits was a terribly enticing option. Who would want to practice sustainable forestry when someone else might own the forest (or what will be left of it)



sooner rather than later?

Forest use in Vrancea clearly bears the marks of a colonial style of resource exploitation, first by foreign logging companies and then by reparation-hungry Soviets. Yet Mantescu refrains from using the word, and so do most of the other authors. The case against the concept is arguably more political than analytical. Depicting a region as colonial is inevitably insulting, and particularly so in a region with strong national and ethnic allegiances. But then, post-socialist Moldovan peasants seek to move beyond subsistence production and complain about a lack of markets for their products, as Jennifer Cash shows on the basis of ethnographic fieldwork. These peasants do not want to shut the door to the world. But then, how do we call trade relations when the playing field is not level?

Of course, when it comes to insults, nothing beats the title of this essay. For all their misery, peasants usually cherish a certain sense of pride, if only because they do better than the landless, and few would delight being compared to guinea pigs. But then, the metaphor (for it is nothing more than that) may serve to highlight the peasants' precarious place in society: guinea pigs usually evoke instant sympathy, but nobody would like to take their place. For all the diversity of peasant livelihoods that this volume explores, we are talking about a group of people that are almost universally poor (except for those few who made a killing with logging permits), and we have known since Pierre Bourdieu's *La Misère du monde* that there is now a huge diversity of depressed existences (Bourdieu et al. 1993). Unlike Kautsky and Lenin, we can no longer act as if proletarianization was the single uniform mode of exploitation.

Poverty has many faces, but its place in society boils down to a common fate nowadays. Zygmunt Bauman put it as follows:

"For the first time in human history, the poor, so to speak, have lost their social use. They are not the vehicle of personal repentance and salvation; they are not the hew-

ers of wood and drawers of water, who feed and defend; they are not the 'reserve army of labour,' nor the flesh and bones of military power either; and most certainly they are not the consumers who will provide the effective 'market clearing' demand and startup recovery. The new poor are fully and truly useless and redundant." (Bauman 1997)

The remark probably hits a point for the peasants of South-Eastern Europe. Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, authorities have cherished them as producers, voters, labourers, or dumping ground for children, but rarely have people cherished them as peasants. The shameful Romanian welfare policy that Cartwright is recording – inflating land values until peasants no longer qualify for support – thus carries a bitter irony: conspiring in such a way is essentially the last step in a long process of making these people invisible. If the peasants of South-Eastern Europe would somehow perish from the face of the earth, would someone really miss them?

As Bauman notes, we have somehow lost a good moral case for engaging with the poor. We certainly have lost a clear vision for their social uplift, and particularly so in a region that is now basically a waste heap for the utopias of the 20th century. In fact, one probably cannot close this volume without a remark on how strangely diffuse the peasants look in this volume, and how far they diverge from any idealized vision. "Peasant" is merely a default word that we use for lack of something better, and we do so in spite of qualms about the past of the word: nobody would want to resuscitate the eternal peasants of infamous memory. But then, their undefined place in societies past and present should not be an excuse for negligence. The peasants that these essays discuss are a part of European history, and a part of 21st century Europe. That the rest of the continent no longer treats them as such, or even acknowledges their sheer existence beyond the essentials of modern citizenship, makes it all the more important to give them a voice.

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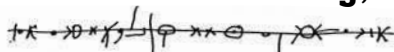
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REVIEWS

The two guest-editors of the volume have decided to include in the special issue a book review section for two reasons. First, the reviewed books have close links with the agrarian question, the topic of the special issue. Cornel Micu and Aneliya Kuzmanova who are contributors to the volume are reviewers and respectively the author of one of the reviewed books. Thus, the book reviews reflect and complete the papers in the volume. Ger Duijzings' book review addresses an issue which was not openly addressed in the volume: the social differentiation based on migrants' remittances. Second, the scarcity of books published on the rural areas in Southeast Europe convinced us to include a review section as an addendum to the special issue.

Cornel Micu, *From Peasants to Farmers? Agrarian Reforms and Modernisation in Twentieth Century Romania*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012.



Reviewed by Mihai-Dan Cîrjan

The rural commune which provides the case-study for this complex and sophisticated analysis of 20th century Romanian rural reforms is also the focus of a longish, meticulous and very detailed Wikipedia article¹. Written in Romanian, the Wikipedia entry painstakingly tries to describe the state socialist period, ending with a sentence which summarizes the 1980s: “Radu Perianu, the last communist mayor, a primitive and [politically] zealous tractor-driver, aided by his lover “The Rabid One”, were the dread of the villagers ... [*Ultimul primar comunist, Radu Perianu, un tractorist primitiv și zelos, secondat de amanta sa “Turbata”, au fost spaima locuitorilor*]”.

This personalized depiction of 1980s' Romania remains, despite its rather quaint humor and awkward sense of agency, a good example of how rural history has been written in this part of the world in the last twenty years. Namely, as an individualized description of the adventures and troubles of the Romanian peasantry in which Radu Perianu can be easily replaced with Nicolae Ceaușescu, while the sexist image of the anonymous *Turbata* is taken over by similarly sexist views on female leaders like Ana Pauker or Elena Ceaușescu. Displaying a

certain degree of abstraction, this personalization may identify the communist elites, the Russia-based Communist Party, or simply the personal will of Charles II or Nicolae Ceaușescu as the main agents within a story heavily underpinned by ethical undertones and within which the collectivization features as the dramatic, central narrative piece.² Despite the abundance of empirical information the archives have recently provided, despite the possibilities opened up by the access to both local and central archives, the fortunes and misfortunes of the Romanian peasantry and, along with it, of Romanian social history, are still seen as the ill-fated results of personal decision, of various well-identified and usually ill-willed heroes. This stands in strange contrast with the history of the working class which, at least recently, has gained a rather different status and has managed to cater for the interest of new Ph.D. students, while new graduate programs dedicated to labor studies have started to appear.

It is the merit of this book to offer an alternative to this type of rural history, allowing a breathing space for narratives which, by going beyond the mere anecdotal, would connect the trajectory of the

1) http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comuna_Bordei_Verde,_Br%C4%83ila.

2) Examples of such perspectives can be found in Aline Mungiu-Pippidi's work or in the 2006 Report of the Romanian Presidential Commission: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *A Tale of Two Villages: Effects of Coerced Modernisation on the East European Countryside* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2010); *Final Report of the Presidential Commission on the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship* (http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf)

Romanian peasantry to macro-social processes of a larger theoretical scope. One of its results is that the focus on complex social dynamics such as the development of rural administration, the technical and legal infrastructure of the Romanian property regime, or elite-peasantry dynamics is theoretically broad enough to avoid a type of methodological nationalism³ which, alas, has marked Romanian historiography up to this day. If the 2000s have witnessed a certain criticism of the ideological nationalist narratives of Romanian historiography, seldom have Romanian historians taken the next step to provide methodological and theoretical frameworks that would avoid a rather more insidious form of nationalism, embedded in the institutional framework of our academic institutions and in the theoretical underpinnings of our narratives. It is a step that the book manages to take as the ambitious theoretical focus which it evinces can connect the Romanian context with other social trajectories, enabling trans-national comparisons which, at the moment, are still a very rare feature of Romanian social history. In this sense, the methodological and the theoretical vocabulary that Cornel Micu uses is in itself an attempt to actually open up Romanian social history towards another form of politics of history.

That is the reason why, in this review, I will try to focus not on the carefully selected empirical material which supports the author's argument, but on its methodological implications, its theoretical effects. This "discriminatory" perspective might be necessary because these implications, far from merely underpinning the theoretical scaffolding of the book, can actually pinpoint some of the dangers and the opportunities awaiting rural and other social historians. Since the 1950s, social history has been marked, as most social sciences, by its insertion into Cold War politics. Historical debates on modernization processes, rural development, have been essential within this ideology-fraught context⁴. Romanian rural history, however, has seldom taken

heed of this hidden presence within the profession, a presence which has rendered the methodological frameworks and the concepts we use imbued with specific political rationalities⁵. Part of this review is intended to address this issue by tackling the type of vocabulary we might use, as Eastern European historians, in what can hopefully be considered a post-Cold War scholarship.

2. *From Peasants to Farmers* focuses on the modernization projects launched by the Romanian elites in the aftermath of the First World War. The reform projects are interpreted through the lenses of the transition from subsistence agriculture to commercial agricultural production, from peasants to farmers or, in Polanyian language, from embedded economy to dis-embedded markets. Perceived as responses to what classical historical sociology has termed the "problem of backwardness", these projects led to the rural reforms of 1919/1921, 1945 and the post-socialist period, as well as to the set of ongoing processes that followed these responses and their actual implementation. In this sense, the author deftly manages to avoid the danger of reifying these historical moments by seeing the reforms as on-going processes rather than well-defined temporal landmarks⁶. The small commune of Bordeiu Verde, the empirical focus of the book, provides the locale through which these macro-social processes can be observed; an extended case study⁷ through which the interaction between the modernizing elites and the peasants can be analyzed.

As a result of this limited but rich case-study, the book manages to unfold and deploy the empirical results and the oftentimes unexpected consequences that the actual implementation of the reforms had on ground-level. It is through this type of empirical groundwork, backed up by extensive archival research, that the author manages to dismantle the rather vague and overly broad concepts of "state," or "modernization process". There are two important elements through which the interactions between the

3) For a critical perspective on what methodological nationalism is and what it might be, see Daniel Chernilo, "Social Theory's Methodological Nationalism Myth and Reality," *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 5–22."

4) Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernisation Theory in Cold War America* (JHU Press, 2003).

5) *Staging Growth: Modernisation, Development, and the Global Cold War, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

6) The rural reform that followed the First World War was a long process which, even officially, was not finished by the beginning of the Second World War.

7) Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (1998): 4–33.

Romanian modernizing state and the rural countryside are analyzed: on the one hand, the complex network of relationships between various sections of the Romanian elite and, on the other, the infrastructural relays through which reform programs could be implemented. One of the main themes of the book is that the Romanian modernization of the countryside failed since Romanian elites, far from focusing on the economic development of the rural area, harnessed this project to various ideological perspectives: nationalism, the preservation of the post-1918 status-quo or creating an egalitarian society. Regarding the second aspect, the bureaucratic infrastructure of rural development, the book offers - following D. Mueller's work - one of the best analysis of the Romanian state's administrative (in)capacity to establish a secure and stable property structure.

The book relies on a complex model of elites interaction that focuses not only on the contacts between local elites and their central avatars, but also on the differences and conflicts that may appear between different sectors of the local elite itself as well as the hierarchical relationships between them⁸. Some of the conclusions that the author draws are rather surprising: the interwar social structure relied on the co-option and the support of traditional elites, leading, in this regard, to a renewed form of traditionalism, despite the modernizing discourse of the Romanian central elites⁹. On the other hand, it was only in the communist period that a new layer of professionals could appear due to the well-developed educational system which produced a generation of technicians and experts capable of replacing traditional rural elites. Nevertheless, what was common to both periods was the lack of incentives which might have boosted an economic entrepreneurial class capable of replacing these position elites. It is this botched attempt to provide for an entrepreneurial elite that might have forwarded the transition from a subsistence economy to a market-based economic structure, from peasants to farmers, that the author follows

up throughout its history, being one of the important threads of the book. If it can be easily understood why this attempt was unsuccessful during the state socialist period, the failure of this embourgeoisement project is very well explained by Cornel Micu in respect to the interwar years. It stems not only from the interactions between various elites, but also from the incapacity of the state to secure a viable rural infrastructure: throughout the interwar period, the cadastral laws were never implemented, which impeded legal land transactions and, consequently, a stable market. In respect to this failure of the Romanian administrative and legal infrastructure, historians are faced with a quaint paradox: despite the interventionist stance of the Romanian state throughout this period, the state seldom found the means to actually intervene in rural economic life. And when it did, it seldom managed to actually meet the demands of its own discourse. This does not mean that state policies did not have important effects on rural life: they did swerve, however, from the models sought out by the Romanian elites. Thus, the circulation of land throughout the interwar period was made through informal means which were still very much dependent on traditional social structures such as kinship and matrimonial ceremonies. Moreover, as it is well known in the specialized literature, the legislation hindered the development of a land market for a long time, which might have provided rural entrepreneurs with the possibility of having a head-start in the race for development.

The bewailing of the lack of an entrepreneurial class is strangely reminiscent of a certain *Sonderweg* thesis regarding Eastern Europe in which Romania implicitly and Eastern Europe (more broadly) is constantly compared with a certain view on Western development. This is partly due to a certain cultural hegemony of the West which made our historical actors, the Romanian elites, to constantly draw this comparison and to build their modernization programs on this model. However, while we should take heed

8) See Chapter 3.

9) My own opinion is that this "traditionalism" was as much invented as renewed. One only has to look at the literature created by the Haretian movement, the cooperative movement or ASTRA, to see how much these traditional elites were a programmatic class-creation project rather than a return to traditional social structures.

of this cultural hegemony (and the author is very skilled in analyzing it) the question is whether we, as social historians, should also employ this perspective, whether the transition from peasants to farmer is indeed the model of development that we should use in our historical narratives as an interpretative tool or even, as in Micu's study, as an evaluative yardstick¹⁰. There is a tendency within the book to assess various modernization projects based on a specific notion of rural modernity in which the farmer and market-oriented production are taken up as representative of a successful modernization. Moreover, market and modernization seem to be intimately connected, although various socialist project, including Romanian state socialism, were based on the idea that this is not the case: that it is possible to "modernize" the countryside without entering the global market or accepting capitalist social relations. Furthermore, we now know that even market-based rural economies in the West did not necessarily do away with traditional farm structures based on kinship and family ties, as the book seems to imply¹¹. The ambiguity of the relationship between markets, capitalism and modernization can be traced in the author's assessment of the socialist period and in his discussion of the Romanian National Peasant program. I will focus a little bit on these points since this discussion may bring forward other issues which touch upon what I would call the ethics of methodological distance, the distinction between the etic and the emic which Marvin Harris, one of the book's main references, draws up.

3. Along with Dietmar Mueller, A. Harre and Dumitru Sandru, Micu's analysis of the Peasant Party program is probably one of the most insightful discussions on the Romanian Peasant Party, despite a certain lack of attention for the international character of this type of populist discourse¹². Similarly, the author seems to avoid tackling the anti-capitalist rhetoric which the Peasant Party, despite its practices, resorted to. One

of the main points Cornel Micu makes is a seeming contradiction between the Peasant Party support for small-holding enterprises and cooperatives, on the one hand, and the necessities of a modernized agriculture, on the other. It is this contradiction which led, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, to the bankruptcy of the Peasant Party program. Of course, with the advantage of hindsight, we might now claim that the program was unrealistic, that the Great Depression, as well as the credit crisis of the 1930s proved them wrong. Nevertheless, the lack of credit throughout the 1930s was a problem that affected peasantries throughout the entire world, peasantries that had been subjected to "modernization programs" fairly different from the Romanian one. For instance, the 1930s wave of farm bankruptcies in the United States was just an instance of an overarching mismatch between the demands of the financial system and the necessities of the peasantries across the globe, a mismatch that ran from the American state of Washington to French Indochina¹³.

Moreover, quite a lot of the modernization programs of the interwar period were proven wrong by the Great Depression, including a certain version of market liberalism. Unfortunately, some might say, discourses praising market rationality are still with us today, alive and kicking. In this sense, I think it might be an overstatement to regard the Great Depression as an intellectual retort to the program of the Peasant Party. I say this partly because of the complexity of the Great Depression as a social phenomenon, partly because the intellectual efforts of the Peasant Party went into the direction of criticizing a certain vision of rural modernity: one based on market-oriented farms and on what, from a Polanyian tradition, we might call the dis-embedding of the peasant household from its social determinations. In this sense, when the author says that the policy of the Peasant Party proved unrealistic, one might interpret this claim not simply as a neutral historical evaluation of the populist program, but as a relatively con-

10) For a contextualized criticism of the opposition peasants vs. farmers, see Andrew Cartwright and Nigel Swain, "Finding Farmers': Vital for Policy-Makers but Politically Inexpedient," *Eastern European Countryside* 9 (2003), http://www.soc.umk.pl/eec/2003/1_Cartwright%20Swain.pdf.

11) Chriss Hann "Still an Awkward Class," *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, March 31, 2014, <http://www.praktykateoretyczna.pl/czasopismo/still-an-awkward-class/>.

12) Pointing out the international character of the Peasant Party's anti-capitalist discourse or the connection they had with the Green International might help us get out of the methodological nationalism conundrum which I mentioned in the beginning of the review.

13) For these two contexts, see Lee J. Alston, "Farm Foreclosures in the United States during the Interwar Period," *The Journal of Economic History* 43, no. 04 (1983): 885–903; Melin, Pierre. *L'endettement agraire et la liquidation des dettes agricoles en Cochinchine*. Paris: Librairie Sociale et Économique, 1939."

tentious clash between two visions of rural modernity: an ahistorical argument between Virgil Madgearu and the present book. How are we to take sides in this debate?

While the interwar period is analyzed as a failure of specific modernization models, having their own coherence and their own inner structure, the socialist state policy regarding agriculture is enjoying a totally different approach. The socialist period seems to be tackled, unlike the party programs of the interwar period, more as a system of policies rather than as an ideological project, more as a day-to-day praxis than as a coherent ideological project¹⁴. We know, however, that the socialist period engendered a fertile, although (partly) hidden discussion over what agriculture and agricultural markets mean or over Romania's role in the global capitalist economy. Despite our (otherwise sound) political intuitions, journals such as *Lupta de Clasa* and *Era Socialista*, in which these debates took place, should be perceived as much more than simple propaganda: they contained a certain ideological rationality that can actually explicate the position(s) of the socialist state regarding economic development. Not taking them into consideration and focusing solely on the policy level may very well impoverish our view on the period, avoiding an analysis of what Stephen Kotkin¹⁵ called the "civilizational" aspect of state socialism, its own developmental logic. Moreover, I think that over-doing the continuities between state socialism and the interwar period, as the book tends to do, presents its own dangers: avoiding the specificities of the socialist developmental project, its anti-market rhetoric, its vision of agricultural production and its own modernization program. This danger becomes even more evident when one avoids discussing the anti-capitalist discourses of the interwar period.

I think that some of these ambiguities in assessing the Peasant Party and the socialist state developmental projects may spring not so much from critical inadequacies, as from a specific concept of modernization which

the author uses and which clashes with both the socialist and the populist perspective of the Romanian Peasant Party. According to the definition borrowed from A. Sterbling, Cornel Micu's modernization presupposes "the extension of economic capacity of production and political participation in a given society."¹⁶ My claim is that this definition not only simplifies quite a lot, but it also disqualifies an entire range of modernization projects (such as state socialism and agrarian populism) which put social rights in its center and viewed "political rights" as useless if devoid of proper access to economic and cultural resources. The Peasant Party has always warned, within the limits of their populist language, that political rights are unusable without a "fair" social organization. The author himself claims that state socialism emphasized social concerns over economic ones in their reform programs. Does this mean that they swerved from the modernization path or simply that they proposed another modernization model in which economic productivism was supposed to listen to social justice constraints? Then, who are we to take sides with: the author or the protagonists of his narrative? To this question one should add that economic and social rationalities cannot be that easily disentangled, not even on a theoretical level. This quaint differentiation between social and economic "reasons" may be the result of a specific history, interspersed with social conflicts and through which economic production became increasingly differentiated from its social embedding¹⁷. An important role to play in this process was a certain vision of modernity which emphasized economic productivity at the expense of social concerns, a vision which seems to be present in the book as well¹⁸. How else are we to interpret the ideological conflict between Romanian liberals and the Peasant Party?

Moreover, it is still unclear what historical examples of modernization the author's definition might refer to. There is a certain claim that modernization was conterminous with the Western model. I will leave

14) Similarly to the analysis of the Peasant Party, there is no discussion over the ideological structures that inspired socialist agricultural policies, its anti-capitalist rhetoric or its refusal of the market as a system of resource distribution.

15) Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

16) Cornel Micu, *From Peasants to Farmers?* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 14.

17) I am referring here to Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), but also to "intellectual histories" such as Pierre Rosanvallon's *Le Libéralisme Économique* (Editions du Seuil, 1989). Ever since Marx and Weber, however, it is the main task of economic anthropology in general to show that economic rationality has a history and this history needs to be told (Chris Hann and Keith Hart, *Economic Anthropology* (Polity, 2011).

18) A good analysis of the productivist bias of modernisation programs is provided by Robert Kurz, *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung* (Eichborn, 1991). I have used the Portuguese translation *O colapso da modernização*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992).

aside the justified criticisms that this Western-centered perspective on modernization might receive¹⁹ and ask: which Western model? German state-led capitalist development, British capitalism along with its colonial dimensions, US capitalism and its racial segregation, Italian fascist corporatism, the Italian workers' councils? In the interwar period there were contentious visions of the West: some radical Peasant Party members talked about socialist cooperatives, M. Manoiilescu looked at fascism as a possible model, Social-Democrats looked at the SPD's anti-capitalist project, the Peasant Party refused the capitalist dimensions of the Western model, etc. These divergent opinions over what the "West" actually meant were underpinned by different modernization projects and class interests, which listened to different discursive constraints. As Elley and Blackburn have tried to show and as some post-colonial scholars have pointed out, the existence of a "Western model" is little more than a discursive trope, used in particular local ideological conflicts²⁰.

Similarly, it is difficult to pin-point the exact elements that make up a "successful" modernization, the specific package that the term modernization bundles up. I find relatively imprecise the contention that every "Western" social feature which led to "increased economic productivity and political participation" is part of a modernization process. How this political participation was defined and how this productivity was reached are also important questions. For instance, one of the arguments used by the author to support his view on the modern influence of EU policies is the surface increase of agricultural holdings. Why this should be a sign of modernization is left unexplained, except for a short note: "in comparison with other EU members, Romania still has the lowest average area for a holding"²¹ The passage is followed by the claim that due to the EU influence "agriculture was no longer used to sustain the industrial development and nation-building process and became, instead, subject of the

capital flow."²² And, indeed, this might be the case, but, again, the question arises: being subject to capital flow is a sign of modernization or simply a sign of capitalism? And if it is a sign of capitalist relations, why not get rid of the word modernization and start talking about markets and capitalism? As in the discussion about state socialism and the program of the Peasant Party, the relationship between modernization, markets and capitalist economy is left in a vague theoretical backwoods.

4. Throughout the book, terms such as backwardness or modernization are used by both author and his actors. Following Marvin Harris's distinction (which the author employs) the distance between the etic and the emic levels remains blurred, as the modernization framework in which the Romanian interwar period and socialist elites thought and acted seems to be shared by the author. The fact that both social actors and the author meet on this common ground raises some important questions regarding the methodological and theoretical framework employed and which go beyond the manner in which the book is conceived and beyond its immediate stakes. As the author himself somehow manages to hint at, the language of modernization vs. backwardness or the modernization of the Romanian village are not just problems of the scholarly discourse, but also important ideological tools. In a context where modernization claims can function as an important political strategy, the historian's attitude towards this discourse should be much warier. Moreover, due to the specific Cold War academic context and of its impact on peasant studies, this language has been layered with specific ideological substructures which I believe should be made evident, rather than internalized and employed as a conceptual framework. These concepts were and, unfortunately, still are deeply immersed in the political and public discourse of various social groups, as well as in the politics that social sciences enact²³.

19) See for instance Gurminder K. Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Palgrave Macmillan Basingstoke, 2007). Or the classical Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

20) David Blackburn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Jean-François Bayart, "Postcolonial Studies: A Political Invention of Tradition?" *Ab Imperio* 2013, no. 2 (2013): 65–96.

21) This opens up a historical question over the adequate size of agricultural holdings, a question which has been nagging rural economics since their inception. One should add that the adequate size depends on a variety of variables (types of crop, access to credit and modern machineries, access to markets, etc) which do not automatically disqualify small holdings as backwards or inefficient.

22) Micu, *From Peasants to Farmers*, 262.

23) For instance, in today's Romania, the discourses of the main political players regarding agricultural policies get their legitimization from a consensus regarding the proper "modernization" of the countryside: creating a commercial, farm-based rural economy.

24) Frederick Cooper, "Modernity," *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, 2005, 113–49

25) Cooper, 146.

26) "Neither the temporal patterns nor the contents of change fit the colonial modernity package—or alternative packages—but the story of this volatile moment suggests another way of looking at the language of modernity: as a claim-making device... We see here how the idea of modernization was used in a particular context and we can trace the effects of its usage and its relation to politics on the ground." (Cooper, 146–147)

27) Martha Lampland, "False Numbers as Formalizing Practices," *Social Studies of Science* 40, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 377–404.

28) For a critique of EU agricultural policies in Eastern Europe, see Nigel Swain, "Agriculture 'East of the Elbe' and the Common Agricultural Policy," *Sociologia Ruralis* 53, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 369–89. Gorton, M., C. Hubbard and L. Hubbard (2009) "The folly of EU policy transfer: why the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) does not fit Central and Eastern Europe." *Regional Studies* 43 (10) pp. 1305–1317; Grant, W. (2008b) *Richest farmers benefit from CAP funding*. *Common Agricultural Policyblog*, Saturday 17 May, 2008. Available online at http://commonagpolicy.blogspot.co.uk/2012_01_01_archive.html last Accessed 26 May 2014.

29) L. Alan Winters, "The European Agricultural Trade Policies and Poverty," *European Review of Agricultural Economics* 32, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 319–46.

I think that, in this sense, it might be useful to take heed of some of the warnings F. Cooper made in relation to modernization studies, but also in respect to the proliferation of the modernity concepts which we have been witnessing in recent years²⁴. Namely, instead of talking about modernization as a package of elements and instead of employing it as a conceptual framework, we should try to unpack it, to see how social actors related not to "modernization" as such, but to various social realities such as market, liberal discourses, specific social configurations. More importantly, one should see modernization not as a phenomenon, but as a specific "claim-making device"²⁵, as a specific legitimization discourse used in various manners by our historical actors.

The Peasant Party, the Communist or the Liberal ones have tried to prove that their programs would bring about the modernization of the countryside. Instead of showing that they had failed in doing so and instead of proposing our own modernization theory and our own set of political choices, I think it is much useful to try to analyze the structure of these discourses and their pragmatic effects²⁶. It would be useful to see the way in which our historical actors use these frames without necessarily adopting or espousing modernization theories as if the ideological battles of the Cold War would have never happened. This attention to the modernization discourses that our actors employed might trigger not only a focus on political programs and on official discourses, but also on the political implication of the administrative and technological infrastructure on which these modernization programs relied. Cornel Micu does an incredible job of emphasizing the importance of professionals for the interwar period and especially for the post-war era. Moreover, we know from Martha Lampland, that far from being simple, neutral technocratic discourses, the practices these professionals enacted contained important political presuppositions over what

peasant economic production meant and how development should be envisioned²⁷.

I think that historicizing modernization discourse instead of employing it as a conceptual framework can be a strategy which might push Romanian social history into a post-Cold War framework. Not only because we might avoid the theoretical deadlock of a teleological Western-centered perspective on Eastern Europe, but also because of the political implication that this might bear. By reinforcing some of the Cold War understandings of modernization we tend to forget all too easily that agricultural production is also embedded in concrete social relations with very concrete social effects. The theoretical outshoots of this position is that, for instance, we keep avoiding any discussion over the economic inequalities which EU agricultural policies have spawned across the European Union and the effects that they have had on the social welfare of Romanian villages²⁸. We know that, despite the CAP rhetoric, big farms are actually rewarded much more than small farms: having in view its land distribution, the effects can be socially damaging for Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the fact that the peasantries in South-Asia and South America are, to a certain extent, negatively affected by the EU's CAP is also, again, a fact much too easily brushed aside in the Romanian scholarship²⁹.

Cornel Micu's *From Peasants to Farmer* manages to bring all these topics, questions and quandaries together in one of the most elegant and, for Romanian historiographical field, motivating analyses in recent years. Due to this nifty mixture of painstaking archival research and theoretical adroitness, Bordei Verde and its history can be considered the beginning of an inquiry over how Romanian and Eastern European social history has dealt with its past and how it should envision its future, over the methodologies that we use and the politics that we enact through them.

MARTOR



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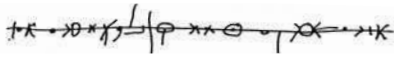
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Ger Duijzings (ed.), *Global Villages: Rural and Urban Transformations in Contemporary Bulgaria*. Anthem Press, 2013.



Reviewed by Aneliya Kuzmanova

Bringing together international scholarship in anthropology, sociology and human geography, this volume explores the complexities of globalization and neoliberal restructuring in the largely overlooked countryside, providing case studies from post-socialist Bulgaria. In this book, the authors set out to offer analyses of the discourses and narratives of globalization, rurality and place that frame the responses of local actors. I recommend this book to anyone interested in globalization, post-socialism and rural change in Bulgaria, the Balkans, Eastern Europe and beyond.

What transformations of urban-rural relations have occurred with the advent of globalization? Is it still valid to speak of “the countryside”? How novel is the concept of globalization? Ger Duijzings sets out to address these and other questions as he explores the tumultuous history of rural and urban transformations in Bulgaria in the Introduction to this volume. The editor starts off the discussion with an exploration of the land reforms during the later Ottoman period in the spirit of modernization, which not only led to the emergence of national elite, the shaping of provisionist mentality among the general population, and the myth of Bulgaria as a small country of small peasants, but these reforms also allow for plausible questioning of the novelty of the global condition. In the same vein, Duijzings then investigates the experience of Soviet-style collectivization of agriculture, while also looking at the under-examined benefits for the rural population that the centralized state brought about, again providing ample evidence of the global tendencies of the period. The historical introduction

finishes off with a discussion of the 1990s “reprivatization without peasants” (p. 9), in the context of an exaggerated ‘neoliberal’ or ‘second-wave’ globalization, which, as also suggested by Michael Woods (2007) and Anna Tsing (2005), wrongly excludes rural areas. Examining the contributions of the rest of the authors, Duijzings makes a timely and convincing case for investigating cultural diffusion and micro-processes of place-making as forms of globalization which apply to the urban and rural contexts alike. The result is an edited volume that presents a diverse range of scholarship, not only filling the discursive gap left by the lack of studies on the effects of globalization in the countryside, but also offering invaluable insight into a wide range of culturally, economically and geographically versatile rural and urban localities in the context of neoliberal restructuring.

The book is split into three sections. Part 1 takes the above question to provide theoretical reflections on the topic of globalization from a Bulgarian context. The chapter by Kaneff poses important questions concerning the de-territorialization and reconfiguration of space and time in the global age, and the paradoxical gap in the study of ‘the rural’ in this new context (p. 35). Kaneff uses this predicament to suggest that, as a consequence of globalization, the position and value of particular places is being reconfigured, thus creating so-called “winners” and “losers”. The implication seen throughout the book is that the relationship between rural and urban places should be examined primarily in terms of “positionality” rather than as bipolar opposition (pp. 45-46). “Positionality” is related to the in-

tensity and nature of interconnectedness of different entities, both in horizontal and vertical terms. Kaneff finishes off her discussion with an important question that deserves scholarly attention. The question concerns the ways in which the incorporation of such “winner” localities into a global economy serves to reinforce or even work against new hierarchies of uneven development that are a feature of global economy.

Creed begins his theoretical discussion with a strong and timely critique of rural anthropology, which either privileges particularities in its focus on one or a small number of villages, or focuses primarily on generalities, thus aggregating statistics rather than particulars through its purview to map the dimensions of differences across a large number of villages (p. 54). Creed also finds that in order to capture the factors that are particularly consequential to the quality of life in rural communities in Bulgaria (and the region), the lens of “positionality” as developed by Kaneff would not be sufficient. Although he recognizes that relations between places are important, Creed points to some important variables that are not relational. Therefore, he argues for a broader notion of “positionality” that includes multiple, intertwined dimensions: economic, social, political, cultural and ideological (p. 63).

Part 1 concludes with one more methodological disagreement between Kaneff and Creed, which poses a greater challenge to rural anthropologists and scholars of the global condition in general. The purchase of land and houses by Britons in Kaneff’s case study is celebrated as a survival strategy. Creed, in contrast, looks at the preconditioned displacement of local villagers in these areas, brought about by the same globalization processes, and suggests that this should be seen as reconstruction, rather than revitalization of the villages, as it transforms rather than sustains them. This transformation-versus-reconstruction debate should be used as a starting point for a meaningful debate in rural anthropology and possible reevaluation of research tools and strategies.

In Part 2 researchers present case studies, exploring the destinies of different rural, semirural and urban localities in the post-socialist period. In the case study of Bulgarian border town, Valtchinova applies the concept of “positionality” in Creed’s broader sense. She explores the destiny of the town of Tran, which was involved in an intricate interplay of ever-changing border “positionality” throughout the 20th century. As she usefully observes, this has produced multiple social, economic and political boundaries, which incessantly reconfigured the local identities and ideas of otherness in this small agro-town located “between urban and rural” (p. 71-72). This has also had important ramifications pertaining to the interethnic relations and hierarchies in the town, especially between the ethnic Bulgarian majority and Roma minority (p. 81-82). Nahodilova also approaches similar interethnic aspects of global transformations, starting with the socialist period of state-sponsored modernization and urbanization “at any cost” and concluding with the reinforcement of the region’s peripheral character in the present-day neo-liberal context. Nahodilova’s position, however, is closer to Kaneff’s narrower assessment of the detrimental effects of globalization to communities where the transformations of the 1990s did not bring any major advantages and opportunities to the local community, and their privileged position within the socialist economy in particular, was relegated. (p. 101).

Giordano and Kostova add another aspect to the discussion of the questionable novelty of the global condition, by suggesting, following Eisenstadt, that modernity can and should be considered as a plurality (p. 106). In this context, they explore the agro-political objectives of the post-socialist agrarian reform in Bulgaria, on the one hand striving to restore pre-socialist ownership relationships; and, on the other, to establish family-operated farms as the basis for the post-socialist agricultural sector. This resulted in the unexpected appearance of the unique capitalist entrepreneurs, popularly



known as *arendatori* who rented land from the new owners (p.111). Giordano and Kostova attribute the success and resulting wealth of the *arendatori* in the Dobrudzha region to the forms of social knowledge and capital acquired in socialist times, thus challenging the assumption that low-trust societies, as opposed to high-trust societies, are generally less likely to develop forms of cooperation. Therefore, they also question the applicability of universalist Western models of globalization, which have overlooked important virtues such as personal networks.

Building on the observations made by Duijzings, Giordano and Kostova regarding the unsuccessful political attempts towards the “reversibility of history” and the return to a Bulgaria of ‘small peasants’, Hristov explores this phenomenon in comparative terms, taking two neighboring rural regions on both sides of the Bulgarian-Serbian border, respectively the Kyustendil and the Vranje regions. Hristov’s investigation suggests that, while in Serbia traditional norms of excluding female heirs going back to pre-socialist times are still strong today, in Bulgaria the majority of respondents share the understanding of equality of the sexes during inheritance. Hristov thus sees socialism as a major contributing factor to present-day gender equality in Bulgaria. The Serbian case, which was also part of a socialist-style configuration, has not, however, received enough attention in order to provide the necessary explanatory power for both cases.

In Part 3, consideration is given to the newly emerging cultural hierarchies and notions of the “urban” and “rural” in the global age. Koleva explores a case of cultural production of the “urban” and “rural”, and the ways in which these representations are used to construct narratives of the self and other, form notions of locality and authenticity, and establish ideologies of *Gesellschaft* [associational society] and *Gemeinschaft* [communal society], following (Tönnies 1955) (p. 138, 147). Examining a nationwide opinion poll on the urban-rural dichotomy conducted in 2003 for the

UNDP, Koleva suggests that the “rural” is again constructed from the outside by the urban gaze through a kind of “orientalist” attitude conditioned by symbolic and political demands (p. 141). She also uses an ethnographic account of an annual village festival to demonstrate that in most people’s minds the ‘rural’ is not opposed to the ‘urban’, but is rather a complementary concept. Koleva also contributes to the transformation-reconstruction debate, acknowledging the role of “positionality” in remaking rurality under globalization, yet in line with Creed, emphasizing the important role of power relations and cultural hierarchies in the social construction of place. Mellish, in turn, shows how a primarily national Bulgarian state-funded event that takes place every five years turned into a commercialized global event over a period of several decades. She explores the multiple symbolic meanings that the festival holds for each of the three main groups of visitors. On the one hand, it has retained an important place in the national mythology and was designated as a museum town in 1952, but it also looks more like a large village than a town to the outsider; and, for the urbanite, and especially the non-Bulgarian urbanite, Koprivshitsa has all the trappings of a rural idyll (p. 156). Mellish demonstrates how this composite “cultural performance” earned its prestigious place on the world festival stage in the communist period and succeeded in holding on to this position into the 21st century. Thus, she presents the Festival not only as a survival strategy, but as a success story, and, as such, favors Kaneff’s understanding of the effects of the global condition as a transformative rather than reconstructive act.

Ermann uses fashion and the restructuring of the apparel and fashion industries in Bulgaria to analyze the role of “consumer capitalism” in a socialist economy, where Western brands and consumer goods stood for freedom and a “good and normal life”. He traces the ways in which such tendencies configured the relations between different

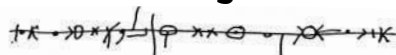


parts of the world in terms of centers and peripheries (p. 175). Ermann suggests that, due to a so-called “friction” (Tsing 2005) between neoliberal cultural hegemony and the forces that contest it, common brands today have come to represent the West and the global, and the anti-brands the East and the local. The global brands stand for the present, whereas alternative or anti-brands are linked to the pre-capitalist (often socialist) past or an anticipated or desired alternative future (p. 177). In the same vein of renewed stereotyping, juxtaposing the East-European or Balkan “other” with the Western “self”, in the final chapter, Angelidou and Kofti show the occurrence of new self-identifications and processes of “othering” between Greece and Bulgaria, which are linked to transnational movements and new labor relationships (p. 193). What is more, instead of contributing to the elimination of cultural boundaries, new capitalist forms of entrepreneurial activities play a key role in creating new boundaries, stereotypes and antagonisms at the margins of Europe (p. 203).

I would recommend this book to anyone researching within the fields of post-social-

ism, neoliberal restructuring, rural and urban transformations and also to those who have a broader interest in area studies and Eastern Europe. Firstly, the diversity of research contexts offers a broad spectrum of recent research that does justice to the complex and complementary roles that rural and urban localities play in our current global climate. Additionally, the chapters are engaging in their description and analysis of the case studies. Thirdly, while it may not have been originally intended as a key question in some of the chapters, the meaning of “positionality” together with a shaping transformation-versus-reconstruction debate has emerged as a focus that clearly deserves consideration in the wider context of rural and post-socialist research. In an increasingly mobile and globalized world, research of the rural condition is scarce and needed, not only in Eastern Europe, but also in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and China, which are still dominated by a large peasantry and whose population comprises half of the world (Hobsbawm 1994, cited in Șerban and Dorondel 2014).

Mândrie și beton / Pride and concrete, Photo Album by Petruț Călinescu and Ioana Hodoiu. Bucharest: Igloo Media, 2013.¹



Reviewed by Ger Duijzings

Amongst the few books that document the often dramatic changes currently taking place in village communities in eastern and south-eastern Europe, this book is unique. The outcome of a collaboration between photographer Petruț Călinescu and anthropologist Ioana Hodoiu, it offers a rare insight into the fast-changing realities of villages in Maramureș, repudiating the common notion of village communities here and elsewhere as rural

backwaters that have missed the train of globalisation. Călinescu and Hodoiu have worked in the area since 2010, documenting village life and following the inhabitants abroad, especially to Paris, where the latter are employed as construction workers and domestic servants. Operating in tandem - Călinescu shooting photographs and Hodoiu doing the research and interviews - they have co-produced a book that offers a dispassionate insight into the destiny of

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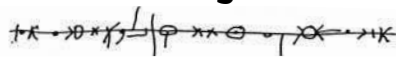


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backwaters that have missed the train of globalisation. Călinescu and Hodoiu have worked in the area since 2010, documenting village life and following the inhabitants abroad, especially to Paris, where the latter are employed as construction workers and domestic servants. Operating in tandem - Călinescu shooting photographs and Hodoiu doing the research and interviews - they have co-produced a book that offers a dispassionate insight into the destiny of

1) A first selection of Petruț Călinescu's images were published in Martor 16/2011.

certain rural communities that have been involved in labour migration to the EU. The book is excellent in that it has eye for visual detail, observing the money-fuelled changes in material culture for example, without casting facile value judgements over what is often in the view of outsiders a betrayal of tradition and travesty of good taste.

The numerous photographs, which form the lion share of the book follow the annual cycle of these rural communities and the villagers' life and work abroad. The reader gets an intriguing insight into the landslide changes caused in these villages by the money earned abroad, but also of the price paid for progress, in terms of social marginality and alienation in cities such as Paris, the extremely frugal and austere living conditions abroad, as well as the social displacements and disruptions occurring back home in the village. The vast houses built there from remittances earned abroad are conspicuous not only by their opulence but also by their emptiness, inhabited almost exclusively by elderly relatives who continue going about their traditional agricultural activities. It is during the summer that these half-abandoned houses and villages come alive, when the labour migrants return to their communities to organise and participate in the lavish weddings.

The most interesting observable features in the images are the changes in material culture, which are well-documented in the book: from timber hand-painted houses with wooden windows to concrete structures, finished with blocks and bricks, tiles and marble, with windows framed in termopane, and iron gates, stainless steel, glass fronts, ornamental lions and columns. Now, a self-respecting local businessman drives a Ferrari instead of the horse-drawn carriages that were the norm a few years ago. Inhabitants bring items from abroad, like brandy bottles in the form of the Eiffel tower, which symbolize their economic success. The changes seem to trigger a certain nostalgia for what has been lost in the process, judging for example by the photo shoots the

inhabitants organise in a nearby village museum, in front of traditional houses, during weddings.

The images also document their lives as labour migrants, which initially (before Romania entered the EU) meant crossing borders illegally, hidden in trucks and under trains, living in abandoned houses or in cheap accommodation, sharing rooms with others while sleeping in bunk beds, or sleeping rough, or building improvised shacks at the peripheries of big Western cities. They show a life of austerity, but also of extreme resilience, where if possible every single penny is saved. In spite of their cross-border 'globalised' mobility, the villagers continue to operate according to 'local' village logic, using their village connections and networks for work and support, forming small teams together to do jobs, and socialising with each other in the spare time they have, and, last but not least, marrying the boys and girls from their region.

The book's strength, that is, its dispassionate observational and 'documentary' character, is perhaps also its main shortcoming. It raises many questions rather than providing the reader with answers to these questions. Amongst the issues that remain obscure is for instance what the effects of these changes are on social relations and economic inequalities within (and between) villages, and how stark differences in wealth and poverty are negotiated in the community? Can one speak here of a 'neo-liberal' context of 'winners' and 'losers' engaged in vicious competition, their comparative success signalled through the size of their house, the materials used, and the cars brought home? Is every villager compelled to take part in this competition in order not to lose face, and how important is it to 'show off' one's accomplishments abroad through the photos one carries and shows at visits home and to friends.

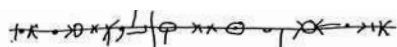
Another question that comes to mind when looking at the images is what has happened to public services in the village, such as the schools, roads, running water,

and sewage systems? As some of the images show, houses do have no running water but only wells, replicating the structural lack of running water and other public services in rural communities in Romania. Last but not least, even if hinting at them, the book does not analyse the emerging social issues, such as repercussions for family and community life and the inter-generational conflicts generated by migration. Parents who made the step to move abroad want to go back, that's why they build these houses, but the children speak of the 'curse' of concrete, determined to lead their own lives abroad without the obligation to invest in a huge home where they do not intend to live.

Finally, one last question that can be

raised is how come certain villages have experienced such an extraordinary development, becoming prosperous at a level unimaginable just a generation ago, while others seem to have missed the boat, ending up as contemporary rural 'ghettos'. The book points at local preconditions, such as previous experiences of labour migration and seasonal work during communism, but that does not cover all possible explanations for this diversity in rural destinies. Yet, by raising these questions, without necessarily answering them, the book makes undoubtedly a very important contribution, and as such it is essential reading for all those interested in the changes affecting rural communities in the region.

Contributors' Biographies



Milena Angelova - Assistant Professor at the Department of History of the South West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Milena completed a Ph.D. in History at the South West University Blagoevgrad in 2007. She carried postdoctoral research within Karl Franzens University (Graz), University of Vienna, North Caucasus University (Stavropol), Academy of Sciences of Armenia (Erevan), University "Shota Rustaveli" (Batumi, Georgia). She is currently a participant in the project „Politics of Memory and Memory Cultures of the Russian-Ottoman War 1877/1878: From Divergence to Dialogue” (2012-2016). Her main interests are in the field of modern Bulgarian history, especially the history of “social diseases”, social work and public health, the state policies referring to the rural areas in Bulgaria in the 1930s and 1940s, the politics of memory in communist Bulgaria. She is the author of „The Model Village.” The Modernization Project about the Village in Bulgaria (1937-1944), Blagoevgrad: SWU-University Press, 2008 /”Образцово село”. Модернизационният проект за селото в България (1937-1944)/ and Unrequited Memory of the Late Socialism. The “Narratives of Popular Memory” movement (1983-1989), Sofia: SEMARSh, 2010 / (Не)сполената памет на късния социализъм. Движението „Народната памет разказва” (1983 - 1989). E-mail: mangelova74@yahoo.com

Kaiti Aroni-Tsichli - Professor of Modern Greek and European Social History and Historiography at Panteion University of Athens, Department of Political Science and History. She graduated from the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens: a. Diploma in History and Archaeology and b. Diploma in Byzantine and Neellenic Studies). She completed

her postgraduate studies in Paris at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and in Rome. She was awarded a Ph.D. in Medieval History from Sapienza University of Rome and a Ph.D. in Modern History from Panteion University of Athens. She is President of the Department of Political Sciences and History and Director of the Department of Modern History. She has published books, articles and papers and has participated in national and international conferences and seminars. She specializes in the research of Modern Greek social history and European Historiography. E-mail: tsicaron@panteion.gr

Andrew Cartwright - Research Fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies at the Central European University in Hungary. Andrew completed his Ph.D. in Law at the University of Warwick, U.K. on the Romanian land reforms of the 1990s. He carried out postdoctoral research at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle and the School of History, the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on post-socialist rural developments, particularly the implications of shrinking and aging populations. He is the Chair of PASOS, the policy associations network, and he is also a member of the organizing committee of LANDNET which seeks to make better connections between land policy and rural development policy in the wider Europe area. He is currently involved in a project researching abandoned land in Serbia. His latest publication was on the failure of land consolidation policy in Central and Eastern Europe in the volume *Negotiating Territoriality: Spatial Dialogues between State and Tradition* (edited by Allan Charles Dawson, Laura Zanolini and Ismael Vaccaro 2014). E-mail: Cartwrighta@ceu.hu