

MARTOR



Title: "Ger Duijzings (ed.), Global Villages: Rural and Urban Transformations in Contemporary Bulgaria. Anthem Press, 2013"

Author: Aneliya Kuzmanova

How to cite this article: Kuzmanova, Aneliya. 2014. "Ger Duijzings (ed.), Global Villages: Rural and Urban Transformations in Contemporary Bulgaria. Anthem Press, 2013". *Martor* 19: 199-202.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

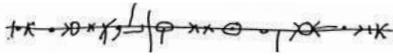
URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-19-2014/>

Martor (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review) is a peer-reviewed academic journal established in 1996, with a focus on cultural and visual anthropology, ethnology, museum studies and the dialogue among these disciplines. *Martor* review is published by the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Its aim is to provide, as widely as possible, a rich content at the highest academic and editorial standards for scientific, educational and (in)formational goals. Any use aside from these purposes and without mentioning the source of the article(s) is prohibited and will be considered an infringement of copyright.

Martor (Revue d'Anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain) est un journal académique en système *peer-review* fondé en 1996, qui se concentre sur l'anthropologie visuelle et culturelle, l'ethnologie, la muséologie et sur le dialogue entre ces disciplines. La revue *Martor* est publiée par le Musée du Paysan Roumain. Son aspiration est de généraliser l'accès vers un riche contenu au plus haut niveau du point de vue académique et éditorial pour des objectifs scientifiques, éducatifs et informationnels. Toute utilisation au-delà de ces buts et sans mentionner la source des articles est interdite et sera considérée une violation des droits de l'auteur.

Martor is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.

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 Dobruzha 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.

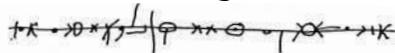
Ermann uses fashion and the restructuring of the apparel and fashion industries in Bulgaria to analyze the role of “consumer capitalism” in a socialist economy, where Western brands and consumer goods stood for freedom and a “good and normal life”. He traces the ways in which such tendencies configured 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

¹) A first selection of Petruț Călinescu's images were published in Martor 16/2011.