

MARTOR



Title: “*Disrupted Landscapes. State, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Postsocialist Romania*, by Ștefan Dorondel. Berghahn, New York, Oxford, 2016”

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How to cite this review: Șerban, Stelu. 2016. “Disrupted Landscapes. State, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Postsocialist Romania, by Ștefan Dorondel. Berghahn, New York, Oxford, 2016.” *Martor* 21: 207-209.

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

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-21-2016/>

The publishers wish to thank photographer Kathleen Laraia McLaughlin for providing interstitial images of this issue.

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Martor is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.



Ștefan Dorondel, *Disrupted landscapes. State, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Postsocialist Romania*, Berghahn, New York, Oxford, 2016.



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The current volume is largely based on the PhD thesis in agricultural economics which Ștefan Dorondel wrote between 2004 and 2007 and successfully defended at Humboldt University of Berlin. This is his second PhD. Originally a historian and a graduate of the Faculty of History and Archeology at the University of Alba Iulia, Ștefan Dorondel successfully defended his first PhD thesis in 2004 at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, on a subject pertaining to both history and ethnography: *Water and Death. Funeral rituals, the symbolism of water and the after-world in the peasantry's collective imagination*. The edifying comparison between the topics of the two PhD theses is illustrative of Ștefan Dorondel's thundering career.

The volume is based on a social anthropological research. Between 2004 and 2010 (p.49, note 2), the author has spend a significant amount of time (from a couple of weeks to eight months per year) in the county of Argeș, more specifically, in two villages, Dragova (situated in the northern region of the Southern Sub-Carpathians) and Dragomirești (located in the the hilly regions near Pitești). The ecological niches of each village have their specificities; moreover, during the

communist regime, one of them was turned into a collective farm, while the other one wasn't, which led to their selection in order for the comparative analysis to be grounded in valid and effective theory. Furthermore, according to the author himself (p. xv), at his advisors' suggestion and as a result of the particularities of the two cases, the approach used to study the retrocession of landed properties, ploughlands, forests and pastures in Romania after the 1990s exceeded the framework of a regular social anthropology thesis so as to add "more nature" to the content of the analysis (p. xvi). Therefore, the end result was an original, thought-provoking thesis, not just for Romania, but also for the entire South-Eastern Europe, where social anthropology is blended in with environment studies, political ecology and rural/ peasant studies.

As stated, the subject examines the circumstances of the return of landed property as it occurred in Romania's rural society; in this instance, the focus is on the two abovementioned villages. After the 1990s, when the phenomenon itself occurred, the literature on land retrocession has been abundant, ranging from "transitology" studies to more comprehensive and complex "post-socialist" studies. In this regard, the author goes



further and subsumes this phenomenon under classical bibliographies and with a history of several decades such as the ones on bureaucracy and state anthropology, post-colonial anthropology and environmental anthropology. Thus, in addition to books required for the study of post-socialism (authored for instance by Katherine Verdery, Chris Hann, Marta Lampland), the referenced bibliography contains names such as James C. Scott, James Ferguson, Beatrice Hibou, Lee A. Tsing, Don Worster, Jesse Ribot, Michael Herzfeld, Nancy Peluso etc. The papers of younger researchers who have worked in South-Eastern Europe, using the same interdisciplinary perspective, blending anthropological fields with various approaches to rural economics or environmental studies, are also part of the bibliography. Among them, one can find Thomas Sikor, the advisor of Dorondel's PhD dissertation, Daniel Münster or Johannes Stahl.

The thesis is structured into seven chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusions (these latter parts are purely theoretical *par excellence*). Using a solid and coherent theoretical apparatus (presented in the Introduction) and a proper analysis of the two cases (unfolding in the seven chapters), the author's intent is to build an argued criticism of the methods employed in the management of environmental resources in Romania and in other rural post-socialist spaces (from the former countries of the socialist concentration camp to the countries of the former colonial system) after the 1990s. Furthermore, following in Maria Todorova and Katherine Verdery's footsteps, the author attempts to equate the two "posts" (post-colonialism and post-socialism) precisely from the perspective of people's reluctance to embrace neo-liberal policies (p. 201). Briefly, it reviews the failure of the neo-liberal "philosophy/ philosophies" to transform the rural societies on the 1990s (pp. 189-190) which led to the grim image of a "disrupted landscape". The neo-liberal

reforms didn't come solely against the social opposition and reluctance inherent to rural/ peasant societies (the works of James C. Scott speaks to this), but also against what Ștefan Dorondel calls "nature agency" (inspired by Bruno Latour who's also referenced in the volume).

As to the contents of this volume, we will not go into detail. Nevertheless, in addition to the two theoretical parts (the Introduction and the Conclusions), the seven chapters outlining a comparative analysis of Dragova and Dragomirești prove to be balanced and solid. The first chapter provides a historical synopsis of the two villages in the past two centuries. However, the data isn't limited only to social, political and economic facts, but also touches on the evolution of the management of environmental resources (fields, forests, water) or on the use of different plant species. Therefore, we could find a history of the local environment rather than the history of the local society and its personalities. Chapter 2 reviews the neo-liberal legislation that guided the retrocession of landed property in the first post-socialist decade, as well as its application at a micro-social level in the two villages; the next chapters cover the effects of this legislation. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the different effects generated by the retrocession of forests in the two villages; chapters 5 and 6 examine the retrocession of pastures and ploughlands, where the effects were much more similar. The retrocession of forests seems to be the element the arguments are grounded in. While in Dragomirești, the village near Pitești, the retrocession of forests led to the vertical creation of client politics, facilitated also by the existence of the ethnic group of the *rudar* (name given in certain parts of Romania to gypsies who did woodwork) who illegally and abusively exploited the forests, in the case of Dragova, the client politics had more reduced effects. In this case, the state as a reform agent is seen through the creation of a national park, which was perceived by the locals as a drastic intrusion and even an abuse (to a



certain extent). In both cases, the effects of neo-liberal policies to re-organize the forest fund and property retrocession led to deep social dissatisfaction. Chapter 7 covers what the author calls “disrupted landscapes”, i.e. the way the water management in the two villages visibly and painfully degraded in the 1990s. Issues such as garbage collection (a new phenomenon in the rural environment in Romania after 1990) and the almost illegal exploitation of materials from the riverbeds or the changes occurring in the riverbeds are also discussed and viewed as responsible and noxious agents that led to the degradation of the environment.

This book has been a rarity in the social science literature of Romania and South-Eastern Europe. The novelty and originality reside in the introduction of themes and theories of environment studies, which, intertwined with the social anthropological approach, highlights and revives seemingly outdated topics such as post-socialism. In addition, the classical requirements of any

anthropological field study are fully met, which is rather rare in Romanian social anthropology. The field research took a long time, the data collected is extensive (from quality to archive and to statistical quantity) and the bibliography is adequate and up-to-date. One shouldn't overlook the fact that Mr. Dorondel succeeded in obtaining a publishing deal with an internationally prestigious publishing house such as Berghahn. However, despite these qualities, the author fails to address certain topics, such as the comparison between post-colonialism and post-socialism which should have deserved at least a chapter, but was barely mentioned at the beginning and at the end of the thesis. Moreover, the programmed criticism of neo-liberal policies continuously set against their truly noxious effects proves a tad excessive; the analysis into the context of these effects and their application should have benefitted from a more complex and nuanced investigation.

