**Disrupted Landscapes: State, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Postsocialist Romania,** by Stefan Dorondel, New York, Berghahn, 2016, xviii + 234 pp., $95.00/£60.00 (hardcover), ISBN-13: 978-1-78533-120-6

If you have ever wondered how to get away with illegal logging or what the secret is to making good plum brandy then *Disrupted Landscapes* will have you on the edge of your seat. Dorondel guides the reader through the practical problems faced by working people in two Muntenian villages in Argeş county, Romania, showing how they have adapted to the social and political transformations of the past twenty-five years. In this innovative and interdisciplinary work, Dorondel unravels how power and patronage networks function in rural communities, the impact of land reform and global markets on local businesses, rural hierarchies and state bureaucracy, racism and ethnic tensions, and how human activity shapes forests, rivers, pastures, and wildlife.

An anthropologist by training, Dorondel carried our eight months of fieldwork in 2004 and then made five extended visits to his sites over the next six years. Initially, he says, ‘I was interested in the dismantling of the collective farm, the integration of the local economy into the wider, newly emerging capitalist economy and the new types of social relations emerging in the postsocialist period’ (7). Over time, his informants convinced him that ‘landscape not only bears the marks of different ideologies and of state power but also creates power and influences economies, politics and discourses’ (16). Dorondel’s conversion to the methods of geography and multispecies ethnography, which assumes that ‘nonhuman actors, such as wild animals, mediate, influence or shape local social relations and feed the political imagination and the social critique’ (18), is not just a tip of the hat to a fashionable and emerging body of theory. The conviction that human-nonhuman relations are ‘circular’ (196) forms the one of central arguments of the book, and Dorondel demonstrates it convincingly. The availability of natural resources determine the types of business ventures people pursue, their decimation can have political repercussions, and unwelcome species such as snakes in one’s house highlight an individual or group’s social and economic marginalization.

The book analyses a number of illegal activities, such as illegal logging, fishing, corruption, and pollution, which Dorondel’s informants must have been understandably reluctant to talk about. He thus relied more on free conversions rather than on semi-structured interviews, and turned his tape recorder off whenever he felt that his informants might say more without it. This is not necessarily a problem as Dorondel saw many of the activities he writes about with his own eyes or could infer that they had taken place from other evidence, so he does not need to rely on local testimonies that might anyway have been deliberately misleading because of personal feuds. He also acknowledges that he had to pay bribes to access documents that the law says are publically available. While his university’s accountants might have trouble following his bookkeeping, his research methods illustrate his arguments about corruption quite well. He is clear about who would and would not speak to him about certain issues, and by putting accusations of corruption against politicians and policemen into the hands of their disenfranchised opponents or by implying that the mayor’s office ignores the fact that a chicken complex is polluting the rive ‘because the complex provides the greatest share of the local administrative budget’ (177), Dorondel demonstrates how power operates through gossip and silence in a village context.

The state is a constant actor in this book, but Dorondel does not use the concept uncritically. He identifies multiple levels of state organization and analyses each in turn. He shows how police officers or tax collectors sometimes undermine the law to smooth over local social relations, how a mayor is able to give lucrative public contracts to his wife’s firm or to misappropriate EUropean funds because of his connections at a national level, and how farmers’ notions of private property clash with national and transnational ecological discourses. ‘Local bureaucracy does not act autonomously but in concert with forces closer to the centre of power’ (13), Dorondel argues, and he even gives a certain agency to paperwork itself, which structures social relations when members of an ethnic minority need to rely on local bureaucrats to submit forms for them or when delaying the announcement of a grant can influence who wins the money. It is not always possible to associate individual names and faces with state actors, and Dorondel makes the point that this is exactly how most people experience the state. The ‘common knowledge’ that National Park administrators were flying in bears to live in the forest only works because no-one apart from Dorondel actually spoke to the administrators about it, for example. A state that is faceless and anonymous is much more powerful – and more easily circumvented – than one whose representative lives next door.

Finally, Dorondel does well to marginalize two important analytic concepts that have dominated the scholarly literature on rural change. First, he consistently ignores the nation. He never repeats the frequently heard claim that ‘that’s how it is in Romania’, or situates social relations within discourses about the nation. Even when he speaks about Rudeni, an ethnic minority frequently associated with Roma, Dorondel describes their marginalization in geographic, social, and economic terms rather than by discussing ethnic stereotypes. Nation-oriented discourses are certainly present in the contexts Dorondel analyses, but they have been well-documented within the literature and need little more elaboration. Second, despite the book’s title the category of postsocialism does precious little analytical work. Dorondel emphasizes the complexity and diversity of postsocialist transitions and prefers to focus on reactions to neoliberal capitalism than on a teleological before-and-after narrative. In its omissions as much as in its achievements, this book is a model of theoretically informed anthropology and of interdisciplinary studies.

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