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As the title suggests, this book consists of two case studies that are meant to give us a general perspective of the Romanian rural society. Nucsoara is a mountainous village where the anti-communist resistance survived for about 10 years, until 1955. Because of its remoteness and wilderness, it could not be collectivized and thus remained an island of capitalism in an ocean of communism. At the opposite end lays Scornicesti. It is a village situated in the plain, one of the first villages to accept collectivization. Furthermore, it is the village where Nicolae Ceausescu, the communist leader of Romania from 1964 to 1989, was born. Ceausescu used the village as a guinea pig in his social engineering experiments that were aimed at creating the “new society”.

The comparative study has eight parts that follow, in general lines, a chronological pattern, starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and reaching the 21<sup>st</sup>. Every general problem, such as life in the village, power or property is analyzed in parallel, the authors seeking to find the points in which the two villages converge and the points where they sunder. The comparative approach fits very well the analysis as it helps us fully comprehend the details of the more general model.

The main part of the study focuses on the communist period. Although this period has been widely explored lately, few have been interested in discovering the mechanisms that lay at the base of the social engineering process. Even fewer are the ones that tried to discover the self-defense and coping mechanisms that the people most affected by, the peasants, came up with. This comprehensive study, although not lengthy, deals with both problems mentioned above. As the authors show, the Communist Party’s first actions were aimed at destroying the existing elite. Most of them were imprisoned and brutally exterminated. The new elite came from the lower strata of the society, educated and brought to power by the Communist Party. Thus, the elite were easy to handle and did not oppose any resistance to the Party’s policies. As for the grass-roots, the measures taken were more subtle. The main technique, Stalin’s favorite, was “divide et impera”. Villagers were set against one another, families were divided, children made to spy on their parents and then report to the Security. Such a person was maliciously called an “in-depth witness”. Concerning the counter-mechanisms that ordinary people developed, the authors depict the resistance movement from Nucsoara, one of the few that lasted for a longer period of time. After its collapse, people realized that no external aide would come, which the Americans won’t show up, and the only thing to do is to accept the system and try to benefit/steal as much as possible from it.

The communist system overlapped the traditional system, giving birth to a hybrid one, one that contained the flaws of both systems. Among them, the authors examine the one that haunts Romanians the most: corruption. The germ existed long before the communists, but they were the ones that ingrained it deep into the collective mentality. The two authors take a look at the system that existed before the Second World War and the manner in which it dealt with the “rural problem”. The several reforms taken, starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were not really aimed at changing the inefficient system, but rather at satisfying some transitory needs, such as the need for combatants during the First World War. In the case of the Communist

system, the authors argue that it did not intend to emancipate the rural society, but rather to enslave it and make it more dependant and less self-conscious. Lenin saw the peasants as a hostile class which needed to be subdued. The two authors come up with the model of neodependence, which they use to explain how the State subjugated the Village. The State acted on three levels, which gave birth to three forms of dependence: the economic dependence (salaries, pensions, food), the political dependence (in order to be successful you had to be enrolled in one of the State-controlled organizations) and the personal dependence (if you wanted to obtain a certain service you had to “know somebody”).

After dealing with the Communist period, the authors get to the present post-communist society. The agrarian reforms taken after the Revolution, made the same mistakes as the previous ones: mainly, the surface was divided excessively, not allowing for large, efficient farms. The agrarian sector remained an ineffective one, where peasants would grow enough crops only to survive and plant next year’s crop. The infrastructure that had been built during the Communist period and the machines needed for working the field were either stolen or destroyed. As one of the local guys from Scornicesti puts it, while strolling through what used to be the biggest cooperative in Romania: “Scornicesti is a sort of Hiroshima.”(p.69).

No comprehensive agricultural policy has yet been elaborated, every government dealing with the peasants in its own way. This has proven to be disastrous. Romania is the most undeveloped country, in this sector, but not only, from the group of states that want to join the European Union. 35% of its active workforce is engaged in agriculture compared with only 8% in neighboring Hungary. What is more, the agricultural sector’s contribution to the GDP is only 19%. The situation is bleak. As the authors put it: “Nine million people living at the edge of poverty - not knowing the difference between left and right in politics and buying one toothbrush per lifetime – are a problem not only for Romania, but for Europe too.” (p.169) The possible solution for improving the sector would be the “upgrading of the rural to modernity”, the authors claim. This means that peasants should try to come up with other solutions than migrating to the urban areas and turning to the industrial sector. Agrotourism and manufacturing goods could turn out to be a good idea. The authors see Scornicesti, the village deeply marked by Communism as the winner in the struggle for survival and predict a tragic end for Nucsoara, which is bound to die of old age, along with its seniors.

Concerning Romania’s acceptance in the European Union, the authors see two different variants: either Romanians change radically, and start working according to the existing standards, either they get accepted the way they are, and progress in time, similar to what happened with Greece. The authors incline for the second one, the first one being too unrealistic and too idealistic.

This eclectic study successfully combines data obtained from oral history and participant observation with elements from political theory, political economy, sociology and various other from the field of social sciences. Overall, the book is immensely informative and I recommend it to anyone who is interested in studying the Romanian (political) culture, dilettante and adept alike.

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