

Taking the Long View?

Polish and Romanian Agrarianism in comparison

Introduction

This paper seeks to provide a nuanced approach to the study of Agrarianism in Central and Eastern Europe and to the fate of the agrarian movements at the end of World War II by using historical sociology and political science. It will challenge the traditional historiographical assumptions surrounding the 1944–47 period by re-contextualizing post-war politics and society as well as the study of Agrarianism. Rather than concentrating upon elite level high politics and the interaction between the agrarian movements and the Communists over control of the state, this work intends to explore the interaction between society and politics in the region. How did socio-economic changes affecting the peasantry impact upon their relationship with and support for the agrarian parties and how did this shifting dynamic then influence the political effectiveness of the agrarian movements? This study concentrates upon the triangular relationship between institutions, social change and agency and how they influence political outcomes in terms of political policy, mobilization and political effectiveness (here defined as the successful achievement of political objectives).

In order to fully explore this dynamic it is necessary to extract the 1944–47 period from historiographical isolation and instead to place it within a broader time frame. Far from being a break with ‘normal politics’, the inability of the agrarian movements to successfully achieve their political aims was the result of longer term failures at the institutional and discursive levels of politics to adjust and reform themselves and to respond to the social changes taking place within the region. It was this that reduced their political effectiveness and their ability to challenge the development of Communist hegemony.

This article seeks to develop these ideas by focusing upon the transition to Communism. This can broadly be defined as the period between 1944 and 1947. This period has for the most part been understood in terms of the success of the Communists in transforming themselves from a small, fractionalised and marginal political group to achieving within three to four years complete political, social, and economic hegemony. Since 1989 by virtue of the opening of the archives there has been an active process of ‘restoring to history’ figures and events that were ignored or prohibited from discussion under Communism and a developing interest in the fate of the anti-Communist opposition, primarily the agrarian parties. This has come against a backdrop of a broader public discourse that has sought to rehabilitate any and almost all non-Communist public figures of the period as victims of Communism. The contextualization of the actions of the agrarian parties between 1944 and 1947 frames them purely as Communist victims. The assertion that the success of the Communists was a function of Soviet military power still remains.¹ Thus a powerful counter-factual narrative holds sway that assumes that but for the presence of the

Red Army the non-Communist political opposition, specifically the Agrarians, would have assumed power and then successfully governed the states of the region. The study of the period has been focused upon elite level politics, rather than the day-to-day processes of political transition that exist on the ground, in the towns and villages of the region. Politics is largely viewed in terms of the realm of the elite.² This top-down approach to politics thus concentrates upon the political representatives of the various social and political groups. It takes for granted that the political parties involved had the complete support of their supporters and assumes that the parties concerned were effectively political organizations.

A phenomenon which is a feature of the study particularly of Romanian agrarianism in particular is that of 'bibliographical determinism'.³ Many studies on the National Peasant Party (*Partidul Național Țărănesc*, PNTȚ) take as their starting point the work of Ion Scurtu.⁴ His work has a number of flaws which are repeatedly reproduced by subsequent scholars. His work was a function of his privileged position within the old pre-1989 regime, which enabled him to access material unavailable to other authors. However, much of what he produced relies not upon archival sources but media sources, primarily the PNTȚ newspapers. His work is in essence an account of the public discourse of PNTȚ rather than of the party. Secondly, his work suffers from poor handling of bibliographical material meaning that it is often impossible for those interested in PNTȚ to assess the accuracy of many of his claims through reference to the original source material.

A problem in assessing the daily political life of the agrarian movements comes from the problem of materials and archival resources themselves. Evidence suggests that material found by the secret police was destroyed.⁵ Where material has been located it indicates that record keeping at the lowest levels of party activity was perfunctory. This paper will draw upon two main sources of material. The first is a series of PNTȚ reports from the village of Berliște in the county (*judet*) Caraș-Severin on the border of Romania and Yugoslavia.⁶ The reports cover the period 1928 to 1946.⁷ They consist of minutes of meetings by the local party and record the local organization of the party, local political and social objectives, and interaction between the local party and the national party. The second source is the personal archive of Mihail Șerban. Șerban was a member of the National Romanian Party (*Partidul Național Român*, PNR), later PNTȚ; he left PNTȚ after the Vaida-Maniu split and joined the Romanian Front (*Frontul Românesc*, FR); finally he joined Carol II's Front of National Rebirth (*Frontul Renașterii Naționale*, FRN), where he served until the fall of Carol. He was Rector of the Agrarian Section of the University of Cluj, served as a Senator in the Romanian Parliament and was a deputy minister of agriculture for both PNTȚ and later in the FRN.⁸ Within PNTȚ his role was largely administrative covering the Cluj area. Thus, the material from his archive provides an insight into the 'middle area' between grassroots peasantism in the villages (as represented by the Berliște reports) and the elite level politics (as described in Scurtu and elsewhere).

The article will adopt a comparative framework which will help to advance a more nuanced and sophisticated study not only of the transition to Communism but also of the agrarian movements themselves. Many recent works have been single country case studies without any comparative references, the result being a tendency towards a perception of exceptionalism due to the lack of contextualization through references to the experiences of other states. Local historiography is caught within a paradigm of narrow national historiography and the belief that the events of the immediate post-war period were unique

to that specific case. The limitations of space prevent the development of a broad 'n' study, instead to provide contextualization and avoid exceptionalism, this paper adopts a small 'n' asymmetrical two case study.⁹ The Romanian case and the Romanian agrarian movement PNȚ will be the main area of focus, while the comparison is provided by the Polish Peasant Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*; SL).

As noted earlier, the period following World War II is viewed as a break with normal politics and therefore must be treated in isolation. This is largely predicated upon the assumption that all events were skewed by the involvement of the Soviet Union within the domestic politics of the states and maintains the monolithic interpretation of the post-1944 period as a function of Soviet Military Power. This narrow conception of 'political time' results in a distortion of our understanding of the period. Socio-economic changes to the structural fabric of a society do not always result in immediate political outcomes. Furthermore, there is often a time lag between the political consequences of the processes of socio-economic change being felt. To understand the socio-political dynamics of agrarian politics it is necessary to adopt a *longue durée* approach with a longer timeframe that takes into account these structural changes. This enables us to see how socio-economic changes feed into politics at a local level and then, in turn, into national politics. This analysis places at its core a bottom up approach to understanding the agrarian movements and emphasizes the interaction of social processes with political outcomes.

This is of significance when placed into the context of the relationship between politics, power, the state and society. The Communists based their bid for power upon the appropriation of state institutions;¹⁰ the logic being that control of the state created the conditions for the development of socio-endemic legitimacy but also of dependence among the local population, who were increasingly reliant upon the state.¹¹ The agrarian movements, on the other hand, sought a mandate of approval from society as a mechanism to legitimate their control of the state.¹² They constantly emphasized the idea of numerical democracy as the justification as to why they should control the state institutions. If they in fact did not represent the interests of the peasantry, or they could not demonstrate this by successfully mobilizing the peasants as a proof of their social power, then the legitimacy of their claims to representativeness was undermined.

Agrarian politics and agrarian political institutions: formation and development, 1848–1918

It is necessary to explore how the peasant parties developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while concentrating on their internal hierarchy of power, the evolution of the party elite and their response to political crises. This period formed the first moment of critical juncture during which time certain practices became embedded, structuralized and institutionalized. This analysis aims to buttress the main contention that the failure of the agrarian movements in opposing the Communists cannot be accounted for in 'pure terms' of psephology,¹³ but rather by evaluating the way in which the peasant movements as institutions reflected and articulated the economic, political, and social interests of the mass of the rural peasantry.

Robert W. Seton-Watson remarked that interwar Romania inherited political and cultural systems from the Habsburgs, Ottomans, and Russians and developed a new system combining the worst features of all three.¹⁴ Agrarian political institutions did not develop as single trans-imperial bodies but individually as component parts of polities of each of the Empires. The nascent movements cannot be separated from nationality politics within the empires during this period. The position of the relevant national groups within the imperial polity influenced how the agrarian movements orientated themselves in terms of policy objectives and organization. The changes in approach and organizational structures within the agrarian movements during their early development are explicitly linked to broader changes within each of the empires. Emphasis will be given to the Polish Galician agrarian movements and the PNR in Transylvania since these two elements went on to dominate their respective post-unification agrarian movements.

Anu Mai Köll¹⁵ argues that peasants played an important role within the national movements and were the main beneficiaries of national emancipation. Using the prism of economic nationalism Köll argues:

‘In the old nation states the nationalist ideology was supported by the pillars of the state and distributed from the elite to the masses. However, among the national minorities of the large empires of East Central Europe nationalism had another meaning. The ruling elites were partially or entirely of different ethnic origins to the working population, which consisted of peasants and labourers. Ethnic and class boundaries were the same in some cases, but not in all. The relationship of subordination had existed for a long time and over time had taken on a structural character.’¹⁶

In Central and Eastern Europe nationalist ideas were adopted by the local indigenous lower-middle class and educated elite. These groups were closely aligned with the upper levels of the social hierarchies in which they lived, both within their own subordinate ethnic group as well as the wider imperial polity. For the indigenous elite nationalism explained their limited opportunities for social advancement. They turned to the peasantry within their own ethnic group and sought to mobilize them as a mechanism to change the position of the whole ethnic group. Thus for the peasantry nationalism became an ideology of emancipation and hence the peasantry became the pillar of many national movements.¹⁷

The political diversity of the agrarian movements that emerged within the region can be explained with reference to the structure of agriculture and the influence of economic backwardness, the persistence of serfdom being the primary cause. Emancipation from serfdom when it occurred

‘resulted in very different structures. In East Prussia and the Baltic provinces the law was on the side of the landlords. Large scale estates retained most of the land even though some of the land was set aside for the peasantry. In the Austrian region of the Habsburg Empire peasants were stronger thanks to more political freedom and a higher level of economic development. But the social and ethnic divides between German estate owners on the one hand and the Czech, Polish, Ukrainian or Slovene peasantry were still great. Even deeper was the divide between Magyar nobles and

the Slovak, Romanian, Croat and Ukrainian peasants because the peasantry in the Hungarian provinces had been excluded from political rights.¹⁸

The distribution of land and the size of holdings depended upon the relative power of the peasants and landlords. The changes in rural society were greatest in the areas where the peasants were traditionally stronger politically and economically than in those areas where the peasants were historically weak.¹⁹ Changes to the structure of agriculture and the resultant social changes stemmed not from economic or technical forces but from a political process.²⁰ Citing Poland Köll demonstrates how emancipation shaped ethnic and class relations:

‘In East Prussia the German and old Prussian peasants lived in different villages and had different rights. By the eighteenth century the old Prussians had been Germanised or Polonised. Peasant emancipation did not deteriorate ethnic relations significantly. Lithuania and Poland were partitioned between Russia and Germany, but the landlord class was mainly Polish. There were ethnic tensions between the Poles and the Lithuanians, but ethnicity and class did not neatly correspond.’²¹

Nationalist ideas, which were at the root of emancipation, seem to have been stronger than class affinities among the peasantry. Where ethnicities overlapped they strengthened one another; when they did not concur, struggles against the landlords became less prominent and ethnic struggles were more apparent. In cases where ethnic rivalries between elite and peasant remained these tended to be the focus of land issues, while the issue of land shortage disappeared from the debate.²² Therefore two kinds of Agrarianism developed: one where ethnic cleavages mirrored class cleavages and the second where peasant and landlord were of the same ethnicity. The movements can thus be broken down into two: those that used nationalist discourses and those that used economic discourses.

Agrarianism, economic backwardness, and political Mobilization

Angela Harre shows how the socio-political mobilization of specific sections of Romanian society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the development of political ideologies map onto one another.²³ The rise of each ideology matches the mobilization of a specific social group and represents the articulation of their economic interests. There were four waves of socio-political mobilization that took place in Romania between 1850 and 1947, in each case the ideology was based upon defining the nation around the economic and political interests of the section of society being mobilized.

Land reform, which broke up the great estates and the granting of universal suffrage, enabled the final two socio-political mobilizations – that of the rural middle class and the mass peasantry itself. The first consisted of the mobilization of richer peasants and the village elite of doctors, teachers, and priests. This mobilization led to the foundation of the Peasant Party (*Partidul Țărănesc*) in 1918. Their political power was further enhanced as a result of land reform. Although they positioned themselves as a ‘purification movement’²⁴, the economic and social policies they advocated sought to maintain their position at the

top of the rural social hierarchy. This elitism opened the door for the mobilization of the mass of the rural population by Romanian Fascism and later Communism. This mobilization stemmed from the 'crude definition of the state (...) the state's centralization in order to defend the elite's dominant social position'.²⁵ As the rural masses became politically aware they reacted against both the Liberals and the Peasant Party and sought to revitalise the country with a 'genuine' national culture.

'The peasants were attracted by the Iron Guard's myth of the soil as being Romania's past and future, by its hierarchical structure that could easily be transformed into the traditional village structure, the strong position of the Orthodox church and the pragmatic help of the "boys"²⁶ which did not resemble the abstract political discourses of well known politicians. Songs and prayers were much easier to understand for the illiterate than academic debates.'²⁷

Each wave of mobilization can be seen as a response to previous waves of mobilization. In each case the group was being mobilized politically in order to protect its economic interests. Building upon Köll and Harre it is clear that the nature of mobilization is dependent upon the dynamics of ethnic-class politics and socio-economic development.

To explain this, it is necessary to explore the development of Agrarianism in Poland and Romania in more depth. Following the third and final partition of Poland in 1795 the main focus of political action for the political elite revolved around the creation of a new Polish state. The debate was shaped by recriminations over the failure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Agrarianism can be seen to have developed out of the debates surrounding the nature of the future Polish state. Polish nationalism had its roots in the medieval, juridical acceptance of the term 'nation', that of a group enjoying certain political/economic privileges and as such separated from the masses.²⁸ This historical premise led to a disjunctive relationship between the nation as conceived by conservative elites and the peasantry. This tension between the aristocratic few and the peasantry informed negotiations over national ideology and representation in the period between 1795 and 1918. This, moreover, constitutes an element of contrast between the Polish and the Romanian case.

The historical legacy of PNR and, subsequently, PNȚ was that of a brand of nationalism which was coterminous with the social problematic. In Transylvania, where the Romanian population were mainly peasants, the issue of national representation became by default a social issue. Consequently, nation and peasantry were perceived as one and the same, so that national action and agrarian initiative became fused and presupposed one another.

These differences in the social-national dynamic between the Polish and Romanian contexts means that we have to move beyond an analysis which attributes the internal dynamics of what was to become PNȚ and PSL purely to their imperial heritage alone.

Polish Peasantism in Exile

A difference between the development of Polish and Romanian peasantism is the influence of exile. Following the partitions and the failure of the Polish uprising of 1831 the majority of the Polish intellectual and political elite went into exile, primarily in Paris but also

in Britain.²⁹ They were later joined by groups of former soldiers many of whom were of peasant origin. This was a significant development. The émigrés were traditional, small in number, and from similar background, yet after 1831 the emergence of the peasant element was to play an important role in shaping the direction of émigré politics.

Within the émigré community there was a debate about what strategy should be employed for re-creating Poland and also a battle for the leadership of the community and specifically the newly arrived peasant émigrés.³⁰ The conservatives were being challenged by radicals. The conservative gentry favoured the recreation of Poland as it had been and retaining the old social order. The arrival of the peasants into the émigré group forced the leaders of the community into addressing the peasant issue. The support of the peasants was seen as vital for the émigré movements, however, the peasants, because of their experience of exile, were not willing simply to be led. Exile radicalized the peasants and thus they quickly became aligned with the radical groupings.

The development of Polish agrarianism in exile can therefore be seen as following Köll's argument that in cases where the group is ethnically homogenous but divided by class, then class serves as the primary mobilizing mechanism for the peasantry. Furthermore, the agrarian issue becomes salient in Polish political discourse far earlier than in Romania.

Peasantism in partitioned Poland: Galicia

There are two emergent strands involving the political mobilization of the peasantry. The first is national-revolutionary seeking to recreate a Polish State. The role of the peasantry is that of 'the people' in whose name the state is being created. It is primarily political. The social element is secondary and only becomes salient when the elite requires the support of the masses. The second strand emphasized an improvement in the social conditions of the peasantry. A straightforward logic applied here in terms of the objective of seeking to improve the conditions of the peasantry. In order to do that the economic conditions had to be improved. Improving the situation of the peasantry involved a dual strategy of enhancing peasant political representation alongside increasing the cultural standing of the peasantry, the development of each objective requiring the mutual development of the others.

The second strand, which can be termed 'social-political' mobilization, was strongest in the Habsburg provinces of Poland. Galicia has come under frequent examination by those investigating the development of Polish political life. Olga Narkiewicz points out that as early as the 1770s peasants within the region used the legal system to ensure their political rights.³¹ It provided a successful formula for them to adopt in future cases. The success of official legal means over revolutionary action shaped the course of future political action.

The first institutional attempt to improve the situation of the peasantry was via economic associations. With the abolition of serfdom the peasantry were in a better position to enter market relations. These movements were driven by the wealthier, more conservative farmers. The aims were often purely economic. The economic success of the associations was used by the wealthier farmers as a way to dominate the poorer farmers. In order to continue to receive the benefits of membership the poorer farmers had to follow the policies of the group, policies which were driven by and designed to benefit the wealthier

farmers. This type of group therefore established a pattern of domination by the richer peasants over the poorer peasants.

Within the social and political associations, two forms of agrarian leadership emerged. The first was Paternalist Populism exemplified by Bolesław Wysłouch (1855–1937)³², the founder of Polish Peasant Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL). He was born into a gentry family whose land had been seized after the 1863 uprising. He attended university in St. Petersburg and became familiar with the *Narodnik* movement. Wysłouch believed that the peasants were the basis of the nation and it was his nationalism which drove him to work for the peasants. He was an idealistic paternalistic intellectual who wished to improve the lot of the peasants, but not a revolutionary. He had no desire to overturn the existing political and social system. Similar to the Russian populists, Wysłouch saw the intellectuals as being of primary importance. The attitude of the intellectuals and their belief in their importance is summed up in this contemporary quote:

‘It is often forgotten that the peasant will always be the source of national strength, yet a passive source, requiring leadership and protection. The peasant can strengthen the intelligentsia (...) but he will never be able to assume leadership because then he would cease to be a peasant.’³³

He promoted his ideas through journals, which, although important in bringing about changes in political attitudes, were nevertheless conservative and paternalistic in their outlook. They had limited success in mobilizing the peasantry because they were only accessible to peasants who were literate and who possessed disposable income to afford them; in short, the village elite.

The second strand of leadership was ‘Christian Populist’ in character and the leading figures were often connected with the church. The principal figure was Father Stanisław Stojalowski. Taking his lead from the Catholic social thinkers in Western Europe he sought to use his ideology to revolutionize the peasantry, believing that the peasants should be represented by peasants.³⁴ The movements set up were dominated by his personal charisma and his personal ownership of many of the instruments of the party. While in prison in Hungary in 1896 he wrote to the Social Democrat leader Ignacy Daszyński: ‘I want to give *my journals* [emphasis added] *Wieniec* and *Pszczółka* and my printing press in Czacy to the Social Democratic Party’.³⁵ His strand of Agrarianism was subject to his personal vicissitudes as he made and broke alliances for both political and personal reasons, which weakened it. Christianity remained a very strong component of rural life and he recognized the power of the pulpit in the mobilization (or non-mobilization) of the peasantry. In addition, one of the recurrent problems of the agrarian leadership was that they were guilty of ‘tailism’,³⁶ in that they reacted to events rather than seeking to establish an agenda of their own.

Apart from low levels of political awareness the agrarians also faced problems in establishing a political powerbase amongst the peasantry. The peasants were often unwilling to participate in the electoral process as well as being hamstrung by an election franchise which favoured the larger farmers and the richer population.³⁷

‘In 1883, out of 1,418,000 smaller farmers only 537,000 paid high enough taxes to vote in the primaries. Eight hundred thousand male peasant workers were deprived

of electoral rights because of property qualifications; about one million male peasant voters were deprived of the franchise because they were under thirty years old, and, additionally, about 3 million peasant women had no electoral rights at all.³⁸

This inequality fostered a perception of the system being structured against the peasants and that participation within the system was pointless. Jan Słomka writes:

'Elections interested the peasant little, scarcely anything was said about them, nor were questions asked. And when something came up the answer would be: "What do I care who is deputy, let them choose whom they will! (...) The lord will hold with his kind, so what can be done? Better keep out of it."³⁹

The peasants rarely voted on the basis of ideology but rather on the perception of someone being a 'good man'.⁴⁰ This highlights the importance of prestige in the minds of peasant electors when choosing their candidates.

There was a three stage evolution in the leadership of the agrarian movement.⁴¹ The first stage is embodied in Wysłouch and Stojałowski. They belonged to the elite. As their influence waned, they were replaced by the second generation led by Jakub Bojko. Bojko was a peasant whose parents had fled the Congress Kingdom to escape serfdom. He considered himself inferior to the gentry and had no desire to upset the social order. His radicalism was a reaction against reactionary landlords.⁴² He cannot be considered to represent a change in approach from Wysłouch and Stojałowski. However, he did represent a bridge between the non-radical elite leaders of the first generation and the more radical peasant leaders of the third generation. The third generation led by Wincenty Witos were also peasants but, unlike Bojko, they were radical in their opinions.⁴³ What is perhaps most relevant to our analysis is how Witos came to assume such a dominant position within the Galician (and later the Polish) peasant movement. This highlights many of the structural problems that Agrarianism faced. Witos was the son of poor peasants and as a result was unable to attend the local *gymnasium*. However, under the patronage of the steward of the local estate, he was able to continue his education. It was through the steward that Witos became involved in agrarian politics. He was elected first to the local council and then in 1908 to the Galician Sejm. His rise was the result of his talent but was also assisted by the fact that many of the local ruling elite supported the Populist cause. His continued elevation was in part because of his abilities and much to the inherent instability of the party leaders and his contemporary Jan Stapiński.

An analysis of Stapiński's own political evolution is necessary for understanding Witos's rise to power. Stapiński belonged to the third generation of peasant leaders. He used both his talent and the system of political patronage to rise within the party. His abilities drew him initially to Wysłouch, who gave him the editorship of a number of peasant journals which enabled him to expand his powerbase⁴⁴ and when Stapiński's first son was born he asked Stojałowski to act as his godfather.⁴⁵ This highlights the importance of both patronage and familial links in assuring a position within the peasant movement for those seeking advancement within the party. He is described as

'a pragmatic populist leader, without an ideology and perhaps without political principles, but he certainly filled a need of the time: the need for a politician who

understood the peasants, sympathised with the peasants, knew their needs, and knew how to speak to them in their own language. His role in awakening the peasants (...) cannot be underestimated.⁴⁶

By virtue of this, following his election to the *Reichsrat* in 1898, he came to be in charge of party policy and organization. Stapiński as the chief executive became the party's main policy maker. His decisions were not, however, predicated on a solid and distinct ideological basis, but rather reflected personal choices effectively transformed into party policy owing to his charismatic leadership and the above-mentioned networks of patronage.

The electoral reform issue is a case in point. Between 1905 and 1913 the actions of Stapiński oscillated wildly. The party under Stapiński had been growing more nationalistic largely as a response to the rise of Ukrainian nationalism. Stapiński veered from a radical position on the issue of electoral reform in alliance with the Social Democrats to later opposition to the reform and an alliance with the Galician Conservatives. The actual reasons for this political deal were, nevertheless, unmistakably mercenary but had a profound impact upon the future of the party.⁴⁷ The alliance with the Conservatives led, on the one hand, to a major fluctuation in the supporter base of the party, as landowners and members of the middle class joined the party at the expense of the poor peasantry. Following the exposure of the deal behind the alliance, along with unhappiness at the active opposition to reform of the voting system by Stapiński, internal divisions came to a head in 1913. As a consequence the party split into two factions PSL-Lewica under Stapiński and PSL-Piast under the leadership of Bojko and Witos. Stapiński continued to control the old party institutions, membership, journals and organization. The PSL-Piast group, although initially smaller than PSL-Lewica, was ultimately to become the main agrarian movement in Galicia and later Poland. Ironically the conservative land-owners and wealthier peasants who had joined PSL because of Stapiński's conservative alliance after 1913 sided not with Stapiński but with Witos. Thus PSL-Piast became a conservative agrarian movement while PSL-Lewica served as a radical agrarian movement. In this sense, the developments within the original agrarian party, stemming from its particular power structure and promotion mechanisms, were instrumental in bringing about Witos's political advancement.

These evolutions in the Polish agrarian movement fall outside the dichotomous framework proposed by Köll, according to whom two were the possible configurations which determined the use of nationalist and, respectively, class-based discourse within agrarian movements. The situation at the beginning of the twentieth century offers a third possible combination, in which the leadership was Polish, as was the majority of the peasantry, while the element of novelty is given by the existence of an Ukrainian peasant minority. The heterogeneity of the peasant class diverts agrarian political discourse from class issues to national issues and can thus be seen to be conducive to the fractioning of agrarian leadership and eventually to the fragmentation of the movement as a whole. Of the two emerging political entities, one will become less and less representative of the agrarian issue and will instead hold the flag of nationalist imperatives, while the other will seek to return Agrarianism to its original purposes, that of furthering the interests of the peasant class.

Romanian politics in the Habsburg provinces, 1848–1919

The Romanians of Transylvania were up until the eighteenth century deprived of political rights, the only recognized nations being the nobles (for the most part Hungarians), the Saxons and the Szeklers. As Keith Hitchins points out, this situation dated back to the 1437, when the pact known as the *Unio trium nationum* was signed between the three nations to protect themselves against peasant uprisings.⁴⁸

‘At this time membership in a nation was not determined by ethnicity. The idea of nation (*natio*) itself implied quality rather than quantity; it did not encompass every one of the same ethnic origin but only those persons who possessed special rights and immunities.’⁴⁹

This brief historical note highlights a dimension fundamental to the development of later Romanian political representation: namely that the concept of nation, which historically excluded the Romanians, was originally based on social status. This political configuration coexisted with the demographical paradox whereby the Romanian population constituted an ethnic majority in Transylvania while being completely excluded from official political and religious participation.

The Union with the Catholic Church was the first step towards gaining social and political rights for the Romanians. The Uniate church under Bishop Ion Inochentie Micu-Klein (1700–1768)⁵⁰ argued that they should be granted the same rights as the other religions. What started out as a set of religious claims by a narrow clerical elite gradually turned into a bid for national recognition, with the term *natio* increasingly acquiring ethnic connotations side by side with its original juridical sense of a privilege-endowed community. The extrapolation of the original sense to include all walks of society occurred as part of an attempt to gain more legitimacy. The demand for rights hinged upon size of the Romanian population as opposed to their social standing. Any discourse articulating the rights of Romanians in Transylvania depended upon a claim to represent all Romanians, which constituted, implicitly, a claim to represent the peasantry. This belief in numerical democracy was to later profoundly shape the politics of the Romanian agrarianists.

As the Romanian intelligentsia developed, control of the Romanian national movement shifted from the clergy to lay intellectuals.⁵¹ Following the *Ausgleich* of 1867, PNR came into being as the first political (as opposed to a purely religious) formation to militate for the rights of the Romanians. As the lay upholder of the Uniate agenda, PNR inherited its discourse and its particularities. Consequently, the national debate continued to be perceived as a bid for social status by the elite. Moreover, the new lay intelligentsia became more removed from the rural/religious roots and increasingly associated with town life. Within Harre’s typology of mobilization PNR can be seen to fit into the second wave of urban and rural elite mobilization rather than the third wave of the mobilization of the village elite.

PNR policies evince a conflation of the national and the social based on the assumption that securing improved political rights will, at the same time, better the condition of the peasantry. This was a top-down approach representing the first step within the framework of 19th-century liberal democratic politics,⁵² according to which political representation

'insures' that the interests of the people will be represented.⁵³ The PNR tended to explain the plight of the Romanian peasantry not as a consequence of economic and social conditions but rather as the result of a specific political configuration created by Hungarian domination.

Iuliu Maniu's (1873–1953) political positions are revealing. On peasant landholdings he believed that large landholdings should be broken up and the land redistributed amongst the peasants and peasants should be moved from over-populated to under-populated areas. However, he opposed the policy on the grounds that the Hungarian government was using it to promote Magyarization rather than economic and social development.⁵⁴ The inability of the PNR elite to represent the peasantry was a reoccurring theme in criticism of the party. It was argued that they over-emphasized the national issue and neglected social and economic issues.⁵⁵

The inclusive relationship between the national and the social agenda of PNR ties in with Köll's argument to the effect that national issues are usually more effective at mobilizing the people than social issues. In the case of PNR, national exclusion provides an easily understood political narrative for the social plight of all Romanians. The reality of exclusion/persecution at the hands of Hungarians fitted in far better with the peasants' worldview than did the more complex and abstract notion of class. In addition, the anti-Romanian tendencies of the Hungarians were cross-class and affected not just the peasants but all Romanians. Thus the commonality of experience and understanding of social causality acted as a political binding medium for the Romanian population as a whole.

In contrast to the Polish peasant movements, the PNR had no rivals for the support of the peasantry. There were no class-based movements, such as in Galicia, where the Conservative Polish landlords opposed the Polish peasants, nor was the nascent socialist movement a significant challenge to PNR.⁵⁶ This resulted in a form of political insulation and isolation. The party was able to develop without ever having to respond to challenges to its claims to the leading role in representing the Romanian peasantry.

PNR was essentially an elite party, reflecting the underdeveloped nature of Romanian society in Transylvania. As such, it was a pre-capitalist political entity relying to a great extent on social status. This peculiarity can be traced back to the fact that the Romanian national movement started not as a grassroots movement but as an elite movement, which had to co-opt the grassroots in order to legitimate its claims. One of the characteristics of the party, deriving from its pre-capitalist nature, was the vital role played by social/family networks in its organization and structuring. A series of local networks of personalized power were thus in place,⁵⁷ which depended not on ideology to link the party but rather on ties of kinship and patronage. The party exploited the tradition of appointing godparents as a mechanism of binding the party to the local population. As a result, much of the party was personally inter-connected either through blood, marriage or baptismal-relations. These bonds of familial loyalty existed in the place of any ideological glue to hold the party together.

This form of personalized leadership ran throughout the party.⁵⁸ It reflected the elite origins of the party, whose discourse emphasized the personal achievements of the party leadership, in particular that of Maniu and Vaida. The party was an extension of their personalities and their achievements reflected upon their extended family members within the party. The use of familial connections as a substitute for a core ideology had many

advantages and served as a useful tool to ensure mobilization within the party. However, in times of crisis, loyalty to family rather than to the party took precedent. The movement often suffered from mass defections, as whole networks with all the associated family members would resign in loyalty to their familial connection.⁵⁹

The party also adopted a number of strategic responses to political situations. The most important of these was the adoption of the policy of passivity.⁶⁰ This started out as a response to Hungarian rule and was more of a political strategy rather than a thoroughly articulated ideological position. Its proponents saw it as a moral and political stance. By refusing to participate in the Hungarian system they believed they denied it legitimacy and, as a result, the system would collapse requiring the Hungarians to engage with the Romanians and grant them their political wishes. The leader adopting this position assumed the moral high ground: participation in any scheme imparted it legitimacy while non-participation de-legitimated it. The charismatic leader, thus, conferred moral validity onto both the policies and the adherents of the movement. As such, the policy was highly divisive;⁶¹ however, it remained an important piece of political methodology for the PNR and PNȚ leaders.

Such an approach to politics played a profound role in shaping the future of PNR and PNȚ. Referring back to Pierson's model of path dependency, one can point out that PNR were very successful during this moment of critical juncture, they were able to mobilize the Romanian population and ultimately achieved their political aims. Their success was due to the salience of the national discourse rather than any specific policy or approach. However, passivity, personal charisma, family networks etc. became embedded in the party 'toolbox' and came to be viewed the source of the party's effectiveness. Additionally, since these political methodologies were being tied together, the party could not remove its reliance on personal networks without removing dependence on personal charisma. Personal charisma, in turn, was a function of familial networks. By providing legitimacy on the basis of morality, it constituted the *raison d'être* for political action and with it the rationale for mobilizing the population. Ultimately PNR came to depend upon these political methodologies, which formed the core of the party in place of an ideology. For PNR the political costs became too high to enable reformation as reliance on personal networks and charisma were integral to how the party functioned.

Peasantism in the Old Kingdom

The formal institution of a Peasant Party (*Partidul Țărănesc*) only came into being after World War I. This was a late foundation by East European standards. For instance, the Bulgarian Agrarian Union (BANU) was by this date already in power in neighbouring Bulgaria. Early attempts at establishing a peasant party had been undermined by the Liberal and Conservative political elite. However, the underlying idea of a movement that would represent the peasant interests went back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Constantin Dobrescu-Argeș (1859–1903)⁶² established *Partida Țărănească* in 1895 as the first agrarian party in Romania. Dobrescu-Argeș, like Wysłouch, sought to improve the cultural life of the peasantry. He established the first peasant journals and, together with the Bishop of Argeș, set up The Society for the Culture of the Peasants (*Societatea pentru*

Cultura Țăranilor).⁶³ His and other intellectuals' progressive initiatives in this respect were encouraged by the cultural climate fostered by Spiru Haret's educational reforms and the continuing economic and social development in the villages themselves,⁶⁴ but this was suppressed by the Liberals in 1899.⁶⁵ From this early period we can observe the importance of familial ties within the agrarian movement. Although Dobrescu- Argeș retired from politics after his arrest in 1898, it was his brother-in-law Alexandru Vălescu who took on a leading role and the editorship of the peasant journal *Gazeta Țăranilor* and would eventually work with Vasile Kogălniceanu (1863–1941) in creating *Partidul Țărănesc* in 1906. Continuity was maintained by the active involvement of many former members of *Partida Țărănească*.

The 1907 Peasant Uprising in the Old Kingdom had profound implications for Agrarianism in Romania. Unlike 1905 in Russia, 1907 in Romania was an uprising rather than a revolution, whose origins were economic and social rather than political. Although unprecedented in scale, the 1907 peasant uprising was not, however, substantially different in its causality from previous uprisings, which plagued the Old Kingdom during the nineteenth century (the 1888 peasant uprisings for instance). It began as a localised dispute over agricultural contracts that the peasants were due to sign with the local tenants (*arendăși*) and quickly spread. The revolt was eventually crushed after bringing down the Conservative government, which was replaced by a Liberal government. There are three points to be made about the uprising. Firstly, it was not political in character, nor did it stem from political agitation and, as such, did not spawn a revolutionary movement. Secondly, the result of the uprising and its suppression was to bring the situation of the peasantry into public and political consciousness and spark off intellectual debates. The third point is that, paradoxically, what did not spring from the uprising and the subsequent debates was a coherent political movement seeking to represent the peasantry. The only tangible results were a range of legislative measures introduced by the Liberal government. However, these measures were not aimed at ameliorating the economic and political situation of the peasantry but rather at defending the political and economic interests of the Liberal party and their supporters. They sought to weaken their political opponents primarily the conservative landlords. The Liberals used the uprising as an excuse to suppress the nascent but rapidly growing peasant movement.⁶⁶ Thus *Partidul Țărănesc* was banned and the leadership arrested.⁶⁷

The question arises as to why there was no agrarian party in the Old Kingdom. Although the tendency was clearly towards the formation of a political party, Spiru Haret, whose reforms had done much to enhance the political consciousness of the villages, was opposed to it as he believed these political desiderata could be fulfilled within the Liberal Party.⁶⁸ Constantin Stere, moreover, attempted to demonstrate the impossibility of creating such a party writing in 1907/8:

'The belief that in our country the common peasantry can suddenly develop initiative and their own independent political organization, as part of the necessary struggle for the democratization of the country, goes beyond the boundaries of scientifically sanctioned hypotheses.'⁶⁹

Ion Mihalache before 1918 echoed Stere's conviction when he envisaged a peasant party in which the peasantry would form the 'basic elements' (*elementele de bază*) while the leaders

should be 'those intellectuals who had no vested interest in preserving the present social order'.⁷⁰ Nicolae Iorga, on the other hand, rejected the idea of a peasant party, convinced that his own national democrat party rendered it unnecessary.⁷¹ The debates hinged upon the issue of leadership and the belief of the intellectuals that the peasants were incapable of leading themselves and that the socio-economic interests of the peasantry were already represented within the Romanian party system of the time. This attitude mirrors that of the first generation of Polish agrarian leaders such as Wysłouch.

The uprising served to make Romanians in Transylvania aware of the plight of the Romanian peasantry. Mihail Șerban wrote that, as a member of the Austrian army mobilized in support of Romanian army with a view to suppressing the uprising, his experiences brought him into contact with the peasants and their existence. It was this that motivated him to study the peasantry.⁷² 1907 can be said to have affected an awakening if not of the peasantry themselves, as political agents and actors, at least of the intellectuals to the conditions of the peasantry.⁷³

Outside of the above debates agrarian issues did not concern the Romanian political elite. It was only with the national crisis during World War I that the peasant question and its resolution arose. The occupation of Bucharest by German forces and the flight of the government to Iași, combined with the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, which they feared would spread to Romania, forced the government to act. The initiative was presented as being at the instigation of King Ferdinand.⁷⁴ His appeal offered land and political voice:

'Sons of peasants who with your own hands, have defended the soil on which you were born, on which your own lives have been passed, I, your King, tell you that besides the great recompense of victory which will assume for everyone of you the nation's gratitude, you have earned the right of being masters in a large measure, of that soil upon which you fought. Land will be given to you. I, your King, am the first to set the example; and you will also take a larger part in public office.'⁷⁵

R.W. Seton-Watson attributes the failure of the peasantry to revolt in 1917 to be down to the absence peasant leaders encouraging and mobilizing the peasantry in Romania to revolt. There was no Romanian Stamboliski⁷⁶ or Lenin taking the leading role and stepping into the political vacuum caused by the collapse of Romania. Thus as in 1907 without effective radical leadership the peasants were un-mobilized and the Romanian elite were able to take a leading role with their promises of land-reform and representation.

Partidul Țărănesc came into being after 1918 and the granting of suffrage to the peasants. Ion Mihalache had started efforts in 1913 but had been interrupted by the outbreak of World War I.⁷⁷ The new party itself developed and grew through a series of mergers with smaller regional groups.⁷⁸ Thus the party did not have a single strong internal core but instead a number of internal cores that orientated themselves around particular individuals namely Constantin Stere, Nicolae Lupu, and Ion Mihalache. This gave the party an inherent instability and imbued it with strongly centrifugal tendencies. The newly emerged political entity would embark on an ongoing, and never quite successful, quest for legitimation and political strategy.⁷⁹

In Köll's analysis the development of Peasantism in the Old Kingdom is instructive. There was no ethnic cleavage between land owners and peasants. Politics was dominated

by the two class blocs, the Conservatives and the Liberals. While the Polish Conservatives in Galicia were unsuccessful in their attempts to weaken the agrarian movement, in the Old Kingdom the Romanian elite was able to use the nascent political state to 'keep out' the peasants. This accounts for the failure of early attempts to establish agrarian parties. The peasant movement that did emerge was inspired from above by intellectuals and the village elite and did not represent the interests of the mass of the peasantry. Although radical by Romanian standards the peasant leaders were not as radical as they could have been when compared in particular with contemporaries such as Stamboliski in Bulgaria. The most radical peasant leaders came from the regions with the lowest levels of economic and social development and the highest levels of poverty. While there was a clear evolution in the leadership of the Polish party from the first wave leaders such as Wysłouch to the third wave of Witos, there was no comparable evolution within the Romanian movement. The leaders who founded the movements were never replaced internally by younger, more radical leaders. Mihalache and Maniu dominated Agrarianism in 1947 as they had done in 1926.

Agrarianism in the village: social control and power

This article has concentrated upon the relationship between the elite and the represented thus far. However, village politics has largely been ignored within the literature other than in terms of the development of national identity. Rural politics has two main features: the first is the centrality of the party for social control and recruitment, second the defence of hierarchy and the status quo.

The Berliște reports highlight the importance to local actors of the social dimension of politics. The reports rarely recount discussions of national or international politics. Instead they concentrate upon the role of the party within the village and its place within the social life of the community. The fate of the party's *fanfara* (brass band) is the dominant issue in these reports, which emphasizes that it was the most important and pressing issue for the local party far more so than national social, political or economic issues. The party is concerned with recruitment of villagers into the party as well as the use of the band in maintaining the prestige of the party by playing at political events both in the village and in the surrounding area. The significance of the *fanfara* is explained by Słomka, who in his account of life in rural Poland describes how the village musicians were crucial to all social events within the village. The band played at every wedding, funeral, baptism, and holiday and thus control of the band provided a mechanism for influencing the social life, recruitment, and dissemination of the party's message.⁸⁰ The *fanfara* presented the public face of the party in the village and the surrounding area. In 1929 the *fanfara* is recorded as representing the village at a national meeting in Alba Iulia. Later in November 1929 the *fanfara* is noted as having led a procession in conjunction with the *fanfara* of Mircovăț, a neighbouring village.⁸¹ The success of the band demonstrated to villagers the strength of the party. The *fanfara* was the principal mechanism for recruiting young people from the village into the party. The importance of recruitment is highlighted in a meeting of 7th May 1934:

‘The president informs them of the situation of our *fanfara*, which is a branch of our organization. The members of the *fanfara* are complaining that the members of the organization do not support them by enlisting the members of their families who are able to enter the *fanfara*. They appeal to the members and point out the significance of the *fanfara*.’⁸²

Sauter-Halstead notes that public celebrations were one of the main contexts of the rural public sphere for working out the collective interests of the village.⁸³ The desire of PNTȚ in Berliște to retain influence over the public space highlights that the way in which decisions were made were still organized within a pre-modern framework.

The *fanfara* is a social institution belonging to this pre-modern world. On the one hand, it discharges a ritualistic function (performing at key events in village life such as weddings, baptisms and funerals). On the other hand, it has a celebratory and solemn function within secular power structures (the army has a brass band, the authorities canvass using a brass band). Given these functions, the *fanfara* comes to connote prestige and authority and lends weight to the event it accompanies. It becomes an instrument of dominating and manipulating the heavily ritualistic public space of the village. Thus the band is a way of recruiting young people into the party and of lending authority to political messages.

The political debates of the Berliște party reflect its localised world view. The local party issued a fourteen point program for the local elections in 1934.

- 1.) Expropriating the empty terrain by the notary house for the use of the Town Hall and Casa culturală.
- 2.) Paving the road to the station with cobblestones or scattering slag on it. Providing it with side ditches and trees. The same for the road to the cemetery.
- 3.) Providing the side streets of the commune with ditches and building sidewalks.
- 4.) Cleaning up and planting part of the common land with fruit trees and other trees in the first place where there are no trees [illegible].
- 5.) Planting the field roads.
- 6.) Improving wells and bridges.
- 7.) Raising money for erecting the heroes’ monument.
- 8.) Sowing grass seeds on the pig field.
- 9.) Procuring choice ... [illegible].
- 10.) Cleaning up around the church and school.
- 11.) Setting up a commune library.
- 12.) Supporting public institutions and cultural societies.
- 13.) Reduction of commune taxes and the revision of fees.
- 14.) Setting up a market in the commune.’⁸⁴

The program emphasizes the use of collective land and the improvement of the rural environment as well as programs to better the cultural standing of the peasantry. These represent a largely social collective program, with little advancement of any political or economic issues other than the final two points of the program, which advocate lower taxation, and the establishment of a market within the commune. These points reflect the growing influence of economic demands within the village and the growing commercialization of

the peasantry as well as showing that economic interests and demands were being articulated. It is, however, unclear who was articulating these demands within the village social structure. However, the minutes for the meeting held on May 7, when the party chose its candidates and developed the above program, mention the following:

‘regarding the ten candidates running for the commune council, the local council is of opinion that the struggle should be waged with the fervour of the past and asks the committee to *aim at* victory in the elections and to choose as candidates the *leading men* seasoned in battle.’⁸⁵

The village elite who traditionally led the party are seeking to protect their interests and deny younger peasants access to positions of power. The above quoted program will have been written by the powerful members of the local party. The policies advocated, which reflected increased economically orientated demands, will have come from the wealthier peasants, who had enough land to produce a surplus to sell. Thus, the wealthier peasants with market orientated interests are also, the politically powerful members of the village party and responsible for the development and articulation of local political programs. This emphasizes the continuing relationship between political power and economic power within the peasant party at the village level.

Conclusion

To conclude, the foundation period of the agrarian movements represents the first moment of critical juncture in the life of the party. It established modes of leadership, institutional organization and mobilization discourses. However, in Galicia the movement was an agrarian movement orientated around socio-economic issues, in contrast to the Transylvanians who were a national movement and whose mobilization discourses hinged on issues of ethnicity. In Galicia the earlier establishment of the agrarian movements allowed the party to evolve in a period of relative political stability and similarly allowed for the transition of leadership from paternal intellectuals to radicalized peasants. The Romanian agrarian movement developed much later and as a result after 1926 was politically subordinated to the Transylvanian wing of PNȚ. There was no evolution of leadership within the Romanian agrarian movement. This lack of evolution at the elite level is reflected in the non-evolution of the programs and discourses of PNȚ. The elite who led the party at its inception are still leading it in 1947. This is a problem for PNȚ because of the impact of socio-economic changes that had taken place within Romania over the previous one hundred years. The changes meant that for many peasants economic issues were of far greater salience than issues of ethnicity. A second question then arises: if these issues were of such importance to the peasantry, why were the peasants ineffective agents? The Berliște case study reveals a local party which views itself primarily as a social organization within the village, seeking to maintain its position of social control and influence over village life. Where economic interests do emerge in the form of local programs they are designed to protect and advance the interests of the wealthier peasants. When younger (and more radicalized) peasants do seek some form of political voice, the institutional weight of the party is used to suppress them.

The result of this in Romania was a party that was unresponsive to the interests of the peasantry and in turn the peasants moved away from it seeking instead more radical options. Unlike in Poland, where the strength of the agrarians forced the Communists into a strategy of relative compromise and negotiation, the Communists in Romania were able to aggressively exploit the weaknesses of PNTȚ between 1944 and 1947. These weaknesses were the result of institutional failures, which in turn had their roots in the foundation period of the movements and the inability of the Romanian agrarians to reform themselves after this initial period to match the changing socio-economic climate of interwar and post-war Romania.

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- 57 The collection of death notices in the Şerban Archive highlights the role of family connections. Şerban was related by marriage to the Haţieganu family, of whom Emil and Iuliu were leading members of PNT. Şerban was himself the godson of Alexandru Vaida-Voievod. Mihail Şerban Archive, Unsorted Material, Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
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committee of the National Party together with other notables have crossed over to the Averescu Party. We cannot be sure even of the president of the committee, Mr Mateiu Ziga, as he did not attend the Congress although he had promised to do so. Consequently, I the undersigned will see to it that the voters in the County are summoned to a meeting where we will regroup, make decisions as to the organization of the party in the county, put together the list of candidates and plan the electoral battle.' Alba Iulia 25 IV 920/Iacob Popa.

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- 75 David Mitrany, *Land and the peasant in Rumania: The war and agrarian reform (1917–21)*, London 1930, 101 f.
- 76 See John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union 1899–1923*, Princeton 1977.
- 77 Hitchins, *Rumania 1866–1947*, see fn. 63, 126.
- 78 In July 1921 the party merged with the Bessarabian Peasant Party (*Partidul Țărănesc din Basarabia*) of Constantin Stere and Pantelimon Halippa. This merger strengthened the radical and left wing tendencies of the party. The fusion with the peasant party from Bessarabia was followed by other fusions with peasant groups from Bukovina (June 1922), Transylvania (October 1922) and the Socialist Peasant party (September 1922).
http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partidul_%C5%A2%C4%83r%C4%83nesc (September 21, 2008).
- 79 Ornea, *Țărănișmul*, see fn. 62, 36.
- 80 Słomka, *Serfdom to Self Government*, see fn. 39, 274.
- 81 Berliște Reports dated 1st May 1929 and 25th November 1929.
- 82 Berliște Report dated 7th May 1934.
- 83 Stauter-Halsted, *Nation in the Village*, see fn. 44, 33.
- 84 Berliște Report dated 13th May 1934.
- 85 Berliște Report dated 7th May 1934.