CHAPTER 5

Get Out of Our Forest!

Rural Societies, National Mobilization, State-Building and Modern Forestry in Late-Habsburg and Post-Habsburg Transylvania

Gábor Egry

Introduction

Violence was a frequent occurrence in interwar Transylvania, especially in rural areas. People clashed over politics, ethnicity, religion, material goods and property rights. Forests were often an object of fights and also the scene where neighbouring villages met with hastily collected arms in hand, while attempts on the lives of forestry personnel, gendarmes and even proprietors were common too.[1] While many of these events remained truly local, quite a few became entangled in politics. What often marked the latter type of violence was how the rural population and their supporters used a national mode of argumentation to achieve their material goals, namely, to retain forests they considered their own. These forests had allegedly been appropriated by the anti-Romanian dualist Hungarian state, while the present state – a markedly nationalizing Romania – often refused to accept the legitimacy of these claims. The Romanian administration often rejected changing the status and exploitation model of the forests, sometimes leaving them in 'foreign' hands. Thus, the state seemingly contradicted its cherished nationalizing goals, accepted the changes introduced by the late-Habsburg governments and, just like its citizens, was willing to take a stand and risk violent conflict for the de facto ownership of the forests.[2]

Conflict over forests was obviously not something new: it did not begin with the extension of Romania to new territories after 1918. The transition to a new ownership structure, abolition of usufruct and new, rational, scientific, industrialized exploitation methods started well before, during the Habsburg administration of Transylvania. The subsequent social conflicts around forests played a significant role in the revolutionary upheaval at the end of the First World War; that is, the popular uprisings that brought down Austria-Hungary and which were supposed to prove the popular legitimacy of national claims

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

laid on the new territories. Among the many national demands included in manifestos, local and regional communities made a series of restitutive claims. Redistribution of agrarian property from large landholdings to small peasant parcels was promised, and political movements and parties jockeyed to support the reform. For inhabitants of the mountain areas, where forests constituted the major form of agricultural land to be distributed, it seemed self-evident that they would receive what they longed for: as peasants and as Romanians they had a dual reason to feel entitled to the forests owned mainly by Hungarian landlords. But the Romanian state was reluctant to satisfy these claims. Neither did it hurry to rescind the existing lease contracts retained from the late-Habsburg system of forest management, a system established gradually from the end of the nineteenth century by the Hungarian governments, their state forestry services and private entrepreneurs who leased exploitation rights for a given term. Nor was it willing to redistribute forests within the agrarian reform, as demanded by the peasants.[3]

Thus, violence in interwar Transylvania was as much about the late-Habsburg era and its continuities as it was about Greater Romania, and I intend to analyse it this way. From this perspective, the end of the First World War was rather a moment when popular discontent with the transition to rational-capitalist exploitation became manifest. The fact that peasant communities attempted to reverse it, often wanting to go back decades in time and return to a previous model, reveals the intensity of the grievances they felt with regard to Habsburg rule. Its modest success, on the other hand, and the ensuing, long-lasting conflicts, be they violent or legal-political, also reveal the complexity surrounding the fate of forests, making the subject of forests a case study with broader implications for imperial statehood and postimperial legal and social transitions.

Economic Nationalism and the Forests

The management of forests since the late nineteenth century offers insight into profound social and economic changes and the relationship between state and society. As the practical issues stemming from different ideas of forestry and rival methods of exploitation were channelled into politics and transformed and related to issues of community, nationhood and state-building, they mobilized people along various dividing lines, one of them being ethnicity.

In a more general sense, the question of forests pertains to how states were extended and transformed since the nineteenth century, but also to how the remnants of a feudal system of forest ownership and exploitation – characterized by a combination of usufruct and servitude, commons and large communal properties devoted to altruistic goals – were integrated into the

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

modern machinery of an expanding state and the capitalist economy. An episode in this process, the imperial Forest Act of 1852, is detailed in Simone Gingrich's and Martin Schmid's chapter in this volume. Finally, it also enables us to look at the concerns of rural people through the lens of a unique event bringing about almost total collapse of the state and providing a short period for locals to voice and subsequently uphold demands that had often been suppressed before. As such, the vantage point of the end of the First World War enables a look at both the pre- and post-1918 states and reveals the afterlife; that is, the persistence of structures established by the imperial nature of Austria-Hungary in one of its provinces where the transformation of the feudal system proceeded the slowest.[4]

Even though peasant mobilization in the wake of the First World War was not solely based on nationalism,[5] rival ideas on forestry – usually carefully embedded in the language of the nation – invoked the phenomenon of ecological nationalism. The concept is more than simply an analysis of the role of nature, the idea of authentic national landscape and the ecological tenets of nationalist discourse. Ecological nationalism focuses on the relationship of the human community with nature and how the typical forms of natural resource use and modes of exploitation are related to the perception of this community's characteristics, making these aspects part of the nation itself.[6] Nations are communities transitioned to a particularist-universal understanding of the community, singular as one specific nation but universal as a community that is almost natural, and held together by a sense of commonality that includes people with no real prior connections. Furthermore, nations emerged out of the idea of human progress and modernization and vested the idea of development in their national existence and nation state. Nature as an imaginary element of nationhood, including mythical landscapes posited in the past, and as a concrete sphere where progress is made, is inherently connected with perceptions of the nation. State development projects historically claimed to bring the wilderness into civilization and integrate its inhabitants in the national body.[7]

But development projects, including forestry, rarely happen without resistance or contestation. Out of these conflicts, through their framing of rival ideas of the relationship between nature and humans, nature and nations, specific understandings of local/regional communities and nations emerge: this was the case in interwar Romania too. Ecological nationalism, as 'a condition where both cosmopolitan and nativist versions of nature devotion converge and express themselves as a form of nation-pride in order to become part of processes legitimizing and consolidating a nation', is one possible framing of the conflict over forests, better suited to reveal the conflictual aspects of final convergence.[8] Throughout this process, actors deployed both what Sivaramakrishnan and Cederlöf call the metropolitan-secularistic view of

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

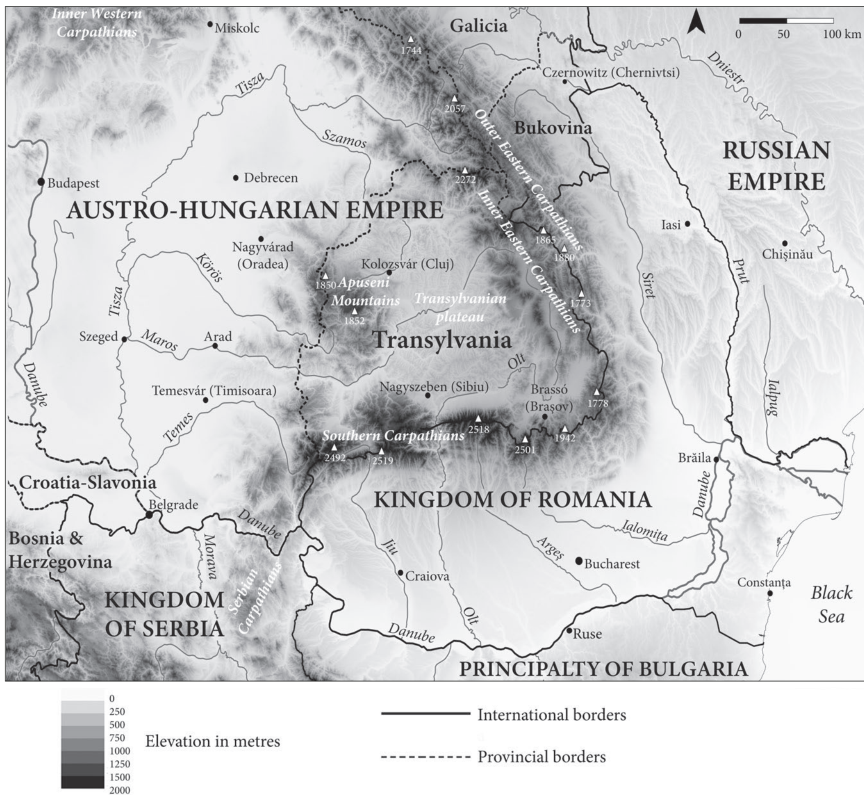
nature as a predominantly economic resource of material use for the nation (a rational-developmental approach to conservation and unification of national space through such projects) and the indigenist-regionalist variety (operating with authenticity, attachment to a specific form of environment and historicizing this connection).[9]

I will first give a brief overview of the major changes concerning community forests and forestry in Transylvania (meant as the territory annexed to Romania in 1920) after the mid-nineteenth century, and use a few concrete examples, many of them transcending the chronological boundary of 1918, to demonstrate the ways in which issues of national mobilization, state-building and social transformation in late-Habsburg and post-Habsburg Transylvania were entangled with the fate of the forests, often through the very same concrete processes of state-driven modernization. I will argue that rural communities were out of step with state-driven modernization, which was motivated by the same rationalist technocratic logic before and after 1918. But the state failed either to use its dominance in forest management to quickly enhance people's lives and transform rural society, or to implement a much broader development programme to mitigate the problems arising from the conflict over forest exploitation. Therefore, this central state- and nation-building project turned out to be easy to delegitimize both before and after 1918 through national mobilization with a regionalist scope that appropriated the language of national authenticity. This struggle ultimately reveals how forests were a means of creating and upholding imperial statehood (differentiated rule) before and after 1918 and how much non-national or a-national logic permeated interwar Romanian state-building even if the state used nationalist language.

A Kaleidoscope of Ownership Rights: Eastern Hungary and Transylvania on the Way from Serfdom to Modern Civic Law

Forests were crucial for peasants, manorial economies and nascent industrialization efforts well before industrial exploitation became dominant. Either held as communal properties or by landlords, most of the forests in eighteenth-century Hungary and Transylvania (the latter a separate province under direct rule from Vienna between 1690 and 1867) were accessible for peasants and serfs because of customary usufruct rights or entitlements for natural benefits like firewood and timber (sometimes in exchange for labour). Communal properties abounded in various forms; these compossessorates (*közbirtokosság*) represented a communally regulated form of the commons, based on collective ownership and management.[10] Although pressure on their existence grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, the process of their dissolution in Hungary had started before 1848, the year of the abolition

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms



Map 5.1. Transylvania's physical environment. Map drawn by Jawad Daheur using QGIS. Based on: F. Köke and D. Biller, *General-Strassen und Ortskarte des Österreichischen Kaiserreiches*. Vienna: Artaria, 1871; SRTM GL1 Global 30m elevation database.

of serfdom. Already Maria Theresia's Urbarium from 1767 (a regulation of landowner rights and servitudes) assumed the process of division and delineation of the different types of agricultural lands within landholdings and by the early nineteenth century this type of commons was disappearing from Hungary. The main method was division or the shift to individual as opposed to common use.[11] This transformation only accelerated after the abolition of serfdom. The imperial decree of 2 March 1853 arranged for the division of forests between landlords and former serfs in exchange for the abolishment of peasant usufruct, a decision that left both sides discontent, although to different extents, and that led to litigation.[12] As a result, their fate was often unclear for decades to come. But this was neither the final division of these lands nor the most meaningful change in ownership structures after the 1848 revolution. The economic transformation in the second half of the nineteenth cen-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

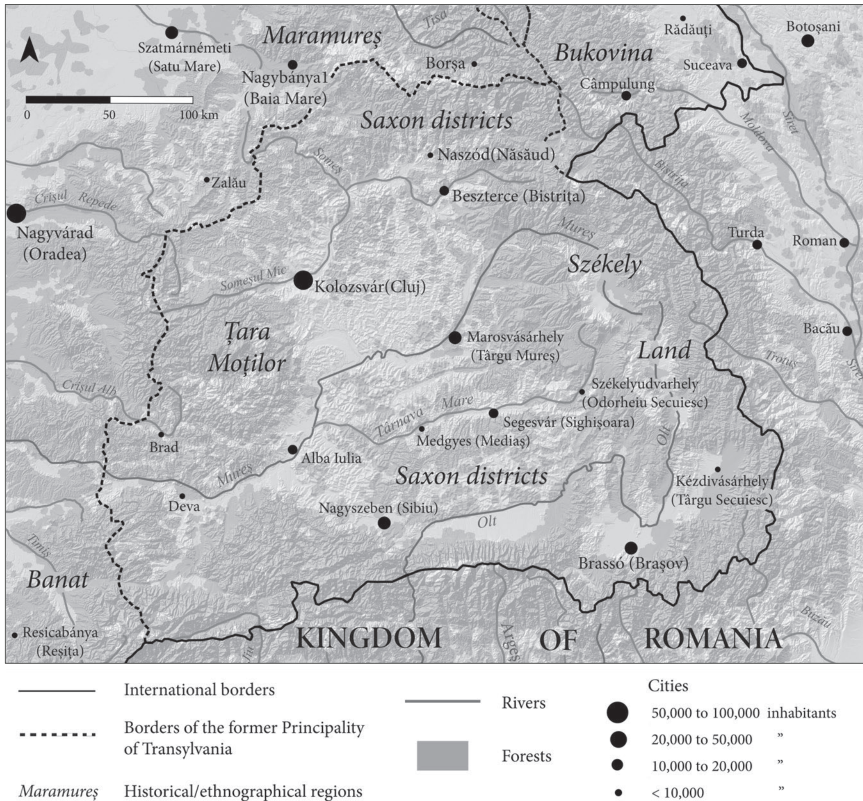
tury again affected exploitation and ownership rights and made the forests the scene of Hungarian developmental state-building too.

Transylvania and the eastern parts of Hungary (the territories annexed to Romania in 1918–1919) are mountainous zones with peaks of over two thousand metres (see Map 5.1). Therefore, all types of forests are present in the region as a whole, with oak, beech and pine in abundance, but with significant intraregional disparities. Mountains in the central zone are usually lower than 1,000 metres, and the Western and Eastern Carpathians only reach to 1,800–1,900 metres too. Therefore, Alpine conditions with the full range of forest belts were typical only for the southern and northern boundaries in the Carpathians. In historic Transylvania, the territory of the Grand Principality abolished in 1867, forests and mountain pastures were the dominant type of agrarian lands (Map 5.2).

The development of forest holdings was not unlike that in Hungary, but a series of factors made the situation here distinct even by the standards of the Habsburg Empire. First, the Urbarium was not introduced in Transylvania; rather, it was substituted with a conscription of property in 1819–1820.[13] As a consequence, the process of division and delineation did not start as soon as in Hungary. However, especially in areas that were unsuited for arable farming, specific measures were necessary to mitigate the lack of new regulations. Thus, for example, in the Țara Moților, the mountain region on the province's western border where, alongside seigneurial forests, the royal treasury held a large property, too, Maria Theresia granted special access rights and usufruct for the locals (grazing, firewood and timber, the last of which was also used for carpentry work later sold in Hungary). This essentially created a kind of condominium for forest use. Still, the post-1848 regulation of the new property rights was just as conflictual as in Hungary. At one point, about 30% of Transylvanian households took part in litigation over forest use.[14]

Second, while a large chunk of the forests was noble property with all the customary uses, rights and duties, another part was held as a specific form of commons (compossessorates), huge areas constituting communal properties grown out of royal donations for altruistic goals. In the easternmost part, in Székelyföld, where noble landholdings were rare, villagers who enjoyed a special privileged status, often described as collective nobility, held all forests as communal property of the individual communes – a practice that survives to today.[15] In the Southern Carpathians two large estates existed, both in the hands of the Saxon community. Saxons, just like the Székelys, were a constitutive group of the principality's feudal architecture, a so-called *natio* (nation), a community with collective privilege and autonomy, as well as representation in the Diet. Their self-governing body, the Saxon Nationsuniversität, held two separate pieces of forest, the so-called University Forests (Universitätswälder) and the Forests of the Seven Judges (Siebenrichterwälder), a complementary

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms



Map 5.2. Transylvanian forests in the late Habsburg Empire. Map drawn by Jawad Daheur using QGIS. Based on: F. Köke and D. Biller, *General-Strassen und Ortskarte des Österreichischen Kaiserreiches*. Vienna: Artaria, 1871; D.A. Sburlan, Intinderea pădurilor in România, in Dimitrie Gusti (ed.), *Enciclopedia Romaniei*. Vol. III: *Economia națională. Cadre și* producție (Bucharest: Asociația Științifică pentru Enciclopedia României, 1938), 464; Eltjo Buringh's database: The Population of European Cities from 700 to 2000 (https://doi.org/10.1163/24523666-06010003); ESRI Shaded relief (OpenStreetMap).

property of around 36,000 acres that was governed by only seven out of the nine Saxon districts.[16]

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought new additions to the communal properties after the Viennese court established four border regiments (two Romanian infantry, one Székely infantry and one cavalry) and subsequently donated large mountain areas for the purpose of their education and military equipment acquisition. After the border regiments were abolished in 1851, two large school funds were set up, one in Northern Transylvania (the so-called Năsăud School Fund, comprising 91,000 acres held by forty-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

four villages) and one in the Székelyföld, the Csiki Magánjavak (Csiki Private Fund, comprising 62,000 acres held by the community of Csík county).[17] In the Banat, the monarch also donated a large property (252,000 acres) for the predominantly Romanian communities of the Caransebeș border regiment in 1871. They enjoyed it without the conflict engulfing the Slavonian forests in the territory of the former Military Border (see Robert Skenderović's chapter in this volume).[18]

Communal properties, however extended they were, were under the direction of the representative bodies of their communities. Usually, representatives of the member communities elected a president and a board that administered the income. The exception among major forest properties were the Saxon forests (Universitätswälder, Siebenrichterwaldungen) in the Southern Carpathians. As remnants of the former Saxon autonomy, the forests – together with huge real estate in the cities – were administered by a body elected by voters with parliamentary suffrage from the communities of the former Saxon autonomous territory, the Königsboden. According to the law dissolving the Saxon feudal autonomy, the 24-member-strong body was responsible for the management and distribution of the income among all communities of the erstwhile Saxon autonomy, regardless of religion or nationality. The profit – just like in the case of the other communal funds – was to be donated for cultural and educational purposes. It is unnecessary to mention that the presidents of these funds held extraordinary economic power, especially as they could influence subcontracting and procurement to the value of millions of crowns. Such influence often translated into political power, as in the case of Octavian Bordan, the Magyarophile Romanian mayor of Caransebeș.[19] In the Țara Moților, however, it was individuals who benefitted from special access rights, even though there were customary mechanisms of coordinating access within the village.

But these large communal properties, and many of the village and city ones, were not rooted in modern civic law, but were rather institutions of feudal origins adjusted to the post-1848 legal reforms. Therefore, after 1918, a third factor emerged to complicate the situation in Transylvania: the incompatibility of Romania's French-inspired civic law and the survival of these ownership and property forms. While the legal adjustment seemed easy, on the one hand the land reform postulated the expropriation and state management of these properties, while on the other the forestry law was unified in 1923 with the extension of the 1910 Romanian law to the new territories. It was far from perfect, and litigation on both accounts (property rights and forest use) continued unabated during the interwar period.[20]

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Transformation of Forestry, Resilience of Communities?

Initially the local economy – based on the regulated distribution of resources from the forests in these areas – looked similar everywhere, even if ownership forms differed. But around the turn of the century, new forms of ownership with the new methods of higher-profit exploitation that already undergirded the 1852 Forest Act (as shown in Simone Gingrich's and Martin Schmid's chapter) made headway, and the traditional forest economy came under pressure.[21] Previously, especially in areas where arable land was scarce (Székelyföld, Țara Moților, Maramureș, Southern Carpathians range, Southern Banat), access to pasture and wood – firewood and lumber – was crucial for families' livelihoods. Husbandry of sheep and cattle substituted for grain and provided dairy, while wood was the material of homes and associated buildings, and a source of energy and raw material for crafts. The areas in the Țara Moților were especially dependent on these handcrafted products. Moți craftsmen roamed the Hungarian plains and Transylvania, selling wooden kitchen utensils and household equipment, and these items also made up a significant portion of family income elsewhere.[22]

Therefore, access rights and division of returns were delicate and important issues (the Năsăud Fund distributed 420,000 crowns among its forty-four member villages in 1914).[23] But the use of this money was restricted as, according to the stipulations of the donation, the profit must serve education, just as it was in the case with the Csiki Magánjavak and the Saxon forests. Given the role of wood in the peasant economy, it is not surprising that the delegates of villages and members of local property communities (*közbirtokosság*) – with the exception of the Saxon villagers – often favoured natural forms of income over money, and regularly struggled for more firewood, more timber and more access to mountain pastures. They did it as part of the general debate over access to property and distribution of goods and profits.

In the meantime, administrators of the communes saw the forests as a resource that could provide regular monetary income instead of natural resources for households. Thus, despite the self-government, the traditional form of forest management and exploitation gradually gave way to capitalist ones. Initially, local communities leased the exploitation of forests to entrepreneurs, often with local origins. Since the 1890s, however, as a culmination of this development, large forestry joint stock companies appeared as exploiters, sometimes replacing the local enterprises with a series of very significant lease and exploitation contracts at the beginning of the twentieth century.[24] The process was aligned with the state's efforts to replace the traditional mountain economy with more scientific forest management, embodied in a series of laws stipulating that even private owners must operate with detailed exploitation plans and employ professional foresters – or hand over their forests to the state forestry apparatus for

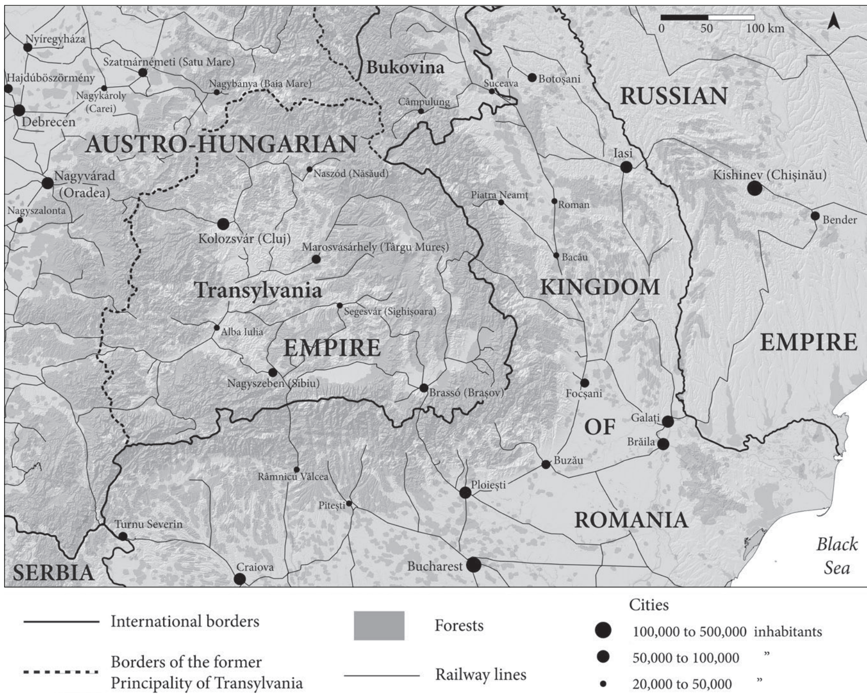
This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license
thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

management. The Forestry Law from 1879 (Law XXXI) required the implementation of long-term exploitation plans by all owners within five years after the passing of the law. As it did not happen, especially in smaller communities, Law XIX from 1898 empowered the government to take over the management of forests unless the owners employed specialist forestry engineers.[25]

As a result, not only private companies but also the state forestry apparatus played a significant role in the introduction of new exploitation methods, and the state's involvement was a bone of contention too. The Năsăud forests were subject to decades-long litigation between the Baronial Kemény family, the community and the state, settled only in 1890.[26] In the meantime the property was administered by a government commissioner. In 1890, Law XIX established a state forestry directorate in Bistrița/Bistritz/Beszterce for the administration of the communal property, while village forests (around 60,000 acres) were separated from the bulk for household purposes. Simultaneously, locals were banned from using the state-administered part of the community forests. Only access to mountain pastures was granted in this area of 220,000 acres, and the state forestry directorate managed almost 300,000 acres here alone. The forestry directorate leased felling to commercial companies, generating a windfall of revenue – almost 3.5 million crowns yearly.[27] The state invested in infrastructure (narrow-gauge railways, forest roads, forestry equipment, sawmills) and planned a major construction endeavour, namely, a standard-gauge railway line along the Bistrița river.

The Saxons instead opted for lease contracts with stock companies for the temporary exploitation of their forests, although their decision was not independent from government influence. When they first thought of changing the exploitation method, it was local banks that approached the community with an exploitation plan, but their offer was deemed undervalued and rejected by the government in its supervisory role in 1899. After a re-evaluation and a public offer, the Hungarian-Italian Forestry Company (with its seat in Fiume) was selected.[28] The company was a subsidiary of the Milan-based Italian Feltrinelli Company, one of the most important forestry businesses on the Italian peninsula. The Feltrinellis were famous for their friendship with Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–49. Kossuth's son, Lajos Tódor, became a member of the board of directors of the Hungarian-Italian Forestry Company too.[29] The new leaseholders promised to pay a yearly sum of 818,181 crowns for twenty-two years, which equated to five times more revenue than under the Saxon's own management. Even more crucially, the arrangements reduced risks of fluctuating income.[30] Suddenly the forests, from which leaseholders could sell not only lumber, mine timber and sleepers for expanding railways but also material for furniture, became the largest source of income for the cultural institutions, although at the expense of the local communities' ability to capitalize on these resources.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms



Map 5.3. Transylvania in the regional railway system. Map drawn by Jawad Daheur using QGIS. Based on: *Artaria's Eisenbahnkarte von Österreich-Ungarn und den Balkanländern*. Vienna: Artaria, 1911; D.A. Sburlan, Intinderea pădurilor in România, in Dimitrie Gusti (ed.), *Enciclopedia Romaniei*. Vol. III: *Economia naţională. Cadre şi* producţie (Bucharest: Asociaţia Ştiinţifică pentru Enciclopedia României, 1938), 464; Eltjo Buringh's database: The Population of European Cities from 700 to 2000 (https://doi.org/10.1163/24523666-06010003); ESRI Shaded relief (OpenStreetMap).

Although the Saxon business was the largest of its kind, the model was not unique: individual communes in the Székelyföld paved the way with several similar arrangements at a much smaller scale. In their case, the income from selling the expropriation rights of forests covered much-needed communal investment, while the business model provided the base for the emergence of solid forestry companies in the region, many of which also grew to be internationally competitive.[31]

Thus, joint stock companies were often transnational in nature. The presence of foreign companies (helped by the rapidly expanding railways; see Map 5.3) demonstrates how profitable forestry became with modern techniques and the ongoing industrialization and urbanization of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. For some Hungarian companies, investment in Transylvania was

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Figure 5.1. The Groedel family's villa in Máramarossziget/Sigethu Marmației around 1910. © Fortepan.hu/Frigyes Schoch, public domain.

one step towards the transnationalization of their business. Well before 1918, Transylvania was united with the Kingdom of Romania into a single zone of modern forestry. The Groedel family from Máramaros/Maramureş (see Figure 5.1) was one of the largest active in the region and soon extended its activities to the Kingdom of Romania, and later to the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, local businessmen and Transylvanian-born landowners and entrepreneurs vied to extend their holdings and turn them into profitable industrial forestry empires. The Magyar Erdőipar Rt from Kézdivásárhely/Târgu Secuiesc, established by local entrepreneurs, joined forces with the Goetz et Cie company, one of the largest of its kind in Romania.[32] Similarly, Count Ármin Mikes, the brother-in-law of later Hungarian prime minister István Bethlen,

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

used the family estates to start expansion beyond the border. At home, in Háromszék/Trei Scaune and in Romania, he was competing with rival companies, like Gödri, as both extended their forest holdings aggressively. Mikes was rumoured to have bid for the Saxon forests and he teamed up with Romanian and Viennese partners to buy forests in the Kingdom of Romanian (next to his holdings on the other side of the Carpathians), which became the Tisița company. During the First World War he continued in Montenegro, in Romania and in the Subcarpathian Rus (next to or inside Maramureş), not always with innocent means and rarely respecting the neighbouring communities.[33]

But it was not just due to the result of malpractice that local communities started to feel pressure and detrimental effects on their lives. The transformation of the forests was part of the broader capitalist modernization of the mountains, and the resulting political and social tensions incentivized the government to push for a broader development policy, balancing its own developmental goals and social stability. This, as opposed to the leasing of exploitation rights in exchange for revenues, did not empower local communities, but rather aimed at accelerating transformation as development was thought to alleviate their problems too.[34] While its intellectual foundations were close to the ones of the 1852 Forestry Act (see Gingrich's and Schmid's chapter in this volume), it was markedly statist. It was first introduced in the Subcarpathian Rus where large landholdings dominated the economic landscape; there, a government agency coordinated implementation. The action plan disseminated knowledge in the form of brochures and lectures, and provided the means for better agricultural techniques and easier access to cheap credit, and also promoted cooperatives. At its core was a reform of the mountain economy, with the introduction of new species for husbandry, a more methodical use of mountain pastures and the promotion of household industry as an intermediate solution for the lack of industrialization.[35] It also entailed investment in roads and communications, schools, dispensaries and public health services, and was followed by the establishment of new development agencies over almost all of the country. The most prominent of these efforts was the so-called *Székely Akció* (Székely Action). When the last of the government agencies was established in the Eastern Banat, only the Țara Moților was missing from the underdeveloped mountain regions, a conspicuous omission that persisted despite Romanian members of parliament urging the government to extend the model to this area too.[36]

While the template was provided by the government, these actions were not solely government initiatives. In almost all areas local elites mobilized the people to put pressure on the centre to gain control over the resources provided through this scheme. The Hungarian nationalist elite pressured the government with petitions, assemblies and finally a large event, the so-called Székely Congress in 1902, where local and national notables lectured on why

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

and how the state should subsidize Székely's development, and the people of the region gathered to demonstrate their support for the plan.[37]

For the mountains as a resource for humans, the most important aspect of this development push was a conscious effort to reconfigure local economies, wind down the traditional mode of forest exploitation and introduce new methods, albeit not necessarily with changing ownership structures. Alongside technical development, new races of cattle were to be introduced, mountain pastures ameliorated and household handicrafts supported, all to use the wood. In addition, light industry was envisaged to appear in these areas. The building blocks of the programmes were a combination of state subsidies and loans, the establishment of cooperatives to facilitate cooperation and channel capital, new outlets for education and investment in basic health care. The surrounding rhetoric was nationalist. Safeguarding mountain areas was meant either to salvage authentic Hungarian communities, like the Székelys, or pre-empt the alienation of loyal ethnicities, like the Ruthenians, whose loyalty allegedly wavered under the pressure of Jewish and feudal exploitation and pro-Russian (pan-Slavic) propaganda.

Nevertheless, in most areas peasants remained relatively peaceful even if they resented their situation. This was true even for the Moţi, whose plights later fuelled the most significant interwar regional development programmes in Romania. Here local communities' access rights given by Maria Theresia were upheld as customary rights even after the abolition of serfdom. However, around the turn of the century the state forestry apparatus started to curtail access, reduce pastures and change the trees to more profitable ones. This was a serious setback for these mountain communities, which were also known as a hotbed of Romanian nationalism due to the bloody Horea uprising in 1784–85 and Avram Iancu's struggle in the mountains in 1848–49.[38]

That was exactly the reason the Ţara Moţilor was left out of the programme: regardless of the realities of the situation, it was hard to conceive of the Romanians of the mountain, who waged war against the Hungarians in 1848–49, as loyal subjects. Despite urging by voices from below, no plan was devised and the locals here were dissatisfied with the few and insignificant advantages the state provided for them (e.g., lower prices for firewood and combustibles for the miners).[39] Therefore, locals emigrated or sought work on the Great Plains, just like Székelys moved to Romania. But unlike the neglect towards Moţi, the latter was addressed at the highest level of politics, especially as a large proportion of the labour migrants were women, raising the spectre of white slavery, a good reason for Hungarian politicians to decry the dangers threatening the nation, as the loss of its women meant the loss of future generations of Hungarians too.[40]

The changes before 1918 represent two stages of a long transformation of mountain agriculture and rural economy. First was the delineation of peasant

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

property and the division of this property from the holdings of landlords and commons, accelerated by the elimination of serfdom and the resulting conflicts over forests and usufruct. Second was the transformation of exploitation methods; that is, the obligatory implementation of rational-scientific methods since the 1890s and the resulting changes in the usual business model, from commons to leasing of exploitation rights. In social terms, it was also a shift towards the individualization of property both within and outside of commons.[41]

In this process, the state and an emerging capitalist group, often with imperial ambitions, created pressure on local societies and forced them to transition from the traditional model by various means.[42] Division of property and elimination of usufruct rights, expropriation, new legal obligations, obligatory state management and state supervision were the means of the state, while forestry companies promised higher and more stable revenues. Those local communities, which were part of a larger communal property (Năsăud, Saxons, Csíki Magánjavak, Banat Community of Property), were better suited to benefit from this process and simultaneously preserve elements of the traditional exploitation models (mainly distribution of natural resources among households and communes). The elites who controlled these properties were often the same ones who negotiated political compromises with the Hungarian government,[43] while the emerging imperial capitalists not infrequently came from the aristocracy, as their forest holdings served as the cornerstone of expanding forestry empires.

The changes were often presented as parts of broader nation-building efforts, sometimes linking forest use with nationalist concerns in unexpected ways, like with white slavery. But for the local peasants, state intervention and development were often not enough to mitigate the direct effects of changing property rights and exploitation methods on their lives. As state-led development efforts rarely yielded the expected results, at least at first, local communities were not attracted to the exploitation forms promoted from outside of their communities, as the revolutionary period and interwar Romanian politics soon demonstrated.

The Moment of Truth? Revolution in and around the Forests

The most significant indication that the relative peace of rural communities did not equate to an absence of conflict over resource exploitation was the way in which forests became a major object of contestation during the 1918 revolution – and without replicating the clear national dividing lines drawn by the political elites. In the tangled web of national social and political claims, locals usually had very concrete and tangible goals: to retain or

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Figure 5.2. The funicular of the narrow-gauge railway leading from Kommandó/ Comandău to Kovászna/Covasna railway station, 1926. © Fortepan.hu/Katalin Kiss, public domain.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

reclaim the forests they considered to have been lost to unjust owners or unfair managers. And those claims were deeply rooted in the past, sometimes going back more than the previous decade. The Romanian communities in the Ghurghiul Valley (Görgény-völgy) offer a telling example of such long-standing grievances. In the village of Görgényhodák (Hodac), the first session of the Romanian National Council adopted a resolution demanding that the Great Council (*sfatul cel mare*) – which was to discuss the rightful demands of the oppressed nations and communities – specifically address their claims to the forests around the village they had lost in 1848.[44] In the nearby village of Görgényorsova (Orșova), the National Council held an assembly on 1 December, the very day of the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia. Here the participants decided to reinforce the defence of the community forests and to send delegates to the neighbouring villages warning them not to enter these forests without permission.[45]

Hope of injustice being remedied was widespread, and peasants took concrete steps to achieve their goals too. However, while state actors continued to connect changes in the forests and the rationalization of forest management with nation-building, peasants used this framing very superficially or strategically, as the above examples show. The end of an unjust political system was the precondition for reversing grievances, but the entitlement of individual villages was rarely – if at all – bound together with nation-building. And their hope for justice was often disappointed by the state. As promising as the agrarian reform sounded, its execution was bogged down by two factors: the state's insistence on retaining control over forests and the attempts of the owners to salvage their properties.[46] It was customary for noble landowners, from Mikes to Count Miklós Bánffy (the writer and theatre-director politician), to either sort their holdings into separate companies in all the successor states, hoping that by pretending to be a 'Romanian' or 'Czechoslovak' company they would be exempt from expropriation,[47] or to lease forests to entrepreneurs in advance of the decree on land reform coming into effect. As a result, they could contest the expropriation decisions in court with the argument that reneging on the contracts would necessitate pecuniary compensation or pointing out that their companies did not fall under the scope of the law.[48]

Disappointment, even anger, was fuelled by how the management of the large communal properties was determined. Villagers hoped to carve out their own community forests from these large holdings, but the state had different ideas.[49] Although most of the *Nationsuniversität*'s property was expropriated, the large forests up in the mountains were barely accessible to peasants and their management remained as it was before. Feltrinelli's politically well-connected company, now under the name Societate Forestieră Feltrinelli din Tălmaci (Feltrinelli Forestry Company in Tălmaci/Nagytalmács) continued to prosper in Greater Romania. The people of Năsăud were similarly disap-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

pointed as the state did not rescind the existing lease contracts and, after their expiration, the state forestry apparatus initially took over management instead of distributing the forests among the villages as many of the locals demanded. Later, a new company nominally owned by the forty-four villages, but managed by the cadres of the state forestry apparatus, continued exploitation.[50] In Maramureş, the local Greek Catholic, Romanian-speaking noble elites, who were part of the social coalition dominating the county before 1918, maintained their grip on communal properties, drawing the ire of radical nationalists, whose publications decried this group as a feudal Hungarian oligarchy strangling the true Romanians.[51]

Finally, despite all the nationalist rhetoric and gestures of empathy towards them, the Moţi, whose situation was the worst in terms of the effects of the changes in forest exploitation, were also left without effective help. Large landowners hindered expropriation; the most notorious case was Mór Tischler, a forestry entrepreneur in Cluj/Kolozsvár, who leased the forests of several Hungarian aristocrats alongside his own property. He succeeded in overturning the decision of the agrarian reform commission and regained 80% of his holdings in the mountains.[52] The state also refused to return to the status of forests before the reforms of the late nineteenth century. The Ruling Council (whose leaders frequently attacked the Hungarian government prior to 1918 for its neglect of the area) and later the Bucharest government established a Government Commissariat for the Ţara Moţilor (alternately the Munţi Apuseni), fulfilling the earlier demand of extending the Hungarian system of development actions to this region.[53] Although arguably a symbolic remedy or compensation, the attempt was not quite successful in terms of transformation of rural life. Large-scale plans for development were drawn up mostly along the lines of Hungarian-era ideas, like building roads and railways and establishing medical dispensaries and vocational education, but concrete investment remained very limited. It is thus hardly surprising that the locals often insisted that the state should at least grant them those minor advantages in terms of tax and railway tariff exemptions that the Hungarian government had done.[54]

Obviously, political rupture did not mean a rupture of how nation- and state-building and the role of modern forestry therein was envisaged; only its presumed beneficiaries changed. The state continued its efforts to transform the forests in terms of capitalist exploitation, often with the same companies, businessmen, managers and engineers as before 1918. Not even state-controlled communal properties were redistributed. Locals in most areas wanted to reclaim their rights to use the forests (in Năsăud, the locals even wanted to disband the fund and share it among the communities), but the state resisted any such attempts in the name of profitability and efficient management. (In reality, corruption and bribery of owners and exploiters did play as important a role as these rational considerations.) Thus, the mountains became a scene

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:55:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of violence and petty crimes; the Moți occupied certain areas by force and at one moment Tischler sued them for compensation. The state had no effective way to remedy the situation and it had to accept that control of the area was slipping away, demonstrated by regular amnesties for forest delinquencies.[55]

Discontent Brewing in the Mountains: Peasant Mobilization and Forests

While the Năsăud funds were explicitly exempt from expropriation and distribution under the agrarian reform,[56] the large fund of the Banat Community of Property was not. Thirty-eight thousand acres from the forests of the former Serbian regiment were annexed to Romania and immediately taken over by the state forestry apparatus for exploitation and management. The much-larger Banat Community of Property (Caransebeș) faced extensive demands from local peasants who occupied thousands of acres and demanded pasture for their own private use. In the meantime, the state forced the community to rent some of its holdings at fixed prices, a decision that the community hotly contested. The reform led to large-scale expropriation, and the Community of Property was able to reverse the decision regarding only about 15,000 acres. Based on specific provisions of the law, it could also retain 45,000 acres of pasture as communal property for communal use, which meant its use was limited to the 31,000 descendants of the former border guards. Thus, it was managed by the community, either as communal property or rented out, but this division of the population fuelled latent discontent even here, where self-administration by elected representatives and leaders continued unabated.[57]

When it came to visions of community and nature, it was rather the state that espoused a nationalism with ecological tenets. The development plans both before and after 1918 reflected the metropolitan–secular progressivist view of nature and nation, treated the forest as a resource for large-scale projects and sought to change the life of the mountain population to free these resources. However, the mountain population was imagined and perceived with a basically ethnic concept of the nation. Their authenticity, purportedly the purest, oldest of the nation, was the reason for assistance, a line of argumentation inherited from the Hungarian action plans. Locals appropriated this logic of nationalism and used it strategically and instrumentally to put moral pressure on the governments and legitimize their own claims in a country where most of the rural countryside competed for scarce financial resources.[58] However, for peasants local practical issues were political, and despite its national framing as a political issue, their ideal mountain economy was better understood in terms of the customs and traditions of mountain agriculture than as any supposedly authentic relationship between the community and its natural

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

environment.[59] Any argument framing forest use in terms of a community and its relation to nature was further undermined by the signs of continuing individualization of the peasants. While it was seemingly aligned with the progressivism of the state apparatus, the specific demands, faced by the large self-governing communal fund from its members for more individual plots instead of commons, demonstrated otherwise. Individualization proceeded at a different scale than the state would have preferred: entitlements were related to concrete property instead of income and benefits, and individual plots were requested, against the logic of rational exploitation promoted by the state.[60]

In Năsăud, the discontent with continued state management of the forests was a source of political mobilization on behalf of the opposition, the Romanian National (later National Peasant) Party, which promised continuation of the agrarian reform and community management of the fund. When the party came to power in 1928, however, it failed to deliver on its promise of restitution of the forests to the communes and retained the Regna cooperative established in 1926 for the exploitation of the property.[61] After thirty-five years of state forestry management, it was in a sense a return to the original form of ownership, but with more up-to-date management provided by former state forestry engineers, which was supposed to ensure modern, scientific management, popular participation in decisions and fair sharing of profits among communities. The reality was different. Mismanagement on the one hand, the insistence of the communes on dissolving the fund on the other, together with the Great Depression, sank the Regna quickly. The government ordered the state forestry apparatus to take over management and start financial stabilization, leading to solvency. The reaction was immediate and violent: locals mobilized and marched on the city of Bistrița, taking the county prefect hostage until their demands were met.[62]

This episode exemplifies how Romania's rural world was perceived, evidenced by the fact that a classic of interwar Romanian sociology, the article 'Local Politics in a Romanian Village', published in Dimitire Gusti's journal *Sociologie Românească*, used the story as the basis of its analyses of rural politics. And it was definitely not atypical to see violence in conjunction with forests and forestry, occasionally or as part of broader political mobilization efforts.[63] Neighbouring villages clashed over pastures while Saxon villagers chased Romani groups (who were allegedly cutting down their trees) out of their forests. As state development plans failed to deliver (they were rarely more than electoral speeches and brochures printed on shiny paper)[64] and the state refused to satisfy the peasants' desire for their own forests, instead pushing forward with modernizing and rationalizing forest exploitation for profit, a dangerous mix of resentment, nationalist sentiment and a sense of abandonment took hold in the rural mountain population. The target of the growing anger was, ultimately, the 'Hungarian feudal oligarchy' and their 'allies',

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Jewish entrepreneurs, but the ire of the people could easily be directed against Romanian politicians too.[65]

A case in point is the murder of Mór Tischler by an invalid veteran officer, tobacco seller Emil Şiancu, in the courthouse. This case unites almost all aspects of the problem and exemplifies its violent potential. As mentioned, Tischler leased the property of Hungarian aristocrats and also retained his own forests, blocking locals' return to traditional mountain economy. They intruded into his forests, while the state planned to buy his holdings for local redistribution – a plan that was never realized.[66] While Tischler's practice hardly differed from the state forestry's restrictive policies, it was easier for a man like Şiancu, with extreme right-wing sympathies, to bring local emotions to bear on the Jewish Tischler rather than the nationalist Romanian state. The juridical process regarding the ownership rights of the Tischler forests dragged on for a long time, with secondary criminal cases initiated against locals who intruded on the property. Then, on 29 May 1933, Şiancu drew a revolver in the corridor of the Bucharest courthouse and shot Tischler.[67] Şiancu was put on trial, acquitted and revered as a hero of the Moți. (He was later killed as a member of the Legionary movement in a detainment camp during the king's dictatorship.) The Tischler forests were finally expropriated, but they hardly helped the Moți.[68]

Despite the eruption of such emotions and the incontestable nationalist logic and arguments legitimizing them, the state was still not willing to relinquish forest exploitation, a source of stable income (both as illicit income for individual politicians involved in corruption and as money for the treasury) and also a potential field of rapid modernization, a dream of dualist Hungary and interwar Romania alike. Thus, the state held on to its development programmes, although their efficiency was not high – as demonstrated by the fact that the plans announced a few years later echoed the initial ones to the minute details. All rural development programmes in mountainous areas counted on wood as a resource and raw material for transforming the rural economy through rational and profitable exploitation and use in industry and construction. Thus, wood was seen not only as a provision for basic needs, but also as a catalyst for transforming an agrarian society into an industrial one. Given the experiences with self-management (most notably the failure of Regna that was to be liquidated in 1940), there was ample reason to accept that only state development could realize this transformation – despite the not-insignificant counterexamples (most notably the relative stability of the Banat Community of Property, which preserved its autonomy).[69]

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

State-Building and National Authenticity with and without Ecological Nationalism

The continuity of state efforts to introduce new exploitation methods to the detriment of traditional usage – along with that of the actors within the process and of the mixed popular reaction to the Romanian state's development plans – seems paradoxical only if we accept that the transition from dualist Hungary to Greater Romania was a rupture in terms of statehood and its normative aspects; that is, its legitimizing ideology. National liberation from the imperial yoke certainly implied reparation for the wrongs of Hungarian rule, and state intervention into the mountain economy was one of them, according to the locals. True, both dualist Hungary and Greater Romania presented a nationalist vision for the exploitation of forests, along more or less uniform lines, devised in the name of economic efficiency and portrayed as conducive to deep social transformations that would finally alleviate hardship in the mountains. In this form, it was a typical metropolitan-secularist, progressivist perspective: integration of the larger national body through modernization and environmental transformation. However, the nationalism underpinning its goals was rather essentialist, depicting the people of the mountains as authentic and pure, deserving help for exactly these qualities. Those who spoke in the name of the people did not challenge this view, but rather appropriated this language strategically, thus not creating an alternative or rival nationalism but instead using the language of traditional practices and customs and historical rights, drawing legitimacy both from the past (the idea that it is feasible and right to return to older ways) and from the realities of the mountain economy among the existing social and economic conditions (where, for the typical mountain household without capital investment, this traditional mode of exploitation with large commons was the most advantageous). Regionalism was, however, subsumed into the broader vison of the nation represented by the state, authenticity dissolved within, and often the latter operated as a strategic, instrumental argumentation. While elements of an indigenist regionalist econationalism were present, the metropolitan remained dominant, not least because the understanding of authenticity shifted away from authentic ecologist practices to essentialist group qualities, and locals accepted the inner logic of hierarchy based on this form of authenticity instead of progress as advantageous for their own objectives.

Therefore, interwar Romania's story is not only about ecological nationalism, but also about imperial and national statehood and state-building before and after 1918. The widespread existence of communal properties and the various forms of ownership and management were not simply the result of economic modernization and capitalism; they were the legacy of a feudal Hungary and a composite state despite Hungary's claims of being a unitary

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

nation state.[70] The communal properties in the Banat, Năsăud, the Saxon forests and the Csiki Magánjavak embodied a past that was more imperial and, as elements of differentiated rule, were also building blocks of an imperial present for Hungary. Moreover, in the case of the Saxons and the Banat forests, autonomous management was part of the political compromise between Hungarian nationalist governments and minority regional elites, and also a constitutive element of a semiformal autonomy of the latter.[71]

With radical agrarian reforms reducing their size and with extended state control over these resources, interwar Romania also limited the leverage local elites, who managed these resources, had over the central government. As demonstrated by the limited efficiency of post-1918 Moți development projects as opposed to the pre-1918 Székely Akció, symbolic capital alone was not enough for regional elites to coerce the centre into concrete action or to find a compromise with the central government. However, where local elites retained control over these resources, like in Maramureş, it gave them enough weight to continue informal regionalist practices.[72]

But alongside their political significance, the forests were the scene and object of modernization attempts and this tendency led to a conflict between supposedly rational and traditional ideas, between knowledge-based, modern expertise and backward forms of exploitation. Thus, the renewal of forest management and the introduction of new exploitation strategies was both a development effort and an intrusion into communal life. The resulting conflict, continuous over the political moment of 1918, was not easy to resolve, either before or after 1918. From the perspective of the agents of the state, modernization was not just a rational economic solution, but the way to eliminate backwardness. Both Hungary and Romania saw themselves as the modernizer, the civilizer, of areas in need of intervention, although their perception of the people was different based on ethnic distinction: coethnics were to be rescued from decay and helped to fulfil their national destiny, while other ethnicities were to be tamed and obstructed or brought into the fold as pro-Magyars – as envisioned for the Ruthenians of Northeastern Hungary. It is therefore hardly surprising that the same practices were applied by Hungary and Romania differently within their respective territories and that they served different political purposes in the various regions – a characteristic and probably also a legacy of the Empire.

Through this state intervention and these differentiated practices, forestry was inextricably entangled with state-building at least since the late nineteenth century, both as a project of modernization – through which the state extended its jurisdiction and power over spheres and spaces hitherto relatively autonomous from its intervention – and as a project of nation-building. As such, it also palpably showed the tensions between these goals. Forestry became a means of differentiated rule, a typical feature of imperial statehood,

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

with experts and their knowledge becoming essential for upholding differentiation. Thus, efforts to manage the conflict over the forests were akin to imperial states even after the fall of the Empire, while this approach, mostly because of its entanglement with modernization goals, also simultaneously generated and calmed social tensions.[73]

But with differentiated management winding down, the nationalizing aspects became more pronounced. Differentiated rule within a normative nation state – despite the compromises carried over from Hungary to Romania on the peripheries, in Maramureş and Banat – was less a function of institutions and legacies and more the outcome of random factors, like bribery or political networks.[74] Only the de facto distinction, sometimes discrimination, made between minority and majority communities regarding ownership rights was more or less systematic before and after 1918. But gradual uniformization of forest management diminished the importance of such differences, which explains the fact that the violence was more pronounced in Romanian-inhabited areas after 1918. In this sense, the most important legacies of imperial state-building for the forests were the central role of experts and expertise as well as the integration of local elites. Differentiated rule as an imperial form of management of society became secondary. While in Hungary forestry was one of the spheres where the normative nationalizing state admittedly coexisted with an institutionalized (in this sense simultaneously normative and functional) imperial state, Greater Romania changed this relationship, only accepting the continuous existence of the functional imperial state under the condition that it remained uninstitutionalized and was only part of informal political compromises.

Gábor Egry is a historian, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, director-general of the Institute of Political History, Budapest, and author of five volumes in Hungarian as well as several articles in *European Review of History*, *Slavic Review*, *Hungarian Historical Review*, *Südostforschungen*, among others. Winner of the Mark Pittaway Article Prize in 2018, his monograph *Etnicitás, identitás, politika Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* [Ethnicity, Identity, Politics: Hungarian Minorities between Nationalism and Regionalism in Romania and Czechoslovakia 1918–1944] received a Honorable Mention for the Felczak-Wereszyczki Prize of the Polish Historical Association. Between 2018 and 2023 he was the Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator project *Nepostrans – Negotiating Post-Imperial Transitions: From Remobilization to Nation-State Consolidation. A Comparative Study of Local and Regional Transitions in Post-Habsburg East and Central Europe*, which supported research for this chapter.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Notes

1. Egry, 'Armed Peasants'; Brett, 'Indifferent but Mobilized'.
2. Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'
3. Ibid.
4. Egry, 'Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics'; Egry, *The Empire's New Clothes?*
5. Brett, 'Indifferent but Mobilized'; Beneš, 'The Green Cadres'.
6. Sivaramakrishnan and Cederlöf, *Ecological Nationalisms*.
7. Ibid., 3.
8. Ibid., 6.
9. Ibid., 7–8.
10. Szántay, 'Rural Commons', 92–93, 97–98.
11. Ibid., 99–100.
12. Orosz, *A jobbágyvilág megszűnése*, 121–43.
13. Vasile, 'Formalizing Commons', 176.
14. Ibid., 178.
15. Garda, *A székely közbirtokosság.*
16. Oroszi, 'Az erdélyi szászok erdőgazdálkodása', 97–101.
17. Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén'; Venczel, 'A kifosztott Székelyföld', 15–17; Endes, *Erdély három nemzete*, 413–34.
18. Oroszi, 'A bánsági volt határőrközségek'; Oroszi, 'Az erdélyi közösségi erdők'.
19. Roşu, *Comunitate de avere*, 68–69.
20. Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'; Vasile, 'Formalizing Commons', 184–88.
21. Nagy, *Mercur a keleti végeken* II. 125–49.
22. Ibid.; Képviselőházi Napló IV 1906, 308–10.
23. Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén', 99–100.
24. Nagy, *Mercur a keleti végeken* II, 129–46.
25. Oroszi, 'Az erdélyi közösségi erdők', 68–111.
26. Law XVII from 1890 'egyrészről a m. kir. pénzügyminister, másrészről a naszódvidéki központi iskola- és ösztöndijalapok és a volt naszódvidéki községek között létrejött szerződés és peregyezség tárgyában'. https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=89000017.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D33 (accessed 20 January 2023.)
27. Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén', 43–45.
28. Oroszi, 'Az erdélyi szászok erdőgazdálkodása', 97–99.
29. A szászhétbírák erdőeladása, Ellenzék, 29, 256; 7 November 1908, 2; Kossuth Ferencz és Szterényi sajtópanasza, Az Újság, 8. 301; 20 December 1910, 11–15. p. 14.
30. Egry, *Nemzeti védgát*.
31. Nagy, *Mercur a keleti végeken* II. 134–49.
32. Ibid.
33. Nagy, 'Erdővagyon-újraelosztás'; Adevarul August 13, 1912. 3., Adevarul June 19, 1921. 2; *Monitorul Oficial*, 26 February 1920, 12331–32.
34. Oroszi, 'A magyar kormány havasgazdálkodási'; Balaton, 'The Role of the Hungarian Government'.
35. Balaton, 'The Role of the Hungarian Government'; Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands', 717.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

36. Egry, 'A mócok útján Székelyföldre?', 494–95.
37. Balaton, 'A háziipar "felfedezése" és jelentősége'; Balaton and Reisz, 'A székelyföldi ipari akció'; Balaton, 'The Székely Action'.
38. Képviselőházi Napló IV 1906, 306–14; Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?', 15–16.
39. Egry, 'Regionalizmus, erdélyiség, szupremácia'.
40. Nagy, *Mercur a keleti végeken* I, 217–26.
41. Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'; Vasile, 'Formalizing Commons'; Szántay, 'Rural Commons'.
42. Rigó, *Capitalism in Chaos*, 64–82.
43. Egry, 'Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics'.
44. Arhivele Naționale Secția Județenă Mureş Colecție Manuscrise (National Archives of Romania, Mureş County Section, Manuscripts Collection) inventar 75. dosar 256. 38–39 et seq. The expression '*sfatul cel mare*' is not entirely clear; it could even refer to the upcoming peace conference.
45. Arhivele Naționale Secția Județenă Mureş Colecție Manuscrise (National Archives of Romania, Mureş County Section, Manuscripts Collection), inventar 75. dosar 256. 89–90 et sq.
46. Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'
47. Ibid.; Jánosi, '"Hontalanul"'.
48. Jánosi, '"Hontalanul"'; Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'; Egry, 'A mócok útján Székelyföldre?', 486–504.
49. Revendicările fiilor de grăniceri din Caransebeş (1919), Patria 1, 19. 8 March, p. 2; Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'; Vasile, 'Formalizing Commons'.
50. Micu, 'Viață politică'; Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén'; Pădurile grănicereşti. Revendicării!a unor comune grănicereşti (1929) Dimineața 25, 8149. 24 August, 8; Exploatarea pădurilor grănicereşti din ținutul Năsăudului (1931) Adevărul 44, 14700, 3 December, 3; „Regna" societatea grănicerilor năsăudeni. Răspuns unor acuzații. (1929) Patria 11, 89. 25 April, 7. It is an interesting example of imperial continuity that the technical director of the Regna company was Ioan Aleman, who served after 1904 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, at the forestry directorate in Sarajevo.
51. Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands', 722–23.
52. A Tischler erdők százmilliós vásárának ügyében Kolozsváron kezdték meg a kihallgatásokat (1930) Keleti Újság XIII, 123, 4 June 1930, 5; Hogyan játszották ki a mócokat az agráreformmal és a telepítéssel (1927) Budapesti Hírlap, 44. 97. 24 April, 5.
53. Egry, 'A mócok útján Székelyföldre?'
54. Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale Consiliul Dirigent, Administrația Generală (National Archives of Romania Central Historical Archives. Ruling Council, General Administration) dosar 10/1919 f. 102–4, Rusu Abrudeanu, 'Moți' 503–6.
55. Lege privitoare la amnistierea delictelor silvice săvârşite de locuitori din Țara Moților. Monitorul Oficial 56. 11 March 1925. 2561–62; N.N., 'Utazás Kolozsvártól Bukarestig', 70.
56. For more details, see Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?'
57. Roşu, *Comunitate de avere*, 249–54.
58. Andrei, 'Whose Nature Is It?', 15–17.
59. Egry, 'A mócok útján Székelyföldre?'; Brett, 'Indifferent but Mobilized'; Karch, *Nation and Loyalty*.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

60. Roşu, *Comunitate de avere*; Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén'. Bogdan Dumitru's Ph.D. thesis details cases of complaints about the execution of the agrarian reform when communities contested with fascinatingly different arguments as to what they saw as unfair. Dumitru, *An Uneasy Encounter*.
61. Micu, 'Viaţă politică'.
62. Ibid.; Oroszi, 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén', 75–80.
63. Micu, 'Viaţă politică'; Brett, 'Indifferent but Mobilized'.
64. Guvernul face totul şi nimic pentru Moţi (1927) Adevărul 40. 13444. 15 October, 2; Dandea, 'Chestiunea Moţilor'; Zanea, 'The Commisary of the Apuseni Mountain'.
65. Miskolczy, 'A Vasgárda színrelép', 87.
66. A Tischler erdők százmilliós.
67. Tischler Mór nagyvállalkozót Şiancu Emil kolozsvári kapitány egy revolverlövéssel halálosan megsebesítette (1930) Keleti Újság 16. 121. 30 May, 1–2.
68. Felmentő ítélet a Şiancu pörben (1934) Keleti Újság 17. 266. 19 November, 5.
69. Roşu, *Comumintate de avere*, 122–27; Oroszi, 'A bánsági volt határőrközségek', 91–92.
70. Egry, 'Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics'.
71. Ibid.
72. Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands', 722–23.
73. Hirschhausen, 'A New Imperial History?'
74. Egry, 'Unruly Borderlands'.

Bibliography

Andrei, George. 'Whose Nature Is It? Contesting Forest Regulation and Land Reform in Interwar Transylvania'. *Balkanologie* 16(2) (2022). https://doi.org/10.4000/balkanologie.3289.

Balaton, Petra. 'A háziipar "felfedezése" és jelentősége a Székelyföldön, a 19–20. század fordulóján'. *Orpheus Noster* 1 (2017), 7–19.

———. 'The Role of the Hungarian Government in the Development of Peripheries in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Focusing the Policy of the Ministry of Agriculture (1897–1914)', in Semsey Viktória, Balaton Petra, Horváth Csaba and José Antonio Sánchez Román (eds), *National Identity and Modernity 1870–1945. Latin America, Southern Europe, East Central Europe* (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, L'Harmattan 2019), 241–54.

———. 'The Székely Action (1902–1914) The Example of Regional Economic Development in Austro-Hungarian Monarchy'. *Ungarn Jahrbuch. Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre Hungarologie* 33 (2017), 223–36.

Balaton, Petra and Csaba T. Reisz. 'A székelyföldi ipari akció'. *Levéltári Közlemények* 2 (2006), 55–122.

Beneš, Jakub S. 'The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918'. *Past & Present* 236(1) (2017), 207–41. https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx028.

Brett, Daniel. 'Indifferent but Mobilized: Rural Politics during the Interwar Period in Eastern and Western Europe', *Central Europe*, 16(2) (2018), 65–80.

Dandea, Emil. 'Chestiunea Moţilor'. *Societatea de Mâine* 3(19) (1926), 356–58.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275.
Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:55:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Dumitru, Bogdan. *An Uneasy Encounter: National Activists Meet the People: Negotiating National Identity and Political Loyalty in Interwar Transylvania*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, Gainsville 2021.

Egry, Gábor. 'A mócok útján Székelyföldre? Elmaradottság, fejlesztéspolitika és regionalizmus a 20. század első felében', in Orbán Zsolt (ed.), *Székelyföld és a Nagy Háború. Tanulmánykötet az első világháború centenáriuma alkalmából* (Csíkszereda: Csíkszereda Kiadóhivatal, 2018), 486–504.

———. 'Armed Peasants, Violent Intellectuals, and Political Guards: Trajectories of Violence in a Failed Nation State, 1918–1940'. *Střed-Centre* 9(1) (2018), 34–54.

———. *Nemzeti védgát vagy szolid haszonszerzés? Az erdélyi szászok pénzintézeti rendszere és szerepe a nemzeti mozgalomban 1835–1914*. Csíkszereda: Pro Print, 2008.

———. 'Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics, Local Accommodations. Center-Periphery Struggles in Late Dualist Hungary', in Bernhard Bachinger, Wolfram Dornik and Stephan Lehnstaedt (eds), *Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen: Nationalismen und Rivalitäten im Habsburgerreich um 1900* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress 2019), 333–53.

———. 'Regionalizmus, erdélyiség, szupremácia. Az Erdélyi Szövetség és Erdély jövője, 1913–1918'. *Századok* 147(1) (2013), 3–32.

———. *The Empire's New Clothes? How Austria-Hungary's Legacy Kept the Successor States Running*. Leiden: Foundation for Austrian Studies, 2022.

———. 'Unruly Borderlands: Border-Making, Peripheralization and Layered Regionalism in Post-First World War Maramureș and the Banat'. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*. 27(6) (2020) 709–31.

Endes, Miklós. *Erdély három nemzete és négy vallása autonómiájának története*. Budapest: Sylvester Nyomda, 1935.

Garda, Dezső. *A székely közbirtokosság*. Csíkszereda: Státus kiadó, 2002.

Hirschhuasen, Ulrike v. 'A New Imperial History? Programm, Potenzial, Perspektiven', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41 (2015), 718–57.

Jánosi, Csongor. '"Hontalanul": védekezési technikák a két világháború között Nagy-Romániában. Gróf Mikes Ármin (1868–1944)'. *Pro Minoritate* 28(2) (2018), 3–32.

Karch, Brendan. *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1965*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Micu, Constantin. 'Viață politică a unui sat din Năsăud'. *Sociologie Românească* 2(9–10) (1937), 459–65.

Miskolczy, Ambrus. 'A Vasgárda színrelép'. *Holmi* 25(1) (2013) 82–101.

N.N. 'Utazás Kolozsvártól Bukarestig'. *A Jövő Társadalma. Huszonegyedik Század* 4 (1928), 69–73.

Nagy, Botond. 'Erdővagyon-újraelosztás és faipari nagyvállalatok megjelenése Háromszéken'. *Certamen* I (2013), 335–52.

———. *Mercur a keleti végeken. Határszéli gazdasági környezet és üzleti modellek a dualizmuskori Háromszéken 1867–1918*. I–II. Kolozsvár: EME-Kriterion 2021.

Orosz, István. *A jobbágyvilág megszűnése Magyarországon*. Debrecen: Debrecen University Press 2010.

Oroszi, Sándor. 'A bánsági volt határközségek (Krassó-Szörény vármegye) erdőgazdálkodása'. *Erdészettörténeti Közlemények* 58 (2003).

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

———. 'A magyar kormány havasgazdálkodási programjának gazdaságpolitikai háttere (1898–1918)'. *Agrártörténeti Szemle* 32(1–4) (1989) 27–55.
———. 'Az erdélyi közösségi erdők története'. *Erdészettörténeti Közlemények* 64 (2004).
———. 'Az erdélyi szászok erdőgazdálkodása'. *Erdészettörténeti Közlemények* 63 (2004).
———. 'Erdőgazdálkodás Naszód vidékén'. *Erdészettörténeti Közlemények* 57 (2003).
Rigó, Máté. *Capitalism in Chaos: How the Business Elites of Europe Prospered in the Era of the Great War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022.
Roşu, Ovidiu Laurenţiu. *Comunitatea de avere a fostului regiment grăniceresc româno-bănăţean Nr 13 din Caransebeş 1879–1948*. Caransebeş: Muzeul Banatului Montan – Editura Cosmopolitan Art, 2010.
Rusu Abrudeanu, Ioan. *Moţi: Calvarul unui popor eroic, dar nedreptăţit*. Bucuresti: Cartea Românească, 1928.
Sivaramakrishnan, Kalyanakrishnan and Gunnel Cederlöf. 'Ecological Nationalisms: Claiming Nature for Making History', in Idem (eds), *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia* (Seattle: Washington University Press 2008), 1–40.
Szántay, Antal. 'Rural Commons in Eighteenth-Century Hungary'. *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes* 12 (2015), 91–102.
Vasile, Monica. 'Formalizing Commons, Registering Rights: The Making of the Forest and Pasture Commons in the Romanian Carpathians from the Nineteenth Century to Post-Socialism'. *International Journal of the Commons* 12(1) (2018), 170–201.
Venczel, József. 'A kifosztott Székelyföld'. *Magyar Külpolitika* 9(22) (1928), 15–17.
Zanea, Iosif. 'The Commissary of the Apuseni Mountain and Its Plan for Economic Recovery of the Region (1934–1936)'. *Cumidava* 30 (2007), 104–15.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781836952275. Not for resale.
This content downloaded from 77.240.108.158 on Tue, 14 Oct 2025 06:35:14 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms