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Redefining Social Relations through Work in a Rural Community in Poland

Michał Buchowski¹

Abstract

Dziekanowice is a small rural community in Wielkopolska (Poznań, Great Poland, Großpolen) in western Poland that has undergone several changes caused by the introduction of free market principles. One of the factors that has redefined social relationships and helped to conceptualise them is 'work'. By using combined criteria of economic, social and cultural capital we can distinguish four social groups in the village: white-collar workers, rural proletarians, village proletarians and farmers. In the past, they used to share different images about a just society and the equality of classes, as well as of the meaning of work in defining the value of a person or group of persons. The state acted as the major employer in the community that also provided social security for all those employed in the public sector. Farmers were the only ones who worked on their own and this helped them to sustain the value of work as a distinctive characteristic of their class ethos. After the closure of the local state farm and the collapse of many small state enterprises in the neighbourhood, labour relations have significantly changed in the village during the 1990s. Many former state employees have been forced to find a job with local entrepreneurs and capital makers, some of them farmers living in the same community and being perceived as social equals, while others continue to be dependent on jobs offered by the local museum, a public institution that is the largest single employer in the neighbourhood. Changes in the local 'labour market' create new dynamics of social relations in which 'work' features as a significant factor shaping these relations and simultaneously contributes to the creation of personal and group identities. This essay explores these work-related problems of identity and social relationships that can be observed in this rural community.

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‘Transformation’, Class, Culture and Work²

Throughout most of western and northern Europe, anthropological discourse on agriculture is “a dying art form” (Abrahams 1991: 167). However, in Poland 38 percent of the entire population, i.e. 14.8 million out of 38.7 million citizens, live in non-urban areas; 25.7% of all those employed in 1999 earn their living in agriculture, forestry and hunting (Rocznik 2000: xxxvii, xxxix). The number of people employed in this sector totals 4.25 million, of which four million work on private farms (Rocznik 2000: 130-132) and account for more than a quarter of the country’s work force. In 1998 there were close to two million farms bigger than one hectare that hold more than 83% of agricultural land area (Rocznik 2000: 335, 337).³ Agriculture comprises the major source of income (25-30% of all agricultural households) or one among other resources (70-75% among these households) for more than ten million people (Turowski 1994: 151; 1995: 13)⁴. It is a paradox that today local ethnologists altogether bypass extended fieldwork with rural people. Nevertheless, a few anthropological works on rural people in Poland have been carried out mostly by Anglo-Saxon and Polish researchers who published in English (cf. monographs by Hann 1985; Nagengast 1991; Buchowski 1997 and articles by Pine 1993; 1994; 1995; 2002; Zbierski-Salameh 1999; Buchowski 1995; 2001). In what follows, I will follow the steps of the tradition which combines ethnographic detail with theoretical insights. My field site, contrary to those chosen by western anthropologists, is not located in Małopolska, formerly part of the Austrian partition of Poland called Galicia, but in Wielkopolska, now a central-western region of the country that used to be a Prussian part of the divided historical Polish Commonwealth. In Wielkopolska, in comparison to Małopolska, agriculture has a unified land structure, a bigger proportion of large estates than in the south-east (before World War II it was privately owned

² An earlier version of these arguments was presented at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in April 2001. The main part of the research in 1994 and 1995 was supported by the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin. A visit to the field in the summer of 1995 was financed by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and my summer stay in 1996 by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Afterwards, I have visited Dziekanowice each summer. I would like to thank the people of Dziekanowice, especially the Michałowicz, whose compassion and hospitality made this research possible. For more ethnographic detail and theoretical arguments see Buchowski 1995 and 1997. All translations of citations from Polish are mine. I would like to thank Peter Finke, Deema Kaneff and Bettina Mann for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

³ In 1990, 76% of the farmland in Poland was in private hands, 18.7% was owned by the state, 3.7% by cooperatives, 1.6% by so-called Agricultural Circles. Farms below five hectares covered 52.8% of arable land, 17.7% among them had one to two hectares, and 35.1% between two and five hectares (Pilichowski 1994: 165-166). Maurel (1994: 99) provides similar data.

⁴ The Main Statistical Office announced that in 2002 the number of people somehow linked to agricultural production amounted to 10,475,500 persons, i.e. 27.4% of the total population in Poland. However, this number is close to 10% lower than in 1996; only one fifth of those engaged in agriculture make their living solely on the farm, and 48% solely on the farm and mainly on the farm. More than 12% of all farms are also active in other kinds of entrepreneurship, e.g. construction industry, transportation, food processing, trade. See Naszkowska 2003: 3.

and after it was nationalised) and, despite the meagre quality of the soil, a high productivity level.

Before we enter the ethnography, I wish to explain some theoretical points and analytical notions. We should be wary of the notion of a so-called *systemic transformation*. Change “is not a parade that can be watched as it passes” (Geertz 1995: 4) and it is up to researchers to catch glimpses of these phenomena. The last decade of the twentieth century has become part of the reality of post-communist societies, which magically tends towards ‘the ideal of western societies.’⁵ Indeed, the transforming of economic, social and legal structural framework influences people’s lives. However, one may wonder if these changes should be described in extraordinary terms of unprecedented transition from one system to the other (often presented as progress). This point is particularly valid with regard to Polish agriculture. The policy towards it over the five decades of ‘real socialism’ ranged from land reform through forced collectivisation, decollectivisation, and ‘oppressive tolerance’ to favourable treatment (cf. Nagengast 1991: 95-120) and is called ‘tolerant oppression’ today. For rural people living conditions have always altered with time and the changes taking place today are just another link in the chain of history. What appears to scholars as a systemic transformation does not necessarily affect people’s lives in a revolutionary way.

I will look at the work-related changes in a local rural community through the lens of different *social groups*. I will call them classes in the sense given below. Social status shapes individual behaviour rooted in customs and the way interpersonal and inter-group relations are perceived and how the world is conceptualised. Simultaneously, people’s attitudes are parameters that determine group affiliation. In this way, human acts and views constitute class identity and at the same time they are constituted by it. The concepts of ‘labour’ and ‘work’ comprise a significant aspect of these identities. All these classification parameters are culturally constructed, and the reproduction of class identity takes on a specific historical form. The question arises which particular form social relations take in the post-socialist era. Individuals adapt to new circumstances by referring to their cultural competence in order to re-establish their status. New strategies emerge as society’s segments and individuals develop defence mechanisms in the face of structural transformations. This participation is built into

⁵ Katherine Verdery writes: “A number of the stories of post-socialism have the knights of Western know-how rushing to rescue the distressed Eastern Europe. (...) The rescue scenario has two common variants: ‘shock therapy’ and ‘big bang’. The first compares the former socialist bloc with a person suffering from mental illness – that is, socialism drove them crazy, and our job is to restore their sanity. The second implies that (*pace* Fukuyama) history is only now beginning, that prior to 1989 the area was without form and void” (1996: 205). In this study I want to show, *inter alia*, that these scenarios do not have much in common with the situation in Central Europe.

everyday life and individuals permanently modify their “models [that] are made and remade through use” (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 15).

My usage of the notion of *class* goes beyond both traditional and modified Marxist approaches that reduce it to “job and property position (...) in the social division of labour and in the division of economic property” (Kozyr-Kowalski 1995: 334). Agricultural producers, e.g. peasants and agricultural workers, can do similar work, but have a different relationship to property. A recourse to the ‘means of production’ alone is too mechanistic for an anthropologist. For Wesołowski, a class division is “an unequal and conflictive distribution of property, power and knowledge in a social system” (1995: 301). All these elements are convertible and thus form the social potential of a given group of people. As Nagengast (1991: 176) observes, class is constituted by a constellation of variables such as the ownership of the means of production, knowledge, forms of symbolic, social, and economic capital as defined by Bourdieu (1990). Culture can also be a factor in this equation as class has its own identity and ethos. In the anthropological sense, class should be understood

“as a structuring of subject positions within a differentiated field of value-power (...) [It is] the structure of and physiology of space within which value-power is created and distributed. Class dynamics has to do with the flows – the production, loss, transfer, accumulation, and consumption, that is, the differential distribution – of value-power by persons situated within class spaces”. (Kearney 1996: 168)

In other words, “value is unevenly distributed among different *class positions* located in a field in which values are unevenly produced, exchanged, accumulated and consumed” (Kearney 2001: 256). Value assumes a meaning similar to Bourdieu’s forms of capital and covers not only the production but also the consumption of economic value and culture⁶. All are inevitably connected with power relations. Class relations are objective, in the sense that they exist independently of their recognition by acting people, but can serve as an identity marker. Subjective identities are culturally created and quite often function as diacritics of social belonging (Kearney 2001: 256).

Culture is seen as an aspect of social action and social relations. It makes them self-evident, ‘natural’ and comprehensible. However, culture is also a variable that differentiates people. It comprises a field of confrontation for contesting social groups. According to Abu-Lughod, past views of culture show “the tendency toward essentialism (...) [which] tends to freeze

⁶ Kearney declares: “I prefer to speak of *generalized value*, which is comparable to Bourdieu’s forms of capital. I, however, prefer *value*, since it is a more general term that does not connote any specific mode of production, as does *capital*, which is associated with capitalism. Value is also more polysemous than capital, equally at home in economics and in aesthetics and ethics.” (1996: 161-162).

differences (...) to overemphasize coherence [and] contribute to the perception of communities as bounded and discrete” (1991: 146).

Culture, seen as a practice and simultaneously as a set of interpreted symbols, is conceptualised ”as a ‘field of discourse’ (...) as an arena in which values, norms and patterns of meanings of cultural actors are permanently negotiated” (translation by M.B.; Schiffauer 1997: 148). Meanings are achieved and constantly transformed through daily discourses and actions, which allow us to account for both the internal dynamic of change and the logic of intercultural exchange.

At this point the notions of culture and class intersect. They refer to the same ‘reality’ and when combined assume dynamic significance. Culture is an important variable conditioning social relations, i.e., in the process of shaping social relations “culture matters” (Sider 1986: 10). However, culture is an aspect of this social relation realised by acting people and these human actions and thoughts are what is most important for anthropologists. Wo/men in their *habitus*, to refer again to Bourdieu’s notion, is what interests us. The behavioural dispositions of a person are conditioned by one’s social status and simultaneously modified in practice and via practice, which then – in return – influence changes in those social relations. Ethnographic fieldwork is a method of observing people in their environment. The perception of *work*, attitudes towards it, the value assigned to this culturally defined notion, are important factors creating the network of social divisions and alliances. People identify themselves and classify others through it and are described by others in relation to, among other parameters, this socially constructed category. Now let us see, how ‘work’ is perceived in Dziekanowice.

The Actors in their Place

Dziekanowice is a village located in an agricultural commune (*gmina*), Łubowo,⁷ north-east of Poznań on the road to Gniezno. Most of the ca. 400 inhabitants are farming families, but some farm dwellers also have other ways of making a living constituting a category of ‘worker-peasants’. Twenty former agricultural workers of the local state farm after its demise

⁷ The commune’s territory is 113.4 square kilometers. 82.8% of it is agricultural land, 7.9% forest, 3.2% water reservoirs, 2% settlement. 70% of the active population works in agriculture. With almost 5000 inhabitants, the commune’s population density is 44 persons per square kilometer, while the average for Wielkopolska voivodship is 112 persons per square kilometer. All data about Łubowo commune was obtained from the Commune’s Office and is valid for 1995, unless otherwise stated.

were employed by the local museum⁸ in 1994. There are also other non-agricultural workers who have been employed for years by the Museum and by other enterprises in the vicinity, in Gniezno, Fałkowo, Pobiedziska, and even Poznań. A group of local white-collar workers, comprised of administrative Museum employees, also live in Dziekanowice as well as in neighbouring Lednogóra.

There are 46 farms larger than one hectare in Dziekanowice which cover 660 hectares of land.⁹ An average farm comprises 14.36 hectares and some farmers also lease land in the vicinity. Nowadays farms smaller than seven or eight hectares are not considered by local people to be 'real farms' at all but represent a supplementary source of income instead. This is different for Małopolska where in the 1970s and 1980s, as Nagengast confirms, a five-hectare farm was considered big. There is also state-owned land in Dziekanowice which is administered by the Agency of Farm Property of the State Treasury. It manages the land of the former state farm of almost 380 hectares that was closed down in 1992. Part of this land is now cultivated by the Agency's commercial farm in Łubowo, whereas another portion has been sold to or leased by the farmers. The Catholic Church parish has close to 100 hectares, 88 of which were given back to it in the 1990s. It also leases land back to the production unit of the Agency in Łubowo and to local farmers. Therefore, land comprises a vital source of subsistence for many but not all families. Some work on it as hired labour, while others try to establish themselves as small entrepreneurs, craftspeople and as seasonal migrants abroad.

Bearing in mind that all categorisation is imposed onto the reality of social life, I will describe four classes in Dziekanowice (i.e. white-collar workers, agricultural proletarians, village proletarians, and farmers) which can be distinguished by the application of the accepted criteria in my study and disclosed here through their functioning.¹⁰ In the mutual perceptions of different groups of people the factor of 'work' plays a significant defining role.

⁸ Dating from the 10th century and located on an island in Lednica Lake, the ruins of a palace, chapel and other parts of a settlement comprise the Polish Piasts Museum of Lednica (the Museum hereafter), which was established in the 1970s. Two of the founders of the Polish state, Mieszko I and Bolesław the Brave, had one of their seats there. An open-air gallery is part of the Museum and presents folk architecture from Wielkopolska. The surroundings of the lake are protected through the Lednica Landscape Reserve.

⁹ Nine farms have a size of between one and two hectares, three between two to seven hectares, sixteen between seven and 15 hectares, and 18 larger than 15 hectares. Ten families officially own plots smaller than one hectare, ranging from 0.18 to 0.89 ares. The former state farm employees have five-are plots. Only some 'old' blue-collar and white-collar Museum employees do not own any land. Property relations in Dziekanowice and vicinity have changed significantly in the last decade and have become more complex (e.g., due to a common practice of leasing out land by the Agency to farmers and between farmers themselves).

¹⁰ Any impression that social groups which I distinguish in my description of the community in Dziekanowice are essentialised, have fixed boundaries or that they are not internally differentiated and fluctuating, are incurred by the limited space available that prevents this ethnography to be more detailed and nuanced.

White-Collar Workers

This large group¹¹ is not indigenous to the village but some of its members have settled in Dziekanowice or its vicinity since they have been employed by the Museum. Many commute from Poznań. Their education, the social milieu they come from, the values they profess, the disdainful attitude they have towards manual museum workers, and their social and economic positions contribute to the creation of this class. Local people who do not work in this institution are ambivalent towards it. They admit the importance of “culture and history”, but it is beyond their imagination that “the state can afford so much money for such fancy things in a period when millions live in poverty” – as *pani*¹² Piatek, a medium-size farm *gospodyni* (landlady), told me in 1995.

White-collar Museum employees retort that villagers do not appreciate what this institution has done for Dziekanowice, starting with an overhaul of a building containing a room for public meetings, the reconstruction of a statue of Saint Benon and the renovation of paintings in the church building. The Museum attracts tourists and employs many villagers. The life of white-collar workers is restricted to their own circle and social peers. Their presence was reflected in the election results through the centrist Freedom Party, considered representative of the intelligentsia, which gained more votes in the Lednogóra district containing Dziekanowice than the other three districts of the Łubowo commune.¹³ In the local elementary school, the children of the white-collar workers are nicknamed ‘relics’ (*zabytki*). In turn, they call the local people literally ‘aborigines’ (*aborigeni*), a word which in Polish may also evoke pejorative associations.

Economic and social as well as political power favours white-collar workers in relation to hired workers. Contact of the former with the local community is rare and mostly restricted to the workplace. Manual workers are subordinated to managers and pen pushers within the framework of hierarchical dependencies. They have to obey their orders and be decent recruits if they want to keep their job. The threat of rationalisation disciplines people and causes them to compete for positions. Bad behaviour, such as drinking in the workplace or stealing, is immediately punished by dismissal. The social hierarchy enables those in power to take advantage of their position. If they need a service of some kind, for example free car repairs in an unofficial garage run by a blue-collar employee, they will use it. ‘Payment’ is

¹¹ In the mid-1990s the Museum employed almost 90 (sic!) people, half of which were white-collar workers who did not perform any manual work. The number of employees fluctuates seasonally, but as I learned in the summer 2003, there were still close to 90 people on the payroll.

¹² *Pani* is the Polish form of addressing women with whom one is not in close relations. *Pan* is the form men are politely addressed with.

¹³ In 1993, for instance, gained in Lednogóra district almost twice as many votes than in the other district in the commune: 11 percent to 4.9-7.4 percent, respectively.

traditionally made in kind and money does not have to be involved. The unspoken rule of this sort of transaction is: ‘I do you a favour and you will repay it one way or another’ (by treating me favourably in the workplace, by extending my contract, by assigning me easier tasks, by giving a job to my child, etc.). Salaries are granted, in the last instance, by the state and taxpayers, but it is the local power holders that distribute the money.

Managers make use of their cultural and social capital. This kind of relationship is not new to the Polish countryside and miraculously even perpetuates the pre-war one between the powerful and the dominated that also continued under socialism. Good relations with top management can mean a job in the long run for other family members in this lucrative institution or a license for any minor commercial activity associated with the Museum for tourists. Additionally, there are whole ‘clans’ working in or around the Museum. For example, involving rural proletarians and not family members of farmers has become a semi-official policy of the Museum management. It is legitimised by the need of helping the poorer and helpless, but also involves cultural conceptions about who is fit for a job in which someone gives orders and others who have to take and follow them. As a result, traditionally independent peasants are not considered suitable for such dealings.

Office work is not highly esteemed by the village residents; it is ‘artificial’ and overpaid. Most of those who work physically for a living consider the high incomes (by local standards) of the top administrators as unmerited and merely legitimised by the unfair power structure that has become especially acute after 1989. ‘They’ are part of ‘the system’ that underestimates physical toil and privileges those who, in Ula’s words (one of my best informants), “do nothing but sit in their offices and drink coffee” and have secured their standing only through “connections (*znajomości*) up there.” The Museum as well as the state farm existed under communism, but income disparity was not as pronounced as it is today. The physical toil of workers was, in the villagers’ opinion, more appreciated.

The white-collar workers’ self-perception is in inverse proportion to that of the commoners: they think that their salaries do not do justice to the merit of their jobs. In comparison to the revenues of successful farmers or many townspeople they consider themselves underpaid. Some of them try to increase their incomes by engaging in additional activities. Research grants, financed from beyond represent a steady flow of money, i.e. voivodship¹⁴ office in Poznań, have not become uncommon. In the last three years two employees have completed their doctoral dissertations, events without precedence in the history of the institution. The

¹⁴ Poland is divided into 16 voivodships (in Polish *województwo*), i.e. administrative provinces. Poznań is the capital of *województwo wielkopolskie* (Great Poland voivodship).

degree, besides providing esteem, also grants an increase in the regular monthly salary. However, having secure jobs, they are generally inactive and unwilling to change their attitude towards work. They believe education itself should grant steady, in this case even rustically-flavoured, employment. Their daily routine has a rather unhurried pace.

‘Job position nomenclature’ is so rooted in their minds that they perceive ample office employment as ‘natural’ and the slow pace of work as given. Virtually nothing has changed in these culturally legitimised images. Nevertheless, the intelligentsia in Dziekanowice feels alienated and underestimated in relation to the commune’s wielders of power and rising new rich. The new system of *nomenklatura* of *nouveaux riches* and administrators is still taking shape, in front of which they feel powerless and degraded. I was even told that one member of the Commune’s Council who works in the Museum and for ecological reasons has opposed the development of the poultry farm in the village, was threatened by suspicious ‘men in black’ driving a Mercedes. He abandoned his opposition.

Agricultural Proletarians

A second distinct group is comprised of the *agricultural proletarians*, i.e. former state farm workers, some of them now employed by the Museum. They joined a few other workers who had been employed by the latter for several years. Although there was a limited exchange of workers between the state farm and the Museum, the two fractions differed. The families of agricultural workers, altogether around thirty individuals, live in a separate part of the village adjacent to the grange buildings called *Brooklyn* in local folklore. The four blocks of apartments in which they live are separated by a solid wall and a wrought iron gate from a ‘palace,’ a park, and the farm yard and buildings of the former state farm, today the seat of the Museum administration.

The agricultural workforce in the Dziekanowice estate has existed for decades. Nationalisation and the distribution of land in 1945 did not in fact change the situation since shortly after this, the land was partly collectivised and then, in the 1960s, the state farm was established. However, its staff was not stable. When it was dismantled in 1994, most workers were outsiders, mainly from the surrounding areas. State farms attracted people with free accommodation and quotas of potatoes, milk and grain. Interestingly enough, the latter, called *deputat*, was an in-kind payment; a tradition which reaches back to pre-capitalist times and that was continued by the socialist state. The core of the workforce comprised pre-war rural proletarians and, in popular opinion, all those unfit for better jobs. In the 1980s most

agricultural workers were satisfied with their jobs and their overall situation in life. After the dissolution of the state farm system, the economic situation of agricultural workers declined rapidly and in 1992 they were only earning half of the average national income (Domański 1995: 376). Rural areas are affected by a very high rate of unemployment.¹⁵ Thanks to the Museum, workers in Dziekanowice have not been adversely affected.

The education of the elderly is mostly elementary. Only some are skilled workers. The younger generation has acquired some skills such as painting, carpentry, or mechanics. Only rarely are they high-school educated technicians. Nevertheless, the younger generation's career paths have been varied. The educated tend to leave their village either through marriage or by taking up a job elsewhere. Marriages are concluded among people of similar social backgrounds, i.e. within the agricultural workers' group or with manual workers employed outside the village. Often young couples of this sort remain unemployed for years and it is probably here that we witness the birth of permanent poverty.

Very few partners come from the families of farmers, normally only those who were the beneficiaries of the land reform in the 1940s, i.e. who have rural proletarian roots. I have never heard of a single marriage between an agricultural worker and a 'traditional' peasant.

The older generation that used to work on the state farms under socialism relies today on its pensions. In the 1990s, the state implemented programmes that enabled many to secure early retirement benefits to help them reach the regular retirement age without making a claim for unemployment insurance. Together with those receiving disability benefits, they compose a large group of people not considered unemployed, but still dependent on state aid. Officially, they are no longer on the job market. However, not everyone has taken full advantage of retiring early. Jakub,¹⁶ for example, works as a stoker. He was on temporary disability for three years and could have produced the documents granting him early retirement, but failed to do so. Therefore, outside of the heating season, he receives unemployment benefits, the so-called *kuroniówka*¹⁷ and does nothing for most of the year but wander around and help his brother-in-law on his farm from time to time.

For twenty former state farm workers, the job offer from the Museum was a blessing. The distillery manager had encouraged them to establish an agricultural enterprise, but in his opinion, being accustomed to obtaining everything from the state, they were waiting for

¹⁵ In the fall of 1996, 1.126 million rural inhabitants were unemployed (43% of all unemployed). The Polish Employment Office estimates that hidden unemployment in rural areas amounts to 0.6-0.9 million. After years of improvement, the situation started to worsen at the beginning of the new millennium and today (mid-2003) unemployment has reached more than 18%.

¹⁶ I use first names or nicknames to identify people.

¹⁷ This folk term comes from the name of Jacek Kuroń, an anti-Communist dissident and the Minister for Social Affairs in the first non-communist government in 1989 under which unemployment benefits were introduced.

manna from heaven. “They did nothing for so many years, so what can they do now?” Actually, they still do what they used to do and are in a similar way still dependent on the state. Agricultural proletarians remain hired labourers, but the character of their job has changed. In general, their work is much easier. Many have become security guards and others perform the manual labour necessary for maintaining and running the Museum, the ethnographic park and the landscape reserve. Job security, however, has decreased. In the past, people could easily find a job on a state farm. Keeping it was taken for granted. Today, they have to ‘behave’ in order to hold on to their position. Drinking alcohol at work, quite common in the past, is strictly forbidden. Old age, early retirement and job losses are the reasons that today only a quarter of the persons ‘inherited’ from the state farm still work for the Museum. Satisfied with their relatively fortunate fate, they complain that *deputat* privileges have stopped and that they have been forced to give in and pay rent for their apartments.¹⁸

The state farm, a vast resource of scarcely guarded agricultural products that one could easily “take home,” no longer exists. The socialist state also extended *deputat* obligations for occasional free holidays to children and adults, for excursions and the organisation of cultural events, such as harvest festivals. All of them are gone, and therefore “it was better under communism,” *za komuny było lepiej*.

Several persons have been ‘forced’ to find employment with local farmers, which is considered a last resort. Farmers are called slutters (*babole*)¹⁹ and workers “don’t want to serve *babole*.” Commenting on the situation of a young man that used to work in the Lednogóra distillery who now works with the local chicken farm owner, one of the manual labourers said: “It is preposterous! What does it mean that he has to work there? Are pre-war times coming back? Nothing compares to a job in a state enterprise.” The low prestige of work on a private farm may be correlated with the low wages one receives there which, in the summer of 1996 amounted to 2.5 zlotys per hour, and by the end of 1999 3.5 zlotys which is

¹⁸ The previously free apartments have had to be bought by their tenants. The prices were very low by Polish standards. For each year one had worked on the state farm, a 4% reduction in price was offered. For example, a worker employed on the farm in 1970 had to pay 540 zlotys (then \$191) in 1991 for a steam-heated apartment with two rooms, kitchen, bathroom and hallway. In mid-2003 the exchange rate is 3.7 zlotys to the US dollar and 4.3 zlotys to the euro. An average salary in the state sector before taxation was about 900 zlotys in 1996, and 2,300 zlotys in 2003.

¹⁹ It is difficult to translate the slang word *babole* into English. I opt for ‘slutters’, and I owe this apt term to Carole Nagengast. It seems to capture the deep meaning of this colloquialism very well through the inherent association of such words as ‘slut’, ‘sluttish’ and ‘sloven’. See: *The New Lexicon. Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: Lexicon Publications 1990. It states: “*slut*, a dirty, slovenly woman...”; “*sluttish*, characteristic of a slut; (of a woman) very dirtily and untidy dressed”; and, “*sloven*, a person, who is habitually untidy in appearance, slipshod or lazy in his work and mental outlook, and dirty in his habits” (p. 936).

extremely little even by Polish standards. In any event, it seems that social perceptions play a crucial role. Rural proletarians have developed a strong feeling of independence from private employers of any type and the state functioned as an abstract and exclusive employer.

Under socialism, labour was not only commodified,²⁰ but also depersonalised. Today this process has been disturbed by the return of job relationships in which direct personal interaction is involved. Employers are real people living in the same community. It is emotionally hard to sell labour to individuals considered *babole* who now control work contracts. For rural proletarians it is like selling a part of their soul, not just a commodity. Rooted in social relations, this feeling of degradation is supplemented by unfavourable work conditions. Low salaries are combined with the minimum payment towards social insurance that will result in lower retirement benefits. I was told that one of the two main private employers in Dziekanowice, Paweł, a chicken farm owner, even deducts social security payments from workers' salaries. Work there is strenuous and the people employed there "have to drink coffee while running." "How is it possible that people cannot even have a coffee break and drink in quiet, but only work, work and work?", asks Jakub. Agata, Jakub's wife, says that she does not want to work there since she "can't stand the foul air which prevails there." So she works with a more appreciated employer, Rysiek.

Rysiek is a greenhouse and vegetable garden owner and his attitude towards his employees is "more humane." He and his wife allow breaks and even prepare free coffee and tea for those employed. This attitude retains a feature of traditional relations in which a person to whom one offers his labour repays in kind and kindness. This habit of offering free drinks was also practiced on the state farm, especially during harvest season. Labour is paid for in a monetary transaction, but elements of the customary behaviour sustaining non-commodified relations augment the value of work relations.

Some work is *na czarno* (literally 'on the black'). After an initial period of 'wild' service practices in the first half of the 1990s, administrative controls have reduced illegal employment. Previously, workers were simply recruited for separate tasks without being formally hired or insured. This also happens today, particularly during seasons of intense work, but the two private employers and producers of capital mentioned prefer to use a permanent workforce which they hire officially. Seasonal employment incidentally occurs at bigger farms in the summer, but it is much less widespread than one might expect.

²⁰ I follow Martha Lampland in her understanding of commodification of labour. It is "the conflation of labour's objectification in particular acts of production with its more general status as the source and arbiter of value..." (1995: 11). This emphasises "the strange parallel of labour acquiring a concrete, physical character while it takes on the general or dominant role in structuring social action and creating cultural value" (ibid.).

Agricultural proletarians are reluctant to go there and farmers equipped with machinery prefer to rely on each other's help. In fact, agricultural proletarians do not enjoy a highbrow opinion among the other villagers.

Talking about the younger generation of agricultural proletarians, Sławek, an outsider who married into a peasant family from the village and whose wife works at the Museum, described them simply as "lazy and unable to learn." They would all end up badly. He states:

Instead of working in the summer for the farmers, when there is high demand for it, they prefer to lean up against the walls and leave their bootmarks on them. They could have earned some money and bought some jeans, but no, they prefer to do nothing and rely on their parents. They will barely complete their schooling and that's it.

There are a few women who have taken up a job with Rysiek or Paweł. "They", Sławek continued, "immediately bought better clothes, changed their hairstyle, started wearing earrings and now look different."

Completing vocational education in Dziekanowice does not secure people any jobs. The policy of the Museum for taking on board former state farm workers is not necessarily extended to their offspring. Left to their own fate, they have been hit by high unemployment. Of the unmarried youth eligible to work, only two are employed. Hanging around has become a new lifestyle recalling, incidentally, a habit of many urban underclass youth.

One of the families living in the apartment blocks, the Stachuras, managed to establish themselves as private entrepreneurs. As a former state farm worker the husband works in the Museum, while his wife, a former store employee in Dziekanowice that belonged to the Production Cooperative (*Spółdzielnia Produkcyjna*) in Fałkowo, enfranchised herself and has become an owner of a store. In fact, the whole family, the couple and the two sons, is involved in running the shop, whose profitability is meagre due to the limited number of customers in a favourable good financial position. One of the sons once attempted to work in a carpentry enterprise, but quit the following day, because "he won't toil and moil for five hundred zlotys [a month] and let anybody yell at him for that amount of money," as his mother explained. He also went to Düsseldorf in Germany to work in construction for a short time. "He was there briefly since the work was hard for a young man and he is only twenty-three years old." Whether this behaviour is a matter of perceived weakness or pride remains unclear. Recently, however, the carpenter has found another job and the other son, after returning from the military service, is employed by the Museum.

Village Proletarians

The economic status of affluent agricultural workers does not differ from members of the *village proletariat*, among whom many have their origins in the first group. They own small houses or live in apartments bought from the community. Their main source of income used to come from their employment in state and private companies. In short, they are part of the rural working class. Some of them work at the Museum, others commute to work outside Dziekanowice, some have retired, and some receive disability pensions or unemployment benefits. Most of them have small garden plots. They have various ways of supplementing their main income. This can be seasonal labour at one of the farms in the vicinity, sometimes done in return for borrowing the equipment of a farmer. Many offer services according to their skills as carpenters, bricklayers or blacksmiths without declaring their activity. Two persons from this class used to work abroad. One is a man who works at the Museum and asked for an unpaid leave. This was granted thanks to his long-standing good relations with the management. The other started his career as a worker abroad in the 1980s and later worked illegally with the same employer. Thanks to this work, he was able to build a house, furnish it, and support his family. Recently his migrant career was stopped, according to popular opinion, due to the so-called *niedzwiadek* ('teddy'), i.e. a stamp banning him from entering Germany that was put in his passports. Most village proletarians have skilled worker's qualifications and their teenagers go to vocational high schools. The social background of the group is diverse and comprises individuals who are agricultural workers, industrial workers, and even children of farmers. It happens that people of this kind stay with their parents who still work on their farms. Village proletarians share a distinct ethos and resourcefulness.

One of the families, the Kostrzewas, offers a spectacular example of the multiplicity of ways by which people pursue a living in the post-1989 situation. Besides a small plot of land, the husband manages an apiary, sells honey, and offers tailoring services. The wife runs a *klub* in which public gatherings are held and young visitors sometimes spend their evenings. In the early 1990s she sold some beverages and cookies, but business was slow. However, she increased and diversified her selection and most people now buy goods like groceries, household cleaning agents, etc. from her. Moreover, her two daughters were involved in an 'Amway' network which sells cleaning agents. The older daughter was engaged in a typical investment pyramid ran by the Austrian company 'Global,' which lured people with easy and quick profits. She dropped it quickly. Both of them still work for a French company, sewing car seat covers in Gniezno. Their salaries are relatively good by local standards.

Not every activity in Dziekanowice is official and some favour 'black' labour. An unregistered blacksmith continues to offer his services. Two local car specialists repair vehicles in the vicinity. Unemployed and disabled pensioners eagerly demonstrate what good professionals they are, when they have the opportunity to work. Quite a few are employed by local agricultural entrepreneurs. Adam is a good example of a person that represents this ethos appreciated in the community. The son of a single mother was trained as a carpenter at a vocational school. Today he commutes to work in the private carpentry enterprise in Gniezno and has additionally opened his own shop at his mother's and uncle's house where he works on weekends and afternoons. His determination is highly valued by the villagers and is contrasted to the young Stachura mentioned above, with whom, by the way, Adam attended high school. To the village, both men embody different traditions and mentalities: 'post-state-farm' and villager, or in keeping with the terms used here: agricultural proletariat and village proletariat. This very much matters to Dziekanowicians.

Changing living conditions have forced people to pursue new forms of activity. The idea is to multiply resources: hired work, retirement or disability pensions, unemployment benefits, a small plot of land and, in some cases, incomes from private activities, both legal and illegal. Hired work for a state-run company and a small plot of land, which secured subsistence under the old system, is not enough today. Many have decided to do things they would hardly have done in the past, e.g. work for the farmers. The number of village proletarians' ventures is limited by the meagre amount of capital at their disposal. Accordingly, very small and scarcely profitable businesses prevail. Although several members of this class are doing relatively well, others are poverty-stricken and move towards the stereotypic image of agricultural proletarians. Their self-perception and the reality of being the losers in the new system, have given rise to an ideological community which fortifies resignation. Together they form a more general class of *rural proletarians*.

Farmers

The fact of having farmland distinguishes *farmers* from other classes in the classic sense. Managing the farm is a profession that defines everyday discourses, establishes fields of shared meanings and interests, creates a feeling of community, and defines relations with other people. Awareness of class solidarity also plays an important role. In this sense they even fit Marx's quite rigorous definition. Peasants live "under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter..." (Marx 1957: 109). Therefore,

despite internal divisions, farmers have their own class-consciousness that translates into political preferences and most of them vote for the Polish Peasant Party.

Obviously, today's farmers are not peasants in the traditional sense. They are involved in an economic and social system completely different from feudal or pre-capitalist economies and do not practice subsistence economy as defined by Chayanov (1923). Nagengast (1991: 151-155) showed the inadequacy of Chayanov's model with regard to Polish farmers during the communist period. Today farmers participate in the process through which the "marketing system penetrate[s] into the community, and transform[s] all relations into single-interest relations of individuals with goods for sale" (Wolf 1966: 48). Yet, I do not share Pine's diagnosis that "rural Poles may turn inward again, relying more and more on production for subsistence, and looking increasingly to village-based ties of kinship and neighbourhood to provide a safety net in times of deprivation" (1993: 240). This is not the case, at least in Dziekanowice, where agricultural production goes to the market in the form of grain, pigs, eggs, chickens, vegetables and fruits.

In relation to the other classes, farmers can be also distinguished by their ethos. One can understand an ethos as "a moral commitment of an individual that is anchored in the sphere of customs of a given community and actually affects his/her economic and professional activity" (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1995: 179). I see this category as empirically based and not just confined to the economic aspect of life but also encapsulating behaviour such as marriage patterns, political views, educational aspirations, social ties, everyday habits, work ethic, and last but not least, perception of labour. A specific attitude to the structural changes in the 1990s differentiates farmers very conspicuously. This means that the ethos of various fractions within this class is evolving in divergent directions according to divisions related to their economic position. At the same time, farmers are to a certain degree defined, together with other forms of social and symbolic capital, by the ethos previously shared by members of this group of origin. The category of ethos appears to be a part of the cultural capital.

'Real peasants,' a native category used by farmers, never pay by credit in the shop, do not rely on social welfare and are opposed to the generous policies of the state towards 'lousy people.' Farmers rely on their own hard work and believe that everything they have, they owe to their own sweat. They never or rarely get drunk, particularly in public. If they do, they drink vodka, but never the cheap apple wine often drunk by *buraki* (literally 'chards,' but having very pejorative overtones), men from the former state farm. 'Real' farmers will only drink in the company of their equals and never in such a way as to feel ashamed the next day. The education of farmers in Dziekanowice varies from the elementary to the university level

and all try to ensure vocational training for their children, especially for those who most probably will not stay on the farm. Marriages are almost always contracted between members of the same or higher class. Exceptions occur only among some poorer farming families and among those families who stem from the pre-war proletariat. In practice, all marriages in families with a long-standing farming tradition only link partners of the peasant class.

This custom has various reasons. On the one hand, there is a dowry involved, although nobody talks about this straightforwardly. Another important, although immaterial, part of a future lifetime partner, is her work habit since both partners must be accustomed to the hard toil on the farm. On the other hand, rural proletarians claim that it is beneath them to accept a way of life demanding such arduous labour. Pani Kostrzewa, a mother of the two unmarried daughters, told me that she did not recommend her daughters to marry farmers even if they were approached, because it meant never-ending drudgery. Besides, if a farmer marries a woman who is without an actual dowry, the partner will throw it back to her face sooner or later. As we can see, culturally defined boundaries work both ways.

Work on farm is indeed hard. It is no wonder that farmers constantly repeat that they have put their sweat into everything they have. Jan and Ula are a typical farmer's couple in Dziekanowice that owns ten hectares and leases some additional eleven. They wake up routinely at five in the morning in order to feed the pigs and milk cows, the latter being the wife's job. She sells the milk to people coming from *Brooklyn*. This work has to be done two or three times a day. The wife does all the kitchen-related labour: she prepares breakfast for her husband and five children, cooks dinner and serves supper. Doing the daily shopping, cleaning the house, washing, feeding the hens and tending the garden as well as processing its products (making jam, pickling cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage, etc.) is all her responsibility. She also brings up the children. This ranges from attending parents-teacher meeting, to making sure that the youngest have washed themselves before going to sleep. The husband is in charge of all the work in the field and the pigsty. This includes arranging for the products to be sold, buying the machinery necessary for farming production, maintaining the house, grange, car and farm equipment, and taking part in public life. (He is *soltys*, i.e. village administrator and as a rule attends the Commune's Council meetings). The older children help out quite often, although they no longer have to carry out the tasks children had to do in previous generations. Together they do their main shopping in Gniezno. Indeed, a 'farmer's work is never done' and there is not much free time. If available, leisure time is mostly spent in front of the TV set. Despite constant efforts it has been difficult for the family to make ends meet. The wife expressed the desire to find an additional job at the Museum, but because of

the policy of rejecting farmers, she did not get it. Being a high school graduate, she was recently able to obtain work at the post office in Lednogóra.

‘Real socialism’ in the 1980s ensured high fixed prices and cheap credit. Having a small farm was often enough to be able to prosper. This situation changed radically after liberalisation in 1990. Agriculture jumped directly from the communist system of governmentally regulated prices to one of a free market with few controls. Paradoxically, private producers were supposed to be best suited for the free market since they had always been private for the most part (‘the Trojan horse of capitalism in socialism’), but this view has proved to be illusory. Participation in the ‘mild’ market game in a non-market environment in the 1980s has been superseded by ‘wild’ competition in the 1990s. We are witnessing a process of subjugation of the former socialist agriculture to new capitalist conditions in which Poland has been exposed to the world market. An adjustment to this new deal can serve as a criterion of adaptation in which *habitus*, class position, possession of capital and culturally defined habits play a conspicuous role. Their combination places farmers on a scale ranging between traditionalist and future-oriented.

Those farmers strongly accustomed to the practice of farming that developed under communism gravitate towards the pole of traditionalism. They have reacted to structural changes in ways which do not always work in the new situation. In this case, the emerging market creates a situation “in which limits and ‘incompleteness’ of the rural folk’s model become evident” (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 15). Farming is a way of life for many and they want to stay in agriculture, but have difficulties in adapting. They usually glorify the past and employ a kind of ‘wait-and-see policy.’ They do not buy more land and increase production. Accordingly, they have decided to endure the situation and not to invest. They maintain several breeds of livestock and reduce or increase their numbers according to fluctuations in the market. Poultry and pork production, grain and other products are incorporated into this complex system. The rationality of action consists of calculating purchases and sales, all of which are adjusted to current fluctuations in prices and everyday transactions. At its extreme, two farmers quit their farming pursuit and sold their land to other, more expansionist, farmers.

A similar rationale applies to all farmers. Yet, foresight differentiates a producer’s capacity to internalise the new scheme. However, not only personal skills for adaptation play a role, but also the material situation of farmers which prevailed when the changes began. It is not surprising that the possibilities of those who are richer and have a better infrastructure have been greater. An unfavourable price ratio between inputs and outputs can cause losses, but the larger turnover facilitates a solution to this problem. Thus, we can see that a group of farmers

was able to make more felicitous economic decisions. They are managing well in the new situation in spite of their complaints about the lack of stability in the business. Their start-up capital enabled them to safeguard their economic and social status. These families today form a fraction of traditionally well-off farmers prepared to relocate to a different market. Today they have large farms, even one hundred hectares or more. Sometimes they form a farmers' clan of sorts in which parents, their children and affinities, have several farms in a neighbourhood. Kinship solidarity implies mutual support and services in labour and in kind within these circles.

Two farmers have established themselves as rural entrepreneurs and producers of capital in Dziekanowice. Their attitude towards farming is decidedly prospective. As Paweł had already explained to me in 1995, his dream was to own several hundred hectares of land one day for larger scale poultry production using a hired labour force. This, he believed, would be the future of making a decent living in agriculture. He realized though that specialisation in a single crop or product would involve a big risk and that a fall in demand and prices could lead to bankruptcy. People in Dziekanowice were also sceptical about his risky venture in the chicken farm. But the dream of this young farmer has come true. He developed a poultry enterprise the capacity of which has increased systematically from 35,000 broilers in 1995 to 50,000 in 1996 and to more than a 100,000 by 1999, which became a limit for the local authorities and inhabitants who felt its presence through the air they were breathing. Thereupon, he installed an industrial chicken butchery and invested into a large pigsty, both in Dziekanowice and Fałkowo. He now employs close to thirty people on a regular basis and from time to time hires additional people to do urgent tasks, many of them recruited from the rural proletariat in Dziekanowice. His venture is mechanised; it runs on gas and makes use of reservoirs, tractors and a butchery line. However, he is perceived by his employees and villagers as someone who exploits people, demands too much, distances himself, is stingy and creates a tense atmosphere at the workplace. Not long ago, he was a regular farmer and an equal to his fellow inhabitants. Today he is a detached and hardnosed entrepreneur who makes it clear who the boss is in the community.

Let me give another example of a future-oriented couple that has transformed itself into agricultural entrepreneurs. The son of one beneficiary of the land reform originally bought five hectares of land, but is now specialising in growing flowers in a greenhouse, and strawberries and tomatoes under a foil greenhouse. There is a gas heating system, a computerised irrigation system, a refrigerating unit for fruit, etc. Ten people are employed there and several others are hired seasonally. Ties with international companies allow for the

selling of some products abroad for better prices. He is a skilled worker, and his wife, who came to Dziekanowice as a Museum employee, completed ethnological studies at the University of Poznań. They have a modern house in the village, a good car. Moreover they have bought additional farmland and are definitely perceived to be one of the most affluent families in Dziekanowice. It is hard to imagine a more spectacular example of class mobility. Within three generations, the family has moved away from being part of the rural proletariat. The man's grandfather was a village butcher. He himself became a 'peasant,' and finally turned into a specialised and sophisticated agricultural producer employing a workforce part of which are his poorer kin. In contrast to the employer described above, working relations in this enterprise are described as much friendlier, but it is, of course, up to employers to decide whom they offer a job.

Labour, Class and the 'New Deal'

The small community of Dziekanowice could appear at first glance as being unified by language, religion, customs, rural lifestyle and even, generally, a negative attitude towards 'transformation.' However, internally it is deeply differentiated. Four social groups form classes that can be distinguished (but not essentialised!) through a combination of economic, social and cultural features which are significant for anthropological analysis. "Property", as Katherine Verdery says, "is about social relations. These include both relations among persons and the power relations in which people act" (1998: 180). Therefore, farmers differ from rural proletarians and white-collar workers in a very complex sense of the word. Marriage patterns, mutual perceptions and, last but not least, attitudes to work comprise a part of the intricate relations generating divergent identities that surface in the least expected circumstances. For instance, it is not a mere coincidence that at village gatherings, agricultural proletarians sit in one corner, village proletarians next to them and farmers apart from both. Social distance shows its symbolic power in a spatial distance that is also inscribed in local topography that separates agricultural and rural proletarians, white-collar workers and, to a certain degree, farmers living in *huby* (midfield homesteads scattered around the village). It is normal in Dziekanowice that the members of volunteer social committees for organising village affairs such as gas distribution are all farmers. Village representatives in the Community Council and the mayor are virtually all farmers too. One representative of the Council who works at the Museum is an exception here, because he seemed to have been elected during the last elections thanks to the support of rural proletarians. One might also ask

why farmers do not go to the shop or spend their time there while proletarians do? Is it a coincidence that a person's choice of company reflects social divisions in the community? If you ask somebody what matters when people get married, you will hear that love is decisive. Interestingly enough, mutual love brings together partners from the same social strata with a similar habitus.

Social borders are not always visible. Behaviour reproduces patterns rooted in culture. This explains why proletarians who relied on the socialist state for decades smartly exploit the social security system today and accept all cunning or illegal forms of exploiting other venues in the struggle for survival. In contrast, this raises objections and contempt among strongly independent 'real peasants' for whom the proletarian's attitudes would not be appropriate.

Such silent barriers are created by each fraction. White-collar workers from the Museum are 'relics' who will never fully understand local problems. The first consider proletarians to be a deprived 'grey mass.' Even agricultural workers are perceived by village proletarians to be an alcohol-abusing lower class. To farmers, agricultural proletarians and, to some extent, village proletarians are 'lazy jerks.' For agricultural workers, farmers are 'slutters.' And so on...

This brings us to the issue of labour again. 'Jerks' or 'chards' (*buraki*) do not want to serve 'slutters' (*babole*). Social barriers strengthened by socialist relations of production, make it now difficult for proletarians to perceive their work at private farms or agricultural enterprises as an ordinary contract between employer and employee. This negates a notion of pride proletarians have held for years. An anonymous employer, the state, is considered much better than a private one. Martha Lampland (1995) writes that in Hungary it was the state that acted as a personalised subject in contrast to depersonalised workings of the 'invisible hand of the free market.' This, in general, applies also to Poland where workers' strikes were addressed to 'the Party,' and *przeklęta komuna* (damned communism) was blamed for all misfortunes. However, contrary to Lampland, I would say that for rural proletarians in today's Poland the free market looms as an incomprehensible phenomenon. What is visible and tangible is an employer that often comes from the same community and used to be on par with them. Socialist managers represented the state, but they were not the State (Party) itself and worked for it as hired workers as well. This has changed and the 'invisible market' is within sight, embodied in a touchable employer, owner and manager all in one.

The personalisation of work relations has raised many worries among rural proletarians, particularly agricultural proletarians, who fear that pre-war social relations would come back. It is difficult to say what has led to such a conclusion; it may be due to negative memories of older generations or communist propaganda. No doubt, they are mythicised and there are very

few people in the village who have experienced these times. From obtainable accounts, both written and oral, pre-war labour relations on big estates presented a mixture of capitalist and feudal relations in which proletarians sold labour to the landowners, partly paid in *deputat* form, but at the same time the latter took responsibility for housing and social security. Thus, a form of patronage relationship was maintained. To a large extent this was continued in the postwar period, but the individual landowner was superseded by ‘the state.’ This status quo was appreciated by many and in Dziekanowice itself, considering that three quarters of the families granted land as a result of nationalisation in the late 1940s preferred to hand it over to the state in the early 1950s and decided to work on the collective farm; in the 1960s they ended up as hired workers on the state farm. The depersonalisation of work relations and the further commodification of labour were, in fact, welcomed in the countryside. This had taken place in the period when massive migration from the countryside to urban areas, prompted by planned industrialisation, occurred.²¹ The propagandised industrial ‘emproletarianism’²² made work in agriculture, particularly on private farms, unpopular and instead promoted life in the cities as a social advancement. In this milieu, being an agricultural worker was still a better option than working on one’s own private farm. In fact, reluctance towards hard work on the farm is visible among rural proletarians also today.

This resentment is observable in many ways. The most remarkable is probably the legitimisation of marriage avoidance between proletarians and farmers, effective both ways, where work functions as the crucial factor. The separation of the two classes seems to be rooted in the social history of the Polish countryside that defined them as culturally different and gave them a discrete consciousness. Agricultural proletarians perceive the hard toil of the peasants as futile in the long run and costing too much time and energy. Simply put, the work does not pay off.

For them, it has been easier to sell labour for a monetary or in-kind payment and have “saintly peace,” *święty spokój*. “Man worked and communism thought,” *człowiek robił a komuna myślała*, and the rule was that “whether you stay or lay, you deserve your pay” (*czy się stoi, czy się leży, wypłata i tak się należy*). The commodification of labour went hand in hand with the devaluation of the work ethos which then led to the depreciation of the importance of labour as such. The same participation in the socialist relations of production,

²¹ In the postwar period, the rural population decreased only slightly (from 16 to 14.5 million), while the number of urban dwellers rose threefold (from 7.5 to 24 million), mostly caused by migration from the countryside (Eberhardt 1993: 34). However, in 2000, for the first time in the postwar period, migration from towns to the countryside outnumbered the traditional route by 4,000 (Sytuacja 2001: D6).

²² I have invented this term as a contrast to ‘embourgeoisement’.

the same presence in the workplace, being an employee and a member of a co-workers' team, became meaningful.

Accepting the role of the state in generating income for those who have lost their job due to the changes in the 1990s has not caused a mental revolution. The devaluation of labour hit the bottom and doing nothing is just as acceptable today as working at the minimum level of, (virtually passive) participation being in the socialist process of production. The state has taken responsibility for many, especially older and physically challenged people, who have been unable to readjust to the new structural framework and provided them with early retirement privileges, unemployment benefits and other forms of social assistance. Since 1994 the new state as a direct employer has been represented in Dziekanowice by the Museum. On the one hand, it has withdrawn from many traditional responsibilities and forms of payment, such as free accommodation and *deputat* obligations. On the other hand, the Museum perpetuates the previous relationship in many ways. As in the past, it hires rural proletarians that in many respects are treated in a patronage way. Recruitment now depends on benevolence and existing connections with families traditionally tied to the Museum or with those who managed to establish a good relationship with it in the last decade. This policy is legitimised by the aspiration to help the (diligent) helpless at the same time. Thanks to emerging new patterns of work relations and the dire job market, managers are able to define the conditions of employment. However, due to the relics of patronage practices this does not produce labour relations ascribed to the ideals of a capitalist society, but fosters relations of a patron-client type. The status of work, physical labour in the institution, has not changed very much. Although it is commodified, labour is not the only measure of one's quality. The same fact of 'being there' defines the value of a person. Even if one does not perform work and is not really willing to do so, one still deserves support. In other words, for agricultural proletarians, the commodification of labour does not go hand in hand with its appreciation as "the metric measure of value" (Biernacki 1995 quoted in Lampland 1995: 10). It can, however, be the identifying gauge applied to proletarians by other social groups.

Many more visible changes in working relations in the period of 'transition' occurred between employers and employees in the private agricultural sector. Only under the new circumstances have these become fully developed. Under communism, farmers could not officially employ more than two people from beyond their family and in Dziekanowice this kind of arrangement never really existed. New regulations allowed for the possibility of a free labour market and unlimited employment. As already mentioned, there are two major private capital producers and job providers in the community, each of whom being perceived

differently through the lenses of the traditionally established cultural values of proletarians who prefer more ‘humane’ and personalised relations between owners and workers. It has been especially difficult for the proletarians to sell their labour, the only thing they really possess, to employers coming from the same community. Even today, their attitude follows the pattern of the commodification of labour and the partial but increasing economism of work relations which systematically reduces work to a performance relationship. The greenhouse and vegetable garden owner is more appreciated than the chicken farm owner. The first has retained some forms of rural and socialist intimation, while the second has opted, intentionally or not, for the more detraditionalised, capitalist model. The difference between the two employers may derive from the fact that the greenhouse entrepreneur’s social roots are agricultural proletarian. His father was a beneficiary of the land reform in the 1940s and owned a small farm, while the entrepreneur engaged in the poultry industry has direct roots in a peasant family that settled in the village only one generation before. The first may still feel some kind of empathy with his former ‘brothers of fate.’

It is difficult for proletarians to grasp and be glad about the capitalist model of work relations which will involve the further commodification of labour and the commercialisation of the work environment, especially in the private sector. These issues appear significantly different for peasants. In their ethos, work has always had a high value. It seems that the attitude of farmers carries several elements that Lampland, following Marx, Lukacs and Biernacki, treats as “unique to capitalism.” “[I]t is a material property of human actors, bearing physical, nearly tangible qualities. It is also the touchstone, the foundation, of subjectivity and morality” (Lampland 1995: 11). Indeed, labour and work ethic have extremely significant functions in the construction of the farmers’ identity. The value of a person depends for them on his or her ability to work diligently and efficiently. Work is a measure that helps peasants to distance themselves from the ‘others,’ both “lazy jerks” and *gryzipiórki* (literally, ‘pen-biters’). The idleness of a healthy individual even disqualifies the person as a valuable human being. Non-physical activity is seldom treated as a creative and productive pursuit, particularly the ‘quasi-work’ performed by the people in the Museum. Thus, labour is not only a matter of prosperity, but also of honour, reputation and distinction.

In the case of farmers, who are simultaneously owners and workers, the commodification of labour is much more mystified and mediated than in other classes. It is essential that they work on their own. First of all, although permanently swamped with work, they control it as well as the fruits of their toil that they partly consume themselves. This gives farmers a strong feeling of independence. However, such a feeling has been undermined by the free market

system penetrating agricultural activity. It is true that in the past a degree of their independence was determined by the state through administrative rules and price regulations. At least in the period of the decline of communism, they were relatively favourable to farmers, but changed drastically in 1990. To them a free market means a lack of preferential loans, unpredictable price fluctuations and price gaps. No wonder that some poorer farmers would like “to hang Balcerowicz²³ onto a withered bough”. Labour input does not translate into profits and neither does moral capital translate into economic capital. The traditional value of appreciation for hard work wrecks on the rocks of invisible market forces. Accustomed to the intervention of the state, an established ‘actor’ regulating just labour relations, many farmers from Dziekanowice blocked the road that connects Poznań with Gniezno and Gdańsk in a nationwide protest against unfair price relations in 1999.

The disruption of a direct and traceable link between physical labour efforts and profit still remains incomprehensible for most farmers. Although they participate in the market game, they cannot understand why their products are hard to sell when in the media they hear about the huge amounts of agricultural products being imported. They can also see them on the store shelves. “Don’t we have our own cheese and sausages, or what?” This happens when “millions of hectares in Poland lay fallow and hundreds of thousands of people who worked in the former state farms rot in their dens,” as Mr. Piątek, an owner of a medium-sized farm in Dziekanowice, said. In this model, land and people are wasted, while the labour of those working hard is unrewarding. New Poland to farmers means the depreciation of the core of their identity: *diligent labour*. It was recognised, at least at an ideological level, by communist propaganda. Today it is sneaky or indolent people who are backed up. Businessmen, politicians, managers and administration personnel form a mafia of those who “do nothing else but money.” These fortunes are made “on the backs of honest and hard working people.” In addition “they feed all those jerks who don’t work at all. When I need somebody to help me in the harvest season, it is difficult to find a single person. But they [the former state farm workers] are the first to get an early retirement or line up for *kuroniówka*.”

Still, despite difficulties, most farmers do prefer to stay in agriculture, although some have already started to move out of it. However, the most vigorous have put themselves on a track to become entrepreneurs. Together with owning a farm, work ethos has acquired a function of the most conspicuous identity factor for farmers. It is one of the last strongholds of peasantry for them. Being an owner of the means of production, working hard on one’s own farm, controlling labour and the whole process of production, puts farmers in opposition

²³ The then Minister of Finance identified with the austere market reform called ‘Balcerowicz’s shock therapy.’

to most social classes in the community, if not society. As in the case of rural proletarians, encroaching capitalism has commodified a farmer's labour even further, but it is difficult for them to accept the capricious market gauge of the value of this work. For their identity industriousness comprises a steady and faithful measure of the value of a person. The same applies for newly established agricultural entrepreneurs. They work 'round the clock' and it is difficult to make an appointment with them. Their work was transformed from physical to managerial. They dared to take the risk of getting involved in the market game, to "bet on one horse," as the chicken farm owner expressed it. This is a consciousness of a person that grasps the principles of the 'new deal' in which an invisible market force rules and physical work does not literally convert into benefits in the form of a 'one to one equation.' In this model, one is also aware that the local economy is a part of the global one. Both vegetable and poultry producers have their contractors in Poland and abroad.

It seems that we witness today a process described by Bettelheim: "Inside social formations in which capitalism is predominant, this domination mainly tends to expand reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, that is to dissolution of the other modes of production (...)" (1969: 297). This process, combined with globalisation, is multistranded and affects various groups differently. People faced with capitalism respond in ways rooted in historically defined meanings. Their practice is a result of the impact of the structural changes and their conceptualisation is entrenched in cultural meanings. In this way they are not only transformed by the capitalist relations of production but also transform capitalism to acquire its local form. The process of the commodification of labour is caught up in a historical process that has different meanings for the various classes. Rural proletarians and the intelligentsia are used to selling their labour and serving as hired employees, but their social position puts them onto different sides of the barricade as far as its conceptualisation is concerned. Socialist depersonalisation of work relations, meaning that the state was an abstract owner and employer and all co-workers, including managers, formed a class of hired people, has given rise to their mental difficulty in selling their skills to private entrepreneurs, their fellow villagers. For farmers, diligent work is a major idiom of their identity that also helps them to distance themselves from the other classes. However, mystified commodification of labour, strengthened through the obscure effects of market forces leaves them much confused about the traditionally absolute value of their ethos. Change, according to Marshal Sahlins (1981: 67), is failed reproduction. People in Dziekanowice try to reproduce their values, habits, ideals and identities. Thanks to the fact that they 'fail' we have

transformations in all of them, in the people, in social classes and in the social system. Work functions in this context as one of the foci through which we can look at others and ourselves.

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