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Property, Work and Local Identity

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I clearly recall a conversation that I had with my great-uncle, during the winter of 1986, in a village that I call Talpa, northern central Bulgaria.

We were sitting at the kitchen table, shelling walnuts for a cake that his grandson's wife was planning to cook for the New Year. I asked him where the walnuts had come from. He replied that they had come from the '*polyana do nac*', that is, 'clearing near our house'.

Having been raised in the city, I hadn't even realised that the trees were walnuts! But this display of ignorance was only furthered when I asked him if *anyone* could pick the walnuts. 'No', my great-uncle replied, because they are 'our' trees (meaning our family's trees). What makes them 'ours'? I asked. 'The fact that we planted them, looked after them, watered them' he responded. 'But the clearing is common land, so how do people know that the trees are ours'? I persisted. He just shrugged his shoulders and said 'they just do, everybody knows that they are ours'.

Using this anecdote, we can draw insights into some of the local assumptions concerning property:

- 1) that the legitimation of property ownership – fruit trees in this case – occurs on the basis of labour and work. The trees belong to the family because it is family members who have spent their time and effort in planting and looking after the trees.
- 2) that knowledge about ownership is local, and thus provides a boundary between 'the community' and 'outsiders'. The issue is one of identity.
- 3) that there is a clear discrepancy between legal and local understandings of land ownership. While there was no doubt in my great-uncle's mind as to the ownership of the trees, nevertheless they grow on land which is owned by the village council. From a strictly legal perspective, the

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trees are the property of the community and in the control of the Council. But ask any local and they will tell you something quite different.

Narrow understandings of property fail to appreciate the intricate and fundamental ways in which property is woven into the fabric of social life. A broader definition of property would involve 'the total distribution of rights and entitlements within society' (Hann 1998). In many regions across eastern Europe, for example, people have fought hard, in the last decade, to retain cooperatives, despite their apparent economic inefficiency. The rejection of private, individual farming in the post-socialist period and the preference shown for the cooperative working of the land is a response not specific to the Bulgarian countryside, but common to most of rural eastern Europe². To make sense of this it is important to recognise that cooperative farms were part of an integrated community, underpinned by complex notions of responsibility and reciprocal obligations between the state and individual/community.

In this paper I explore further the importance of the agricultural cooperative in terms of its symbolic importance for the community. My starting point is that 'work' is a central feature of rural identity and an important local binding force (See Pine 1996 & 1998 for Polish case, Verdery 1999 for Romania). Sites such as the agricultural cooperative, which were established by the pooling of local wealth and labour, appear to hold particular significance when considered in the context of local identity. Thus the cooperative is much more than simply an agricultural organisation with economic purpose. In order to appreciate the wider significance of the organisation, I consider it in a historical context – as one of a long list of community institutions which were constructed with local labour and resources. While I do not give any particular attention to the role of the state in this process, its degree of involvement in local production is an important consideration. The state's increasing penetration into peripheral areas during the course of the 20th century has coincided with greater control over local work and production. Only in the last 10 years has this process been reversed, as the state withdraws from the local level. This, in combination with the pro-socialist position of village Talpa, has had repercussions for not only village responses to the liquidation of agricultural cooperative but also for the community's identity.

Work, Local Identity and the Rise of the Agricultural Cooperative

Talpa, as other villages in the region, has a long history of establishing community institutions through joint labour. Below I briefly outline some moments in Talpian history which are particularly relevant when trying to understand present connections between land (property) and identity, that is, in appreciating the contemporary place of the socialist agricultural cooperative in the village.

Present inhabitants consider the modern history of Talpa to have begun in 1878, after Bulgaria won its freedom from the Turks. The latter evacuated the area, returning only to sell their land to Bulgarian settlers moving in. A construction programme began almost immediately: Turkish buildings were demolished and replaced with Bulgarian-style buildings. The responsibility for the initiative, construction and funding of the central village structures was a local affair. The church and school both built in 1882, and the *chitalishte* (cultural house³) built in 1887, were projects carried out by villagers using funding and donations from local sources, and constructed with the contribution of village labour. The only history of Talpa, written in 1969, records the efforts of local people.⁴ For example: one 96-year-old man, describing his participation in the building of the church is quoted as saying: ‘We built with excitement and with great will. We worked voluntarily and didn’t mind giving our labour. Once the afternoon set in, we returned from the fields and with carts we transported different materials – stone, wood, water. Everyone worked. Every stone is split by hand’ (Naymov 1969: 59-60).

Clearly, rural ‘work’ constitutes a central part of local identity⁵: the above quotation implies something about the character of the activity - it is ‘hard’, physical work, carried out by hand, often as a shared venture. Such themes arise again and again in village discourse. Elsewhere (Kaneff 1998a, 1998b) I have argued that the shared nature of village labour is a central dimension of rural relations. For example, the preparation/production of household food, as well

² Poland is an exception but even in this case there has been no smooth transition to new property relations (personal communication, Pine).

³ Presently consisting of a library, theatre, one large and a number of small meeting rooms.

⁴ The work was written by a prominent Talpian who was the director of the village school for periods both before and after World War 2 as well as head of the *chitalishte* for a number of decades.

⁵ See Pine (1996) for the Polish case.

as its exchange⁶ and consumption is a cornerstone of interaction between kin, neighbours and other villagers. Shared labour in household plot activities involving not only neighbours but - since the time of socialist industrialization - also kin now resident in the city, was a vital foundation of all village relations. I do not wish to dwell further on this point. Here, rather, I extend this idea to include joint labour projects that are not limited to the production of household food: for example, work surrounding the construction of public buildings such as the *chitalishte*, school and church. Community projects bound inhabitants together, cementing relations through the activity. Such tasks were also carried out during the socialist period when communal projects - for example, the foundation of the agricultural cooperative - were encouraged. Social relations are thus made concrete in local institutions which are built with local labour - the agricultural cooperative is one such institution - and become embedded in the collective history of the community. The resulting physical structure is the concrete symbol of these relations.

Since 'work' acts as a 'cementing agent' between participants, social distance is also designated in terms of labour. Indeed, labour constituted the basis for defining relations of familiarity - closeness was indicated in terms of the extent to which labour was shared and exchanged (Kanef 1998a). Agricultural work served to bind kin and neighbours in relations of trust, obligation and familiarity. Through the exclusion of non-workers, labour also served to define the boundaries of the community itself. Again, this point has been made with respect to household production of food but it seems equally true for other Talpian activities. The building of the church, school and *chitalishte* were examples of the community being constituted through projects involving shared work. It was villagers' hard labour in the construction of the *chitalishte*, school and church, which gave value to the buildings, which then became sources of pride, visual concrete symbols of joint effort by the new settlers. Another recollection of the establishment of the church, this time by an elderly female villager, emphasises the act as bound to issues of identity: 'I remember the Turkish mosque with the tower...We Bulgarians destroyed it and picked up the stones with our bare hands. The stones we carried to build this present church' (Naymov 1969: 60). The buildings represented two communities - 'Bulgarian' as opposed to 'Turkish', and Talpian as opposed to any other local community. Through the shared task of construction, the new settlers in Talpa, families who had immigrated from over 20 different villages in the region, were united. As a

⁶ See Smollet (1989:126) for an interesting discussion on being 'treated as quasi-kin' through inclusion in the exchange of home-preserved produce.

newly settled site with no long-term traditions for the post 1878 Bulgarian settlers to call upon, such shared tasks as the 'public' construction programme created a strong - perhaps sole source - of 'community' in the village.

While the appropriate state agencies provided authorisation for the buildings – the government in the case of the school, the higher church order for the church – and minimal financial assistance, the village projects were otherwise local concerns: they were organised through community initiative; construction and long term maintenance was carried out using local resources and labour. The village history gives a long list of names – people who donated money and time for these projects (Naymov 1969). It was not until the socialist period that the state finally provided significant amounts of financial and other support. Before 1944, when the socialist state was established, funds for the heating, lighting, maintenance and cleaning of the school, as well as the cost of furnishing the building, came from property written in the name of the school. Such school land - 45.6 hectares of fields, 4 hectares of forest and 6 hectares of meadow - was given 'under rent' and the proceeds used to fund the school. The *chitalishte* did not receive income from land until 1939, when it was granted 2.1 hectares by the government. Until this time, material support for the *chitalishte* came from individual donations, which included money, building supplies and grain (Naymov 1969: 17). Funding was also earned from local initiatives to organise entertainment projects. The proceeds of Talpian plays and other theatrical activities were channelled into developing the *chitaliste*. The library was established through the generosity of the local inhabitants who made donations of newspapers, books and journals, while others gave cash⁷.

Documents from this early period clearly identify the importance of the public buildings as places for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. The function of the *Chitalishte*, for example, was to provide adult education – through the library, courses, lectures and theatrical events. Villagers would better themselves both socially and economically. A founding member of the *Chitalishte* in the late 19th century was quoted as saying: 'the priest and teachers encouraged us...made us believe that if we want to have freedom...it must be through the educational programmes of the

⁷ The degree of autonomy evident in the establishment of the Talpian *chitalishte* appears quite typical of Bulgarian villages during the earlier part of the 20th century, although Sanders, in his 1930s ethnography of a village near Sofia, now an outer suburb of the city, notes a gradual increase in the penetration of the state at the local level.

Chitalishte' (Naymov 1969: 13-14). Education was seen as a fundamental survival skill necessary to villagers who must protect their interests from increasing state penetration and private entrepreneurs: 'Adults must pay taxes in the district council, in the law courts, they must calculate things at the markets and protect themselves from liquidators, businessmen and other exploiters' (Naymov 1969: 5).

Given the community's role in establishing the buildings, the perceived importance of the institutions in freeing villagers from their burdensome lives, and the communal sense of pride in the buildings, any attack on them was considered an assault on the village itself.

One event that stands out in local minds, was a right-wing purge of the *Chitalishte* library on the 3rd of May, 1923. It brought the socialist-oriented politics of Talpa in direct conflict with that of the national government and is passionately described in village history. The episode was told and retold to me on numerous occasions during the mid-late 1980s, but also in the following years:

The village was surrounded by the army and police from the city of Veliko Turnovo. A number of houses was searched and men arrested – communists and BZNC (Agrarian) party members - the perpetrators then moved to the village library from which they confiscated over 300 books, mostly socialist literature including works by Marx and Engels. A portion of the books was piled high in the *Chitalishte* yard and burnt publicly, the other part was taken back to the city of Turnovo, along with the arrested men (Naymov 1969: 26).

The library and contents were built up through years of concerted local effort. The destruction of village property (books), which had taken the villagers so much effort to develop, was also ultimately a deep cut into the core of village identity. There was a number of such assaults on Talpa throughout the mid 1930s and in the lead up to World War II, when much of the anti-government activity locally brought the village in direct conflict with right-wing state policies. Portrayed as a community with strong socialist leanings – if not amongst all individuals, then at least amongst those who held leading positions in the village (even the first village priest was a

socialist!) - this period placed Talpa as much 'at war' with its own government as with foreign powers.⁸

To the extent that shared work activities solidify the community both symbolically and practically, then the socialist agricultural cooperative was about creating community, part of a long tradition of Talpian community labour projects.

Positive improvements in rural life brought during the socialist period were associated with changing forms of 'work'. Indeed in the context of state socialism - which controlled both the means and forces of production - work became a significant 'target' for socialist transformation. The collectivisation of agricultural production was a fundamental factor in this process. In many significant ways, the establishment of the agricultural cooperative in the late 1940s paralleled the establishment of the public building programme some 60 years earlier. Again, as with the building of the *chitalishte*, church and school, the cooperative was the product of local labour and wealth. While cooperative farming was not welcomed by all villagers, few would deny the increases in standard of living that were associated with the establishment of the cooperative. The important fact was that while the cooperative was a state initiative, it was established on the basis of local contributions: constituted through collectivisation of local land and livestock and built with joint labour.

The institution was far more significant to the community than simply as an organisation for agricultural production. The collectivisation of agricultural production was perceived as a fundamental factor in contributing to the overall improvement in rural standards of living during the socialist period. It freed villages from heavy physical work through the mechanisation of agricultural labour and took away a lot of individual risk associated with working the land. Moreover, collective agriculture introduced a form of labour compatible with urban factory work and enabled villagers to enjoy, for the first time, salaries, pensions and holidays. An increasing

⁸ I have discussed the pro-socialist history of Talpa elsewhere (Kaneff n.d.). Here I would simply point out that this position was probably more typical for villages that, like Talpa, were newly established (that is, post-independence – 1878) Bulgarian settlements. In such villages socialist politics and the importance of education (rather than religion and traditional customs) were prominent values that served to bind the community.

number of villagers moved out of working full-time in agriculture altogether - aided by an excellent and free nationalised educational system. By 1986 when I first arrived in Talpa, only about one-sixth of the village population worked full-time in the agricultural cooperative. It is true that all Talpians laboured on their half-hectare household plots, but for those not yet pensioned, this work was part-time, carried out in conjunction with other, often non-agricultural occupations. Lastly, the cooperative provided a wide range of services – offering practical and technical assistance to household agriculture (veterinary help for example) - as well as sponsoring social events.

Changing Work/Ownership-Land Relations in Post-Socialist Talpa

The liquidation of the cooperative in 1992 constituted an important symbolic as well as practical act; with fundamental repercussions for village identity as well as real consequences for future agricultural production.

Reminiscent of the situation in the early 20th century when the state's presence and role in rural life was comparatively minor, Talpa has become once again relatively autonomous. Privatisation - part of the general move towards decentralisation - involving the return of land to individual private control, is perhaps the most significant way in which the state has withdrawn its involvement in local affairs. The particular way in which restitution took place in Bulgaria - through returning land to pre-1944 owners - gave prominence to land on the basis of kinship ties rather than on the basis of work/labour. Undoubtedly, both kinship and work are bound in complicated ways to the service of rural identity, but this complexity is not recognised in the restitution laws. I have noted elsewhere how the distortion which acknowledges kin at the expense of work has served to create new ethnic tensions in Talpa; that is, between Bulgarians who can legitimate their claims to land on the basis of pre-1944 ownership versus non-Bulgarian immigrants to the area who have no claims on the basis of their 30 odd years of work in the cooperative (Kaneff 1998b). Here, I highlight a second antagonism arising from the kinship-oriented restitution law: a division between those who create and reproduce their community in terms of shared labour and non-participants in such community-oriented work activities. Actually this antagonism has two manifestations: villagers versus non-local state reformers, and land renters versus land owners. I deal with both in turn, below.

To understand the depth of local resentment in connection with the liquidation of the socialist cooperative, we may recall how integrally entwined the institution was in everyday village life. Arising from their joint labour and perceived as a source of 'freedom' from agricultural toil, the cooperative had symbolic importance as a monument to local improvements in standard of living. The reforms (driven as much by political/ideological motives as economic or social reasons) did not take into account the importance of the cooperative for providing a range of local services or its strong connections with local identity. Talpians⁹ spoke about the dismantling of the socialist agricultural cooperative in a way reminiscent of their reflections on the past event of the confiscation and destruction of village books. In the minds of the villagers, there were similarities between the earlier period when the fascist government came and destroyed village library property and what has happened in the last 10 years, as villagers have had to stand by and watch the liquidation of their socialist cooperative. In both cases, Talpians had worked hard and made important sacrifices in order to establish the institutions, institutions which they believed were central in the improvement of their life-styles.

It is little wonder, given the central importance of the cooperative to the village community, that its disestablishment has had fundamental repercussions for local/state relations. The cooperative was founded with *local* land, *local* livestock and a product of *local* labour. Villagers were proud of their achievements during the socialist period and resented outsiders liquidating their work of a life-time. As one woman said 'We joined the agricultural co-operative and now its being destroyed. Just as well that those who were most involved in founding it are dead and can' t see their *work* being destroyed [my emphasis]¹⁰. Outside initiatives to liquidate the cooperative were an affront, a perceived attack on one of the central village institutions, an attack on the community itself. The reforms, enacted with little consultation of local needs or desires, were a fundamental reason for the souring of local-state relations, in much the same way that the confiscation and destruction of village books had been some 60 years earlier. For the first time in half a century, the state was not seen as supportive of local institutions, but a threat to them.

⁹ In using this collective term, I do not mean to imply that the community's response was unified and harmonious. However, a vast majority (my estimate is almost 90 per cent of the village population) was against the liquidation of the cooperative. For this reason, I feel justified in referring to the 'Talpians' response.

¹⁰ See also Verdery (1999: 72) who suggests that Romanian cooperatives have a similar importance – one bound up with local notions of work.

The height of tensions was reached at the time that the liquidation of the socialist cooperative took place. The Liquidation Council was established on the basis of policies of the anti-communist party, the Union of Democratic Forces (henceforth, the UDF), which during its short term in office in 1991-92 passed laws that disallowed members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (henceforth to be known as the BSP, previously the Communist Party) from participating in the process. In Talpa the Liquidation Council was comprised of five men who fulfilled these criteria and were thus in no way representative of the politically pro-socialist village. Unsurprisingly these men bore the brunt of rising antagonisms between ordinary villagers and state officials. Further, Talpians re-established the co-operative working of the land in preference to private individual farms - an act which placed them at odds with goals upheld by the UDF. The first of the two new private cooperatives was formed in 1992. The president, Iliev, spoke in a village meeting of 'interfering' outsiders and promised that no-one but Talpians would be employed in the new co-operative (a promise he had to break at a later stage). Indeed at the same meeting, he said that 'I'll kick out non-villagers, they have no business here'. Villagers took it as an obvious reference to the Liquidation Council members most of whom lived in the nearby township and who by nature of their political alliances - and participation in the liquidation of the socialist co-operative - had become the target of local resentment. Liquidation Council members were representatives of the new political-economic order and village anti-state feelings were focused precisely on such visible figures.

Animosity spread to those to whom the village Liquidation Council was responsible, in this way transferring prejudice from urban-based representatives in Talpa to a general dislike of all non-local 'state officials'. This is borne out by another statement made by Iliev, who said of Stanev, head of the Liquidation Council, that 'I don't think Stanev is our problem. Firstly his directives come from there', and he pointed to the ceiling, indicating them as coming 'from above'. This was a significant moment. The relationship between the village and state centre was under contention. Unlike the socialist period, the state now was seen as something alien, distant and non-accessible. Once a 'model' village with close and 'exemplary' relations to the state centre, villagers now realised that they were on their own and could no longer rely on outside assistance. This was echoed in the way that other local people started speaking about state officials, as those from 'above' and as 'outsiders', in contrast to the familiar way in which state officials were perceived during socialist times. As one member said at a meeting of the newly formed private cooperative

'If we don't help ourselves, there's no one else to help us'. Village meetings placed an emphasis on local autonomy and speeches along the line of 'it's our land and our village we should be able to do as we please' were frequently voiced.

Work is still carried out collectively, but the state is no longer involved in this process. The divorce between the state and agricultural production has resulted in tensions manifested in part as between the village and state centre. Work now serves to exclude state officials in a way not evident during the socialist period. It is the relationship with state officials, those involved in the state's demolition of a village institution - the cooperative - that is perceived as the problem. This chasm represents a severance of close links to the state and simultaneously a souring of particular local/centre relations. Reform laws, that legalised kin as the basis for land restitution and de-emphasised work, served to exclude outsiders not bound to the community through labour.

But this was only the first of two significant changes to the work-land-identity relationship. The development of different types of cooperatives has led, in the last ten years, to different arrangements between work, ownership and land. I have written about the formation of the two new private cooperatives and their progress over the past years elsewhere (Kaneff 1995, 1996, 1998c). Here I simply emphasise certain points in order to underline the consequences in terms of work and local identity.

The second new cooperative founded in 1993 – called 'Talpa 1993' – is organised in a fundamentally different way from the other private cooperative. 'Talpa 1993' is run by two renters who pay a set rent to land owners, taking all the risks and profits. The renters have total control over decisions (what is sown, how, when). This is unlike the other cooperative which is run by a committee, where profits are divided equally amongst the members and where a regulatory committee exists to investigate complaints and irregularities. In the case of the latter, general meetings give members access to decision-making processes and opportunities to express approval or give advice. There are no such mechanisms available in 'Talpa 1993', where the two renters have sole authority.

In the early years after its foundation, members of 'Talpa 1993', that is the land owners, did not seem particularly concerned about their lack of input into the organisation. They were receiving

rent, more than the members of the other cooperative, and that was sufficient. For the first time this year (2000), however, I detected a change in views. Maria, for example, had transferred her land shares to her daughter living in the city, who in turn took them out of the first cooperative called 'Progress' and into 'Talpa 1993'. Maria stated that the problem with 'the firm' (interestingly no one deluded themselves anymore by calling 'Talpa 1993' a cooperative as in the early period after 1989) was that 'the land owners had less control over the two renters than members in the other cooperative'. She continued: 'at the firm there is no negotiation of price per decacre - whatever is written in the contract by the two renters is what you get. At least in the other cooperative you can have more control over these things and have your say at meetings. Also cooperative 'Progress' has a regulatory council'. She described the behaviour of one of the two renters as a '*tarikát*', that is, a 'cunning fellow/sly dog' who would not tolerate listening to complaints or arguments. Implicitly she was also pointing to the weak position of the landowners in 'Talpa 1993'. Maria elaborated this criticism with an example: one elderly woman had gone twice to the renter's office to complain. The nature of the complaint was not disclosed, but I was under the impression it had to do with the issue of rent. The second time he had cut her short and told her 'not to waste his time, that if she was not satisfied she should take her land and leave the firm'. Maria concluded that this was 'hardly a proper way to behave toward the landowners', after all, they became millionaires from *our* lands'.

Also, for the first time this year, I heard one of the renter's greatest sponsors – an elderly neighbour of Maria's who had helped the two men initially found the firm and who had convinced fellow Talpians to break away from the cooperative and put their lands in the firm - complain. She and her husband, who like many in the village are now struggling to make ends meet, expressed dissatisfaction about how little rent they receive. She acknowledged that the two renters give (marginally) more rent per decacre than the other cooperative, but in proportion to what the renters receive, it is little. She explained that the two renters 'look after the workers, but not after the land owners'. She said that they give their casual workers (tractor drivers) and their families presents at Christmas, they hold a banquet for them at this time, they have provided them with work clothes and are now thinking about also providing them with warmer winter work jackets and give them higher salaries than their counterparts in the other cooperative. She also described how they had paid their accountant – Snedza – 'to do part time study in order that she could study for a tertiary degree in accountancy'. She now works full-time for the two renters

'receiving a very good salary.' Maria's neighbour pointed to the gold rings the young accountant wears on her fingers and the gold earrings as evidence of how well she is being paid.

Maria's neighbour's view was that while there is no doubt that the two renters treat their workers well, 'they have forgotten the land owners'. She said several times that the rent they were being given is too little. When I asked her why she doesn't do something, after all, the land is hers, she pointed to the bind landowners find themselves in – there is no financial incentive in moving across to the other cooperative, while staying in this cooperative means acceptance of the terms dictated by the two renters. She repeated the dilemma concerning the two renters: 'they have forgotten that they are working *our* land'.

Here, it seems to me, the relationship between work and land is of a fundamentally different order from anything that has existed in Talpa since World War II. Ownership and work in the 'Talpa 1993' firm are separate in a way that is not true of the socialist period - when technically land was never nationalised and villagers had control over their land via their work in the cooperative and role in the decision making process. The other contemporary cooperative still maintains such mechanisms which give villagers a say over their land in a way that 'the firm' does not. Whether members in the other cooperative work the land or not, they still have some determination over the way it is used through general meetings. The firm, on the other hand, creates a clear severance between land and work, between those who work the land and those who own it.

Conclusion

'Work' was and still is a central dimension of rural Talpian identity. During particular historical moments Talpians have perceived state officials as 'attacking' local identity through destroying the products of their labour – be it their hard work to collect books for the library or more recently the agricultural cooperative. In both instances these institutions (the *chitalishte* and state run cooperative) were seen as having particular importance to the community – the result of village toil and the means through which villagers believed they could be freed from their burdensome lives. In this context local property and identities are connected (Hann 1998: 2) through shared labour.

Post-socialist reforms involving land restitution that de-emphasised work and which necessitated the liquidation of the cooperative, failed to acknowledge two important issues:

- 1) the reforms failed to recognise the agricultural cooperative's symbolic and practical role in contributing to improvements in rural life over the previous 50 years,
- 2) the importance of the institution in terms of local identity, through community work which had been invested in it.

Decentralisation policies, especially land privatisation involving the liquidation of the agricultural cooperatives, underestimated the crucial role that the cooperatives played in local community life and in village identity. The private cooperatives that are now developing are establishing new ways in which 'work' and 'land' are juxtaposed. This in turn is transforming local identities, not only in terms of growing lines of division between village and state officials but also between local land owners and renters (who in the Talpian case are not village natives).

At the source of these tensions is the failure of post-socialist reformers to grasp that agricultural cooperatives (and land) are invested with meanings that go well beyond issues of economic performance. Property relations are made concrete in local institutions that are built with village labour and become embedded in the collective history of the community. The physical structure of the agricultural cooperative is the 'real' symbol of these relations. Thus, from the villagers' perspective, reformers have attacked the very heart of 'community' through the liquidation of their cooperative. As with the walnut trees growing on the *polyana*, there appears to be a wide chasm between legal definitions of land/property and local definitions. The cooperatives, like the walnut trees, bind social identities and the community together through shared labour and through local knowledge about this labour. Ownership and property are ultimately determined through work (see also Verdery 1999: 73) rather than, or at least as much as, through legal structures imposed 'from above'.

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