# Chapter 2:
# Transformations of Peasantries

In journalistic and academic approaches to East European economies in the socialist period, two main lines of argument predominated. Commentators either highlighted the failure of socialist economies to meet the needs of their populations, or if needs were being met, they sought to show that apparent economic successes were in reality triumphs of private initiative. In other words, socialist principles were taken to be inherently unworkable. But the diagnoses of stagnation on the one hand, or convergence with the capitalist west on the other, were both simplistic and did not do justice to the diversity of East European economic life under socialism. This chapter concentrates upon the rural economy, the largest sector in most of Eastern Europe until the socialist period. Most anthropological research has been carried out here. This research suggests that very significant changes took place in the socialist period, which led to major improvements in the material conditions of large sections of the population. These achievements have been undermined in the post-socialist years. However, popular evaluations of rural policies may show a surprising, inverse pattern: highly negative during the socialist period, particularly following the trauma of collectivization, but more positive following the recent restitution of private property rights, even though this restitution has taken place against a background of collapsing markets and reductions in state subsidies.

I argued in Chapter One that Eastern Europe was subjected to a process of 'underdevelopment' by the expanding west, a process which began in the sixteenth century and was not arrested in many parts of the region until the advent of socialism in the middle of the twentieth century. As the scene of pioneering forms of peasant protest in the pre-socialist period (Landsberger 1974), and then, under socialism, of a co-ordinated attempt to escape from the world system established by capitalism, the East European experience is instructive for other regions. As Halpern and Kideckel have put it, 'Thematically, the transformation of East European society has provided a laboratory for the study of rapid and directed social change succeeding conditions of extreme underdevelopment. These circumstances are being duplicated in the developing world' (1983: 394). East European socialism was fundamentally problematic because, far from emerging in the course of class conflict in mature industrial societies, as Marx had anticipated, it was imposed upon societies that still had

large, sometimes preponderant, agrarian sectors. Marx himself at the end of his life held out tantalizing possibilities for revolutionaries in the east. But even if 'jumping stages' allowed you to move directly from feudalism to socialism, the problems of 'building socialism' in backward economies were obviously different from those faced by mature industrial economies. The 'defence' often entered on behalf of the USSR, namely that it sacrificed or was forced to sacrifice other socialist goals because of an over-riding need to promote rapid industrialization and overcome historical backwardness, can also be entered for most of Eastern Europe. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that socialist rulers prioritized production targets, and later sought increasingly to ground their legitimacy in the satisfaction of consumers' material expectations (Kideckel 1988).

Socialist economic performance was very uneven. The common features included the attempt in all the East European countries to introduce some forms of central planning in the early post-war period, and to constrain market forces accordingly; high rates of investment in heavy industry; and a squeeze on the peasantry, many of whom found new jobs in the towns, though not all were able to settle there. Many of the differences could be related to the developmental levels reached in the pre-socialist period. The Czech lands and East Germany were the most advanced areas of Eastern Europe economically. These two countries maintained a relatively high standard of living under socialism (compared to other socialist states) and at times made the basic socialist institutions of central planning seem almost workable. At the other extreme, the Balkan states were the most underdeveloped in the region at the start of the socialist period. Yet the four Balkan states followed rather different economic paths under socialism: autarchy was emphasized in Albania; self-management in Yugoslavia, closely tied to the federal and decentralized structure of the polity; ultra-orthodox, heavy-industrial bias in Romania reflected the highly centralized character of that political system; and finally, Bulgaria pursued more pragmatic adjustments to natural endowments, coupled with limited economic reform. Pre-socialist history and 'culture' cannot fully account for these very significant differences, any more than they can account for the contrasting fates of Hungary and Poland after 1956.

Hungary, as noted in Chapter One, was close to the middle of the spectrum in terms of development in the pre-socialist period: peripheral compared to the Czech or Prussian lands, but more advanced than the Balkans. The Hungarian experience of Stalinism was fairly typical. Later, in its pursuit of economic reform after 1968, Hungary provided the best testing ground for the vexing questions of 'market socialism', i.e. the viability of a form of economic

organization which was neither an orthodox centrally planned socialist economy nor the 'free market' of liberal economics. Many have disputed the possibility of such a 'third way', and for ideological reasons it could never be embraced officially by the socialist authorities. However, despite significant reversals, the consolidation of Hungary's New Economic Mechanism after 1968 brought progressively greater exposure to market discipline. By the late 1980s Hungary had reached the stage where the budget constraints of state enterprises were much tougher, the private and semi-private sectors were enormously expanded, and discussions were proceeding concerning bankruptcy laws, unemployment benefits, and a new system of personal taxation. In other words, even before the political changes of 1989-90, radical and irreversible changes had taken place in the structure and organization of the national economy. These changes, and the possibility of a 'third way', were then overtaken by events external to Hungary. I shall suggest that the peasants, the prime beneficiaries of the policies of the socialist years, have become the principal victims of the new direction followed in the 1990s. The focus is on Hungary, but to some extent I think the arguments apply to most other parts of the region as well.

## The classical East European peasantry

Anthropological studies such as those by Fél and Hofer (1969), Halpern and Halpern (1972), Salzmann and Scheufler (1974), and Stahl (1980), covering respectively Hungary, Serbia, Bohemia and Romania, have presented Eastern Europe as the home of 'classical' peasantries (cf. Macfarlane 1978). In this classical model, the rural household was the basic unit of society, simultaneously the productive enterprise and the consumption unit. It relied primarily on the labour inputs of family members. This family group could be expanded to include both additional generations and 'lateral' extensions (when married siblings remained part of the same domestic group). The group was closely identified with the property it owned through the generations, its 'patrimony'. The identity was in a sense collective, being shared by all family members, through the unit acknowledged the authority of one male head. The economies of the peasant households were primarily oriented towards meeting the subsistence needs of their members, who seldom travelled far outside their village community. There was some mobility of a cyclical kind within the village, i.e. the poor peasants of one generation could become the rich of the next, and vice versa, and this prevented significant status differentiation. No peasant group had close ties with groups alien to the community, if indeed external links were significant at all. The village community was the highest

level of identity. It was a cohesive force, composed of essentially autonomous households which might, however, practise various forms of mutual aid, particularly labour exchanges. The level of technology was rudimentary by modern standards, and this too, like the entire culture, was essentially stagnant.

Whilst some of these features of an ideal type peasant society can be found in the East Europeanist literature, a close reading of the monographs cited above reveals that the four case-studies are extraordinarily different, and no single one of them comes even close to meeting the full criteria of the 'model'. Above all, any notion of autonomous, subsistence-oriented communities is untenable. All four of these areas were affected by the international livestock trade from the eighteenth century onwards (some of them even earlier). The effect of external political structures was far from uniform. Southern Bohemia experienced a mild but fairly orthodox manorial system, whilst on the Great Hungarian Plain, in the so-called *civis* peasant communities, the impact of feudalism was comparatively slight. The extent and timing of the later infiltration of villages by professional administrators varied, and so did stratification patterns within the peasantry. The Halperns' claim of 'minimal class distinctions' within the Serbian peasantry looks convincing when compared to Hungary, but less impressive when their data are compared with some of the Romanian material. As Stahl shows, communal ideals were purest here, but their efflorescence was not evidence of a general pristine form of peasant egalitarianism; it was rather a specific response to changes in the external environment, broadly speaking the same changes which induced serfdom and later capitalism in neighbouring regions.

With the partial exception of Stahl, all of these studies are limited to particular communities, and there is a built-in tendency to emphasize their unity and their self-sufficiency. None can be taken as fully representative of the wider region or state. For example, in Hungary many villages were dominated by large estates right down to the socialist period, and their economies and social structures were certainly quite different (see e.g. Illyés 1971). These works highlight the pitfalls in attempting to construct a general model of peasantry, abstracted from changing historical conditions. Perhaps the only truly widespread features of Eastern European peasantries were attachment to the land as patrimony and a reliance on unsophisticated, labour-intensive technology. Both of these were to be directly challenged by collectivization.

The 'peasant' stereotype has been extremely influential 'on the ground' in Eastern Europe, particularly through the influence of populist movements and

associated political parties. Some scholars set out deliberately to highlight the contrasts between the modern world in which Eastern European emigrants found themselves, and the 'traditional' world from which they had come: the study by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) of the Polish peasantry is a notable example. Such works contain valuable materials, but they are not necessarily the most reliable guides to changing empirical realities. The danger is that the relatively abundant sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are treated as a reliable guide to earlier centuries. Yet all these peasantries have been in a continuous process of change throughout their existence, and the 'traditional peasantry' beloved of East European intellectuals, including the national ethnographers, must ultimately be seen as part of their myth-making.

Granted this variety and the need to adopt a dynamic perspective, it is still possible to identify some general directions of change. The main trend can be summed up as a movement away from 'communalism' and towards more individualized forms of ownership and control. Sometimes this process stopped short at the boundary of the peasant family, but at other times and in other places it began to alter the character of the family itself. The 'communalism' of the past should not be exaggerated, as it was by the populists. The egalitarian commune in Russia was largely a product of the specific circumstances of emancipation. Fél and Hofer's account of land tenure in a Hungarian village makes the general pattern very clear. The common system of cultivation was abolished in 1901, and the final consolidation of plots took place in 1927. 'This marked the end of a process by which land possessed by the community and used in a collective way for two hundred years was fragmented into exactly measured and independently used parcels of private property. The ancient communal ownership and use was preserved in the pasture only' (1969: 52). The impact of commercial pressures caused similar rapid disintegration of communal forms in pre-war Romania, and the search for new communal forms had to begin afresh in the socialist period.

These fundamental changes in property relations in peasant communities, exemplified by the move towards simpler forms of full private ownership, were stimulated by changes in the general economic environment. They had far-reaching effects not only upon the social structure of rural communities but upon all aspects of culture and the value system. The extent of these implications has been hotly debated. Marxists emphasized the penetration of capitalist market principles and a new polarization of social relations, whereas populists asserted the fundamental absence of class differentiation and emphasized the continued strength of the community's barriers against market penetration.

While all East European countries had pockets of development - often financed and controlled by foreign capital - the general picture was one of overwhelming poverty, of health and nutritional crisis, aggravated by severe rural overpopulation. Conditions were often worst on the large estates, comparable to the *latifundia* of the Mediterranean and Latin America, where there were no effective economic incentives to encourage investment and social progress (Warriner 1964).

Sometimes a village 'on the margin', untypical of most other villages, can still serve to illustrate the main themes of transformation. The Hungarian village of Tázlár is located on a poor, relatively infertile part of the Great Plain. It was inhabited before the Turkish conquest of the region in the early sixteenth century, but then remained as deserted *puszta* until the latter part of the nineteenth century (see Chapter Six for further detail). The lands were then sold on the market. Some went to prosperous aristocrats and entrepreneurs, but most were bought in very small parcels by poor immigrants who were being squeezed out of other, more densely populated regions. This settlement was never a traditional *gemeinschaft*. Its members did not reside in a nuclear centre, as most villagers did. Tázlár had very few public buildings of any kind, not even a church. Instead, the immigrants built and occupied farms on their own landed property, and ethnic and linguistic divisions frequently isolated them from their neighbours. Whereas populist ethnographers were able to document how outlying farms in other parts of the Great Plain formed part of an integrated settlement network centred upon a market town, this was not the case for Tázlár. It must be seen instead as the direct product of the new economic system that was emerging in this period, which was commercializing the land in a wider context of monetization and rural overpopulation. A Leninist analysis of class polarization is much more plausible for this settlement than for older villages, with traditions of solidarity. Statistical data for land ownership in Tázlár do indeed suggest a settlement stratified into clearly defined social classes, in which the principle of private rights over landed property enjoyed unchallenged supremacy (Hann 1980a: Ch.2).

But whilst inspection of archival, statistical and other documentary materials might lend support to a Marxist-Leninist analysis, fieldwork in the community elicited a different story. Nobody denied past inequalities in land ownership, but the poor and the landless had patrons to whom they were linked morally as well as economically. The survival and reproduction of all households was guaranteed. Many families fell in the intermediate 'middle peasant' groupings: they were not fully autonomous, but they could hope to achieve a measure of household self-sufficiency in at least one phase of the unit's 'developmental

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cycle', and this inhibited any perception of class polarization. Tázlár, too, had its communal pasture, and was able to preserve it right down to the socialist period, because the relatively poor quality of the land reduced the incentives to parcel everything out to individuals. Even in those parts of the settlement which were fully privatized, the statistical details of ownership did not reveal how the land was used: larger landowners often allowed others to work their plots in return for small favours or support.

In these ways, a community and a moral order did develop in Tázlár. Even here, where the farms were new and the land poor, peasants identified very strongly with their plots. Some families were continuously active in the land market, but would never consider selling the plots they had inherited. Much of the land was held by absentee owners, who presumably did not feel such attachments. At the other extreme, some of the former landless and poor peasant groups were among the first groups to leave the village in the socialist period. The descendants of poorer families who have stayed have tended to gravitate to full-time work in the cooperatives: their loyalties to the land are weaker than those of villagers who claim descent from the ranks of the middle peasantry. However, as in the village studied by Fél and Hofer (1969), a sentiment and value that may, strictly speaking, have characterized only a part of the community came to be endorsed by the majority. The proof of these attachments was manifested in the socialist period in the opposition of the rural population to collectivization. Remarkably, Tázlár and a minority of similarly endowed villages were able to avoid the Soviet model of collectivization. The Tázlár version enabled elements of the classical Eastern European peasantry to survive, or at least to avoid breakdown and collapse.

### The cooperative farm in theory and practice

Marx had little idea what post-capitalist society would look like, and he was not well disposed towards peasantries (cf. Mitrany 1951). He largely ignored agriculture, but seems to have assumed that trends towards capitalist concentration would prevail here, as in other sectors of the economy. Later Marxists who made specific studies of agriculture were aware of the limitations of this perspective. Karl Kautsky (1988) pointed to the persistence of small-scale, family farmers in Germany, but he still clung to the notion that such farmers must be on the road to becoming proletarians, however long the road might be. Even more influential for twentieth century socialist societies was Lenin's simultaneously researched study of the Russian countryside (1956). This was essentially a polemical work against the Russian Populists, in which

he greatly exaggerated the extent to which the peasantry was already divided along class lines.

These polemics were still relatively fresh in the memory when the Bolsheviks seized power and 'Leftists' and 'Rightists' debated the future course of Soviet development strategy. The programme of Bukharin was not exactly that of the Populists, but he was at least aware of the specific features of agriculture, and favoured some continuation of the market-based economic policies of the early 1920s, rather than their abandonment. That was the course followed by Lenin himself in the last years of his life. However Stalin emerged victorious from the political battle which followed Lenin's death, and it was he, drawing freely on the class polarization rhetoric of the early Lenin, who pushed through mass collectivization in the USSR in the years 1929-32. The economic and political consequences were enormous.

The Soviet theoretical arguments and experience of collectivization were directly relevant to later developments in other parts of Eastern Europe, where the same institutional forms were imposed after 1945. Thus *cooperative farms*, where resources were the jointly held property of their members, were distinguished from *state farms*, in which all property belonged to the state (a higher form of ownership) and management principles approximated more closely those of industrial factories. Throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe this distinction weakened over the years: the status and working conditions of cooperative farm workers increasingly came to resemble the more 'industrialized' model of the state farm. Collectivization in Eastern Europe, while far from voluntary or popular, required less drastic forms of coercion than had been the case in the USSR, and the direct human costs were therefore much lower. The economic implications also differed, since at least some of the East European states had a fairly advanced industrial base by the time mass collectivization was completed (the early 1960s). Due to unfavourable political circumstances, attempts to pursue collectivization in Poland and Yugoslavia were never completed.

The formal theory of the cooperative farm specified an institution designed both to maintain political control (partly through party cells), and to achieve economic efficiency by responding appropriately to externally determined targets, as part of the overall planned economy. The organizational structure was complex, and changed significantly through time. The formal rules were a facade behind which anthropologists could uncover a more complex social field, but a great deal depended on the positions individuals held in the formal, emphatically hierarchical division of labour (Humphrey 1983).

Assessment of the political and economic performance of cooperative farms is not as straightforward as most western commentaries imply. It is widely accepted that at macro levels the farms proved unsatisfactory in economic terms: their productivity was low, environmental damage and wastage was high, and a labour force of poor quality was poorly utilized (Wädekin 1973, 1982). Cooperative farms also helped to establish new forms of social inequality, as well as reinforcing older forms, including gender inequalities. For these reasons many latter-day populists as well as western liberals have condemned the institution in its entirety. For Doreen Warriner (1964) they replicated the structural imbalances of the large estates of the pre-socialist period, notably in their uneven distribution of persons over the land. Russian sociologists have argued that the collective farms severed links between people and land, creating a passive, alienated workforce and destroying the sense of 'mastery' that had been built up over centuries of peasant culture (Zaslavskaia 1989).

Anthropological field studies of collectivized villages have dispelled the myth of their uniformity. The models imposed from the top in Eastern Europe may have been almost identically specified, reflecting their common origin in the Soviet model, but implementation depended on a host of variables at regional and local levels. Villagers were not merely the passive recipients of commands from above, and some anthropologists have found that they have had creative, or at least constraining effects on national policy making. David Kideckel's field research concentrated upon the economic transformation of a community in southeastern Transylvania. He noted (1982) villagers' strong resistance to all forms of collectivization, even in the early, Stalinist years. When this provoked a stalling of the campaign in 1951, only a weaker form of 'association' was promoted during the rest of the 1950s. Continuing agitation against rich peasants was counter-productive: it deprived the authorities of some valuable sources of support for their policies, and helped to convince the mass of the peasantry that they should not join any form of collective. Consequently only party members could be prevailed upon to join the new associations, making them entirely unrepresentative. Some peasants who applied to join did so for reasons to do with their own personal networks and calculations of later benefit. Others who might have liked to join were inhibited from doing so by the prejudice of general village opinion. The associations in this area, which was economically and ethnically diverse and had been part of the Romanian state only since 1921, had scant regard for collectivist principles. They could afford to do what they liked because of their strong identification

with the party. Kideckel's analysis implied that the discord of the 1950s in the villages not only frustrated the policymakers of that period and left a permanent sense of opposition among the peasants; it also helped the authorities to understand how better to implement mass collectivization, which in this area was relatively smoothly accomplished in the spring of 1962. Hence the author speaks of a 'dialectical transformation of commune and national policy' (1982: 335), which continued after cooperative farms were fully established.

Kideckel and other anthropologists have also explored the adjustments that had to be made within cooperative farms for them to function with a modicum of efficiency: basically, adjustments had to be made between the private interests of individual members and the collective interests of the farm. What Kideckel calls a 'de facto concern for individual and community response' (1982: 336) was severely neglected in the last phases of socialism in Romania, which saw a return to the more repressive policies of the 1950s. In other countries, however, the dialectical interaction between centre and periphery, between villagers and their states, developed in more complex and creative ways.

My study of Tázlár focused on a zone where socialist adjustments to regional ecology and settlement patterns became increasingly realistic and free of dogma. The 'specialist cooperatives' of this region resembled the Romanian 'associations' of the 1950s. Many households in the mid-1970s still farmed the same lands they had farmed before collectivization, and used approximately the same methods. They could order certain technical services from the cooperative, and they could sell their produce through it, but they also had private options available to them. Although the collective sector of this cooperative had been gradually strengthened over the years, and its formal structures corresponded to those of regular collective farms, its members were required to work no more than six days per year in the collective sector. Even this obligation could be commuted by a small monetary payment. The result was that most households had remained active commodity producers in one or more branches of agriculture. They often had some regular source of wage income from the socialist sector too, which might involve commuting to urban factories. Still, the continuities with the peasant society and peasant economy of the pre-socialist period were substantially greater than almost anywhere else in collectivized Eastern Europe.

Pragmatic adjustment to local ecological factors, which hinged in the Tázlár case on the problems posed to large-scale management by fragmented and labour-intensive orchards and vineyards, is parallelled elsewhere in the region.

Beck (1976) and Randall (1976) have described upland areas of Transylvania where, for rather different reasons, collectivization was similarly modified. But Hungary went much further in pursuing optimal combinations of public and private sector interests. In most cooperative farms this was achieved via the 'private plot', a chameleon-like institution that changed its character from region to region, and also varied with economic trends from one year to the next. The wider framework was in essence one of market economy, for it was through market price signals that rural households (and a good many urban ones too) received incentives to produce, and information about which branches of production were most profitable. This system was frequently refined in the course of the economic reform programme launched in 1968. When the path of reform was obstructed, the rational response of producers was to contract production. The authorities then responded by allowing a rise in prices and reaffirming the market principle (Hann 1980a: Ch.4). In Romania the typical response to such difficulties was to try to 'command' or 'persuade' the small-farm sector to produce more. By and large the farmers did not respond to such exhortations: hence the enormous disparities in the relative weighting of agriculture in the national economies of Hungary and Romania, and in the quality and quantity of the food supplies in the two countries.

Although in some senses a continuation of the old peasant economy (the rural family supplied most of the labour and technology remained simple), in other respects the forms of rural economy developed in socialist Hungary were quite novel. Domestic husbandry, focused on the house, was combined with new forms of corporation. Most farmers were significantly dependent on the collective sector for some of their inputs, e.g. chemicals and machine services, as well as land. Some regular commodity producers had no access to land at all: they bought fodder from the socialist sector, which could produce it cheaply by large-scale methods, and used it to raise hogs in the backyard. My work tended to support those who claimed a successful socialist integration of the small-farm sector, and who spoke of a 'symbiosis' (cf. Swain 1985).

In theoretical terms this Hungarian pattern can be linked to the work of the theories of the Russian agrarian economist A.V. Chayanov (1966). In Chayanov's view agriculture required a complex division of labour, since different tasks needed different skills and different sizes of unit. He advocated 'vertical integration', as opposed to the 'horizontal' amalgamation of farms achieved by collectivization in its Stalinist variant. A characteristic vertical chain in late socialist Hungary might begin with a cooperative farm member, who contracted with the socialist sector to raise animals and did so by proven

peasant methods, working unsociable hours and using simple technologies. Most of the farm labour might in reality devolve to the member's wife, while he himself commuted to a nearby factory. The family enjoyed the support (fodder, land, medicines etc.) of the collective farm. The chain did not end when the family transfered the animals to the collective, for that socialist unit was likely to be contracting with another large-scale processing enterprise, which might in turn have regular clients abroad.

Other researchers have challenged the picture of symbiosis, and alleged that the interests of collective farms and their individual members remained essentially antagonistic. Michael Sozan, drawing on his own fieldwork in a community in Western Hungary (Transdanubia), argued that all agricultural tasks could be more efficiently carried out by individual farmers, without the imposition of socialist institutions. He too noted that 'domestic husbandry' expanded dynamically after 1968, such that 'It is certain that approximately half of Hungary's food is derived from agricultural operations conducted on 15% of the nation's arable land using little or no machinery' (1983: 126). Without denying aspects of cooperation with the socialist sector, Sozan was unable to accept the 'official posture ... that socialist agriculture is well complemented by the private sector' (*ibid.*). He argued that high output in domestic husbandry showed that this had greater potential than collective methods, and neglected the fact that they were clearly interdependent. His emphasis upon high productivity in the household plots did not fit well with his discussion of the 'self-exploitation' of the peasants. This concept was originally used by Chayanov as part of his demonstration that peasants would produce in conditions unacceptable to a capitalist enterprise, when their productivity would typically be very low. And in fact, of course, productivity in the small-farm sector in socialist Hungary was low. The activities which Sozan described as lucrative were extremely labour-intensive. But they were attractive to households as ways of boosting income, and since they were cheaper from the state's point of view than investing in modern 'agribusiness' technologies, all parties could gain from the new structures of vertical integration.

Sozan's work raised some of the political issues and raw nerves that are frequently exposed in East European anthropology. Elsewhere he compared Hungarian performance unfavourably with neighbouring capitalist Austria (1985). It is an interesting comparison, and it would be even more so if it were made by villagers themselves. But comparisons with Romania and with Poland are also interesting. The evidence suggests that, within a basic framework of socialist property relations, Hungary achieved both a high degree of economic efficiency in agriculture and a remarkable transformation of rural

living standards. On this basis, it seemed to me that by the late 1970s socialist powerholders had come to enjoy a high degree of legitimacy in their large rural constituencies; but this claim did not impress Michael Sozan (1986).

Before leaving this subject, it is worth considering briefly what happened to the rural economies of the two East European states which did not pursue full collectivization, Poland and Yugoslavia. Serious tensions arose here from the persistence in agriculture of private property relations deriving from the old peasant economy, within a state framwork dominated by socialist relations. In Yugoslavia there was a limitation of ten hectares on private farms, though such a ceiling clearly was not conducive to economic efficiency. In Poland the size of the farm was not fetishized to quite this extent, but in numerous other ways private farmers felt that they were discriminated against by the socialist sector. In other words, suspicion and mistrust on both sides contrasted with the symbiosis of small and large, private and socialist, achieved in Hungary. It would seem that the villagers of Eastern Europe were better off under governments prepared to make appropriate pragmatic adjustments and to operate market systems within socialist constraints, than they were with a system which allowed the nominal retention of pre-socialist forms of private property. The compromises worked out in Yugoslavia and Poland were just as painful socially as collectivization was elsewhere. Hence, both the non-collectivized states and those more rigid, centrally planned states that pursued inflexible models of collectivization paid a heavy price in terms of economic efficiency and consumption possibilities. The villagers and the rest of the population of these countries suffered for their failure to emulate the more integrated Hungarian model.

### Consumption in socialist rural society

Beyond the themes of political and economic transformation, numerous anthropological studies have explored social and cultural continuities in rural society under socialism. Michael Sozan himself (1983) provides valuable discussion of changes in rural social stratification, which remained almost as complex and controversial as it had been in the pre-socialist period. Recent evidence suggests that, to the extent that new classes began to emerge in the Hungarian countryside after the implementation of market-oriented reforms, this was a direct resumption of pre-war trajectories. In other words, the new dominant groups were the children and grandchildren of those who had embarked upon an 'embourgeoisement' path in the past (Szelényi 1988). However, Szent-Györgyi's (1993) study of two contrasting types of community

in North-East Hungary brings out the significance of pre-socialist structures in explaining more precisely which groups have been able to take most advantage of the economic opportunities which opened up after 1968. Sik (1988) has shown the continued importance of non-market transactions among peasants, and especially of reciprocal labour exchanges. Others have commented on the declining importance of land ownership, while finding some elements of the 'traditional peasantry' stereotype more resilient, including family structures and attitudes to work (Lampland 1991). With most of the other factors of production under socialist ownership and control, it was control over persons, including above all the labour of family members, which mattered most. In this sense, 'peasants' were still very much a part of the scene, and many rural families still accepted this self-designation (this despite the fact that, in Hungarian as in several other East European languages, the term peasant now-adays has many of the same derogatory connotations that it has in modern English).

One sign of transformation was that stress and the lack of leisure time became serious problems in the later socialist period, given that many of those continuing with the old labour-intensive forms of production were also themselves holding full-time wage-labour jobs ('peasant-workers'). I argued that increased reliance on the market mechanism led to the overexploitation of the 'specialist cooperative' villagers. But this was determined ultimately by individual decisions to 'self-exploit', and in late socialist Hungary such decisions were no longer driven by the subsistence compulsion that applied to some of Chayanov's peasants. Many rural families gained satisfaction and enhanced identities from the consumer durables on which they spent their earnings – even, perhaps, from the luxury bathrooms used by female teen-agers, which the rest of the family ignored. Consumption is a relatively recent area of interest in economic anthropology. As far as peasantries were concerned, there was perhaps some excuse for neglect of this field in the past. Until the socialist period, most Hungarian peasants were still self-provisioning to a high degree. Many could not afford to purchase 'luxuries', i.e. items that were not vitally needed for the home or for the farm. However, all this changed in the later years of socialism, and the highly independent farmers of 'specialist cooperatives' were ideally placed to take advantage of new opportunities.

Among many traditional cultural forms that were modified by this new prosperity, the most conspicuous was the rural wedding. I could not help being struck by the sums of money raised at weddings in Tázlár in the 1970s. In contrast to the modest numbers of guests invited in the past, and traditional

emphasis upon productive resources in the property transmission, by the 1970s there was competition to emulate the scale of the grandest weddings of neighbouring villages; and, with land no longer a clear signifier of status, the most obvious alternative was money itself. People talked about how the richer farmers of neighbouring villages were building three storyed houses and presenting their sons and daughters with their own self-contained apartments at marriage. Some parents were said to be donating cars to the new couple. In Tázlár the sums involved were not on the same scale, but they were still considerable. I was particularly struck by the style in which money was raised during the wedding itself, even though many of the guests would have already sent substantial gifts before the ceremonies. (I am referring here to the wedding *reception*, which normally follows either a civil or religious wedding ceremony, or both; but all three can be separated in time, and only the civil ceremony is legally compulsory.) Late in the proceedings, when spirits were high and generosity presumed to be at its peak, the guests queued up to participate in the 'bride's dance'. The Master of Ceremonies was at hand to accept a contribution from each dancer as the bride moved on to her next partner; alternatively, the money was pinned directly onto her dress (cf. Sárkány 1983).

This modern version of the dance can be dismissed as a gross commercialization. Yet in a sense this money, too, was offered by each guest as a 'gift', as a token not only of the hospitality received at the wedding but of a relationship to the families involved. One gave in the knowledge that one would at some stage obtain a 'return' when one's own children married, though there could be no precise calculation of these returns. The large wedding receptions and the transactions they framed were not simply *instrumental* adaptations for helping the newlyweds to acquire material resources, in the absence of other provisions. They were also *expressive* of a high degree of social solidarity. Rural weddings had become large-scale and expensive events, such that visiting anthropolgists living frugally on scholarships might hesitate before accepting invitations to them. But invitations were seldom declined by villagers, who took much pride in their celebrations. Although few lasted the proverbial three days, people pointed out that continued merriment into the early hours was simply impossible in the urban setting. They also prided themselves on the quality of the fare, which large groups of women worked hard to prepare for days in advance. The Master of Ceremonies and the musicians performed songs and told jokes familiar to the audience, all of which combined to give the wedding its special atmosphere. Prosperity thus involved adaptations of a traditional pattern, and cultural efflorescence rather than atrophy.

The idea of a honeymoon was still rare in rural Hungary in the 1970s. Most young couples still had to work and save very hard to create a home. There was little variation in building styles: the private builders who dominated rural housebuilding did not as a rule hire architects. Interiors, too, were generally much the same, reflecting the limited range of materials and equipment available at the time. Only a few families, the most prosperous, could spend large sums on the purchase of distinctive items, usually western. This would become public knowledge in the village, and part of the ongoing process of status competition.

Alongside the rapid acquisition of standard consumer durables (and it must be stressed that among the Tázlár peasantry in the 1970s a modern kitchen and bathroom were not yet by any means standard) there was usually, in at least one room ('the clean room'), a lot of embroidery on display. The regional folk style was one of the best known in the country, and the handicrafts industry had been highly commercialized for a long time. Many Tázlár women, particularly during winter months, made their own pieces. Very few of these required artistic skills or originality, for the patterns could be cheaply purchased. What seemed to matter was the labour that had gone in to producing them (this was stressed when the ethnographer was pressed to accept them as gifts). Most houses in modern Hungarian villages exhibit some obvious signs in their material culture of their Hungarian character. Consumption, for modern citizens, is not *simply* a matter of copying the west. Some of the more valued items are not items of utility at all, but 'luxuries' which may serve to focus deeply held regional and national identities.

Overall, therefore, the consequences of new consumption patterns were very interesting. In a country such as Hungary they had macropolitical effects in legitimizing socialist powerholders. They provided millions of people who had formerly lived in poverty not merely with what they themselves saw as a decent standard of living, but with new sources of pride and identity in their privately achieved property. Of course, some of the new wealth went straight into excessive alcohol consumption. Much status competition revolved around money and the acquisition of standard consumer goods. But closer inspection of the consumption patterns showed that local variations on global themes had also to be taken into account.

## Decollectivization

By the end of the socialist period the rural sector was a much smaller part of the national economy than it had been four decades earlier. However, the

proportion of the population engaged in agriculture was still significantly higher than in most Western European countries, and due to lack of investment in urban housing, large numbers of industrial workers were still constrained to live in the countryside. The consequences of post-socialist privatization strategies in the rural sectors are therefore of major importance. Anthropological studies carried out so far in the 1990s have continued the earlier bias toward rural community studies, and several scholars have returned to the villages they studied under socialism in order to trace the course of this latest phase of rapid social change.

Just as there was significant variety in the implementation of collectivization a generation earlier, so no two countries have followed exactly the same path of decollectivization. A general distinction can be drawn between those countries which committed themselves to restoring property rights to the original owners, and those which adopted a mechanism to compensate those owners, without guaranteeing them the right to reclaim what had belonged to them or their families in the past. The potential for the emergence of serious economic irrationalities led Hungary to adopt a compensation scheme, despite strong pressure from the Independent Smallholders political party to honour the exact property rights of pre-socialist owners.

Which ever strategy was followed by post-socialist powerholders, the early 1990s provided an extraordinary opportunity to assess the extent to which the rural population still felt strong ties of sentiment towards a patrimony which, in many cases, it had not farmed directly for more than a generation. Tázlár was, of course, a special case, since here there had been much more continuity than elsewhere in the relationship between family and land. I found that members of the older generation were very anxious to obtain full private property rights over their original holdings. However, among those who had grown up under socialism these sentimental ties were, unsurprisingly, much weaker. Younger families sometimes cautioned their parents and grandparents against making extravagant land claims when neither market conditions nor the labour supply were favourable to a strategy of private farming (Hann 1993d).

Other anthropologists, too, have documented diverse responses, not to mention highly confused and chaotic conditions as the process of redistributing collectivized land unfolded. Katherine Verdery sees rural privatization as 'a war of knowledge and memory' (1994: 1099) that entails a process of individuation and sometimes leads even kinsmen to squabble with each other. She found that plots in the Transylvanian village she studied were highly

'elastic': resources were reliable to manipulation by those with the best access to information, who might well be the officials of the *ancien régime*. Verdery concludes that these local struggles over property have far-reaching consequences: 'they affect not only villagers' self-conceptions and social relations but the state's very capacity to dominate them in the future' (p.1109). In his studies of the Hungarian changes, Nigel Swain (1993) has also found a basic tension between the interests of the former landowners and those of the technocratic élites which staffed cooperative farms, sometimes known as the 'Green Barons'. Ironically, the political strategies of the Independent Smallholders, intended to serve the former group, have in fact created a situation in which the latter seem likely to emerge as the long-term beneficiaries.

It is premature to attempt a definitive analysis of the new property relations, but it is interesting to ask how far the new patterns can be analyzed in terms of the old concept of class. Whereas the anthropological evidence suggests that the Leninist analysis of polarized social relations was very far from the reality in East European villages when they had collectivization foisted upon them, just such a 'capitalist road' may now be opening up. A relatively small stratum of family farmers is the explicit object of government policy in most countries. Technological backwardness and the availability of abundant cheap labour in the countryside are likely to push some of these new owners towards models resembling the manorial systems of the past, rather than the family-labour farm as known in most of Western Europe.

Villagers are alert to this danger, and in many places they have sought to resist such changes. In Tázlár they have so far been loyal to their 'specialist cooperative' (Hann 1993e). Deema Kaneff (forthcoming) shows how, in the village she has studied in Bulgaria, the vast majority of residents have preferred to see the socialist cooperative continue in operation. With land ownership passing for the most part to non-villagers, or to those too old and infirm to farm it, those who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods are extremely suspicious of the entrepreneurial initiatives of a group of young outsiders.

Such worries and consequent loyalty to the established socialist institutions are probably strongest in the former Soviet Union, where collectivization was implemented a generation earlier and the skills and 'human capital' needed for family farming have largely disappeared. (This does not apply to the Baltic Republics, incorporated into the Soviet Union only after the second World War. Ray Abrahams has found considerable enthusiasm for the resumption of private farming in rural Estonia: see Abrahams and Kahk 1994.) David Anderson's work in Northern Siberia has shown the strengths of attachments

among native peoples to the institutions which provided them with a secure framework of entitlements, now swept away by the impact of the market (forthcoming; cf. this volume, Chapter Ten). Myriam Hivon (1995) has examined resistance to decollectivization in a North Russian village. She found that, in the later decades of communism, the proportion of income derived from the state and from employment in a socialist sector institution was much greater than that obtained through subsidiary farming. The system of private plots was nonetheless positively valued; above all, it gave village households the flexibility they needed, as the commune had done in the past. Thus expanding households were able to utilize large plots, which would be voluntarily given up by those who no longer needed them. This was an important normative principle. A successful domestic economy required complex patterns of collaboration within and between households, and between households and socialist institutions. Decollectivization threatened to destroy these embedded structures and the security they offered. In some ways Hivon implies that the recent commoditization of land and labour under market-oriented reforms has been as great a shock to the moral community as collectivization itself had been – and possibly even more destructive. She draws on Foster's (1965) 'limited good' argument to explain the antipathy felt towards the new, entrepreneurial farmers. They are seen as enjoying unfair public subsidies, and attract particular opprobrium if they fail to produce a surplus for society, but instead exploit their new equipment for short-term commercial advantage, or for *spekulatsia*. Some of these farmers have had their haystacks burned down by fellow villagers. Hivon did find one new farmer whose behaviour seemed to make him acceptable to the majority: he was using his new wealth to renovate and revive the local Orthodox Church, moribund for most of the communist period. But, for the majority of villagers, Hivon's analysis reveals that the mastery they may have lost as a consequence of collectivization palls into insignificance compared with the loss of control and security associated with its reversal.

The background to these studies, and also to the changing fortunes of villagers in the non-collectivized countries of Poland and the former Yugoslavia, is one in which rural incomes have declined and the prospects for agriculture have worsened. In the jargon of political economy, the sector's terms of trade, which were extremely adverse in the early period of socialist industrialization but then improved significantly in the later socialist decades, have now suffered a further reversal. In the perceptions of the human beings on the ground, the sector has been virtually abandoned by governments. Subsidies

have been withdrawn, established eastern markets have collapsed, and the potentially lucrative western markets (where East Europeans know that farmers enjoy generous subsidies) remain for the most part closed. Some new owners of small plots find themselves in a quandary: they have satisfied emotional needs by reestablishing their ownership rights, but their real incomes have fallen and the existential security which they had come to take for granted under socialism is now threatened. The peasant-workers are typically among the first to be laid off when factories close or restructure, thus augmenting the numbers made redundant by collective farms and contributing to the formation of a new rural underclass. These families typically maintain a garden or allotment for self-provisioning, and meet their cash requirements through wage-labour, usually on a daily basis, for the members of the emergent élites. Doreen Warriner's (1964) ideal of land redistribution leading to western style family farming seems as far away as ever.

## Conclusion: Karl Polanyi and market socialism

The major debates in economic anthropology since its emergence as a clearly demarcated sub-discipline have concerned the place of the economy in the wider society, and the appropriate methods for studying this relationship. 'Substantivist' anthropologists, notably Karl Polanyi, argued against general reliance on the maximization models of neoclassical economic theory. They alleged that these were appropriate only for a particular type of human society, that dominated by the market principle, in modern industrial conditions. Polanyi was also consistently critical of Marxism, which he equated with economic determinism. However, when he revisited his native Hungary shortly before his death in 1964, he spoke approvingly of the economic institutions beginning to emerge there (see Hann 1992a). He had no opportunity to comment on the experiment in 'market socialism' that was officially launched a few years later in 1968, but it is tempting to speculate on how Polanyi might have interpreted the transformations outlined in this chapter. The stereotype of 'economic man', pursuing his materialistic goals through rational economizing behaviour, appeared to flourish under socialism. Given the backwardness of these economies and the poverty in which so many citizens lived until very recently, it is hardly surprising that materialist aims were prominent in individual behaviour. The trouble was that in the unreformed, centrally planned economies this 'economic man' was invariably seen as an incipient petty-capitalist to be obstructed at all costs.

The market principle that was gradually re-introduced into Hungary after 1968 did not, unlike the threat perceived by many farmers in the 1990s, lead to an economy that was 'disembedded' from society. The basic structures of property relations remained socialist, in that the great bulk of the means of production were in social ownership. However, in all economic sectors the forms of that ownership continued to evolve and to encompass private property rights, in the interests of economic efficiency. It also gave millions of people greater democratic control not just over the means of production but over their entire social existence.

I see the transformation of the peasantry in Tázlár as exemplifying the transition that was attempted under market socialism in Hungary. Although these peasants lost some of their earlier rights, and although formal cooperative and local government institutions did not develop their democratic potential significantly, through 'informal' economic opportunities villagers were able to retain a great deal of control over their lives. Previously they were mostly poor, though significantly differentiated, and they had struggled with simple technology in an adverse ecological setting. They identified strongly with the land that was their private property. Like peasants everywhere they opposed collectivization, and this opposition led directly to traumas in the Stalinist period. The Stalinist remedies, and particularly the notion of collective ownership, were quite alien to the mass of the peasantry. Fortunately for most Hungarian peasants this period was comparatively brief. In the early 1960s Tázlár villagers did lose some of their private property rights, with the formation of the new specialist cooperatives. By this time it was already clear that legal ownership of land could no longer provide rural dwellers with a focus of identity, as it had in the past. However most families were able to carry on working their own lands, and the financial rewards soon began to improve rapidly. Even where the expansion of the socialized sector restricted villagers' access to land, families were able to maintain key elements of the old peasant economy, notably control over members' labour. In Polanyi's sense, embedded structures persisted throughout these years. The combination in a post-Stalinist collectivized system of rampant consumerism with a productive system which left rural families with a high degree of control over how they organized and executed their work activities was attractive to villagers, even though few could reconcile themselves to the diminution of their legal property rights. After 1989, the reconstituted Independent Smallholders party campaigned for the full restitution of private property rights. This has been accomplished only partially, and in demoralizing circumstances in which rural standards of living

have experienced a very sharp decline and the real achievements of the socialist period have been undermined. The threat to embedded structures has become greater than at any time in the past.

A close reading of the economic works of Karl Polanyi suggests that he was much more than a romantic critic of markets, and that his preferred solution was some combination of the market principle with democratic political controls. This synthesis (like the synthesis of Chayanov, with which it has some affinity) has implications for the totality of social organization. In a general sense, I think that the course followed by Hungary in the era of mature socialism corresponded to the social philosophy of the mature Polanyi (see Hann 1992a). It amounted to a strategy to overcome alienation by a symbiosis of Plan and Market, a reconciliation in modern conditions of social, public interests and the private interests of persons and families. Of course, plenty of problems remained, including inefficiencies in the socialist sector of production and alienation in the private sector of consumption. Not all of these problems can be explained away as the legacies of underdevelopment in the pre-socialist past. But Hungarian market socialism, though it lacked the appeal of the simpler ideologies of Right and Left, and never found a theoretical champion to match the stature of Polanyi, had much to commend it. To judge from recent voting trends, Hungarian villagers in the 1990s are becoming more aware of the advantages of the synthesis now that it has been largely abandoned.

## Further reading

The germ of my argument in this chapter comes from Tepicht (1975) (cf. Hann 1994). Theoretical debates over late development and Chayanovian remedies are presented in the work of Teodor Shanin (1972, 1985). The ironies of market socialism in Hungary are creatively explored in the setting of a former manorial village by Martha Lampland (1995). Carole Nagengast's study of a Polish village (1991) extends the 'dependency' perspective into the period of contemporary capitalist transformation. The best general survey of collectivized farming in Eastern Europe is Pryor (1992). The troubled confusions of the decollectivizing years are explored in the recent collections of Kideckel (1995), Abrahams (forthcoming), Swain *et al.* (forthcoming) and in a special issue of *Cambridge Anthropology* entitled 'Surviving the Transition' (1995: Vol. 18, No.2). The journal *Sociologia Ruralis* provides reasonable coverage of rural issues in Eastern Europe.