

Contradictory Economies in Post-Socialist Rural Hungary: The Emergence,
Endurance and Persistence of the Hoop-House Economy in Balástya

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Dedication

To three wonderful women, My late Mother, Sára Uhrin, My late paternal Grandmother, Terézia Lengyel, and My Daughter, Zigi Flóra Kaiser-Holt for their unconditional love and encouragement.

Abstract

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research conducted in the village of Balástya, Hungary between 2001-2003. It is concerned with the nature of post-socialist life as lived, interpreted, and negotiated by rural people after the collapse of state-socialism. It discusses post-socialist life and economy and how rural people express their conceptions of the past, present and future. My central question is simple. What happens to people's identity and how people invent new ways of generating livelihoods when the political, economic and social system of forty-five years of socialism—a frame of reference that people used and lived through—vanishes and an extralocal economic model is crudely mapped on the lived landscape of everyday reality?

As this ethnography demonstrates, post-socialist life is filled with anxiety. I claim that the anxiety is driven and fueled by the transformation from socialism to capitalism, and by the visible gap between observed phenomena of the “lived post-socialism” and the political-economic discourses of “capitalism.”

This study examines this critical and anxious transformation through the prism of a local economic innovation that I coin the “hoop-house economy.” It investigates its emergence, endurance and persistence over time and argues that the shifting meanings of the hoop-house economy accurately mirror this transformation from market-socialism to market-capitalism, all the way up to the creation of the EU's market.

Conceptually, the model of the hoop-house economy demonstrates the dialectical relationship between economy's two spheres—house and market. I distinguish among three types of the hoop-house economy, which I call 1) minimal, 2) liminal and 3) maximal and argue that the liminal hoop-house economy best represents the tension between economy's two value domains—commensurate and incommensurate—in post-socialist Hungary.

This work challenges generalizations and broad assumptions about the transformation from socialism to capitalism. By examining this transformation through the complexities of local practices and ordinary life, my dissertation extends, but also complicates macro-level analyses, illuminating the linkages between changing political and economic institutions and the micro-level of everyday reality.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It is a market-day...

No matter the time of the day, Balástya people are always exceptionally busy. It is a blistering Saturday afternoon in early September. The Szeged bus is jammed as women and men stand in the aisle trying to hold on to their plastic bags and wicker baskets. It is not an atypical scene: weary and morose bus drivers always take on more riders than there are seats on the bus. Regardless of whether you sit in relative comfort or stagger and sway in the aisle, oftentimes for an hour or more, you still must pay the same. The bus turns right and left, trying to get out of the busy bus terminal located at the old “Marx” Square that now, with political correctness, is called “Mars” Square instead. Marx Square houses not only the bus terminal but also the local food market (*piac*), discount stores (*diszkont bolt*), newspaper and porn magazine kiosks (*trafikos bódék*), street vendors, and the growing Chinese shops. Now, Hungarian street vendors selling cheap cigarettes, coffee, watches, batteries, and socks have to compete with the Chinese merchants who have successfully blended into Hungary’s commercial landscape.

The hot air is suffocating; it is only 1:00 pm. The asphalt under our feet is melting as our sandals stick to the black tar. All this is mingled with the smell of exhaust, sweat, coffee, wine spritzer (*fröccs*), and the smell of greasy fried bread (*lángos*). Getting on the long-distance bus is a challenge itself. Even before the bus gets into its departure stop the passengers anxiously begin pushing one another around to make sure that they get to the door first. The bus opens only its forward door so no passenger can sneak into the bus without payment or without the right privileges; the crowd moves along as one ocean wave. The younger generation, busy with sending text messages while in line, does not let the older people ahead. They also try to make room for themselves and their baskets. Getting out of this bustling spot—when each and every person and vehicle seem to be in such grand hurry—requires honed maneuvering skills and extreme patience on the part of our bus driver, and more often than not swearing is the way to release increasing tension.

Inside the bus is like being in a hot furnace as side windows are permanently stuck shut and only the roof hatches can be opened with the application of some physical force. Finally leaving Szeged behind and getting on the highway, people become less restless as the lukewarm breeze touches our sweaty backs and arms. Cell phones keep ringing as everyone tries to make peace with his or her own spot on the crowded bus.

As the bus staggeringly moves along the steamy highway, casual conversations strike up between the older women, at first about what little money they made at the food market and how they go about spending the least amount of money. They go on to compare food prices and how much gas, electricity, and water bills have gone up “again”. As do most Hungarians, these older women also openly talk about the government and are very much tuned into politics. “This new government is as corrupt as the other ones were. Politicians just want to get rich, build a villa and get jobs for their buddies. Those people who sit in the Parliament should live off such little pension as we do.”

These conversations swiftly blur into cloudy murmurs of bitterness, disappointment, complaint and general dissatisfaction. Then the conversation, just like the bus, takes a different turn now: “Have you heard that Auntie Edit is at the hospital? She almost died. Her neighbor found her passed out on the vinyl floor in the middle of the kitchen. She was holding a rusty cup in her hands. Now she is at the hospital and no one knows what on earth had happened to her. You know, her son and daughter-in-law only visit her when they need money. They never invite her over for Sunday lunch and let her see her grandchildren.” “This is what young people are like,” says one of the elder women, waving off her concern. From conversation of the hospital to conversation of funerals is not a big stretch. “Did you hear that Uncle Feri’s brother-in-law died of a stroke while he was out in the fields plowing? His family hardly had the money to give him an honorable

funeral.” She goes on and adds proudly, “All I have to say is that I have already put aside money for my own funeral. I don’t want to be a burden on my family when I die...”

The bus moves on as we get closer and closer to the settlement of Balástya. Tuning in and out of these monologues and dialogues I look out the window over the shoulder of a teenage girl who is humming a well-known tune by “Kis Pál és a Borz,” a very popular Hungarian rock band. I see rows and rows of hoop-houses and a few green-houses dotting the rural agricultural landscape. They swirl and twirl around, filling in the space between large corn and sunflower fields. In the distance I see both traditional whitewashed adobe homes and new brick houses with large agricultural yards around them. The houses are tucked away behind tall trees to protect themselves, the yard and the sheds and trees are lined up as wind-breakers. People begin bustling about as we approach the village of Balástya. The bus makes several stops in this detached farming area so people who live here can get home faster; however, they usually need to bike or walk a couple of kilometers before getting home.

It is my stop as I get off by the old *kultúr ház* (culture house), taking a peek at the movie schedule for Sunday evening. It is easy to choose, as there is only one film a week. On Sunday *Gladiator* is on; it’s dubbed. I casually stroll on the main street of Rákóczi, passing the Office of the Local Autonomy. In front of its main building there is a bulletin board where I stop and briefly read through the

announcements and notices, hoping to find an ad for a place to rent for the duration of my research. Instead, I read: “land auction in Balástya-Gajgonya,” “I would like to sell my golden crowns,” “Foliapast KFT’s new products” “Dániel Józsa, land surveyor holds office hours on Tuesdays at the Retirees Club about the Móra Cooperative Farm’s property,” “The deadline to sell your share proportions, if you are a member of Móra Co-op, is September 30, 2001,” and “New registration requirement for 2002...” I stand there in utter astonishment, even forgetting the sizzling heat touching down on the top of my head. What do these mean, I wonder. It is September 2001, and the Land Privatization Act was passed almost ten years ago. I had supposed that land privatization was finished, I murmur to myself as I take another inquisitive glance at the shiny board. “Land lottery,” “Land Auction,” “Information on the work of the County Land Office held at the Culture House on 2 August 2001,” and “Selling Golden Crowns.” I am equally confused about the meanings of these announcements and frustrated that there are no advertisements for renting a place.

If you need to dig up any information quickly in a Hungarian village like Balástya, from a local resident’s address to where propane canisters can be exchanged, you have at least four immediate options to explore, all in very close proximity: The local pub or *kocsma*, the church or *templom*, the store or *bolt*, and the old council house or *tanács háza*. Upon some contemplation, I decided that first I would try something else before making my debut at the pub, the church,

the store or the council house. I stop by at the village hair dresser's shop— located near all these establishments—eager to obtain a few answers as to why I can't stumble on any place for rent either in the village or in any of the detached farming areas.

Auntie¹ Jolika's shop, rented from the Local Autonomy, is across from the local pub, the Presso Cafe and the Orchidea Hotel-Restaurant. To my good fortune it is open, although it is Saturday and after two o'clock. Next to Auntie Jolika's is a small shop that sells seasonal vegetables and cat food. Her "salon" is tiny and crammed full—definitely not up to "EU standards or EU conform." In order to have hot water for shampooing hair she keeps a propane canister tucked under a patterned skirt-like material so it doesn't show. On the green paper walls there is a faint black and white photograph of the legendary female singer of the 30s, Katalin Karády. On the work station are some *pilóta keksz* (sweet "pilot" crackers), a few slices of peach, a glass of water, a worn red-leather wallet, a checkered note pad, and, set near some brushes and combs with a few missing teeth, the local paper, *Balástyai Újság*. Some high school graduation pictures taken in a photo studio are slipped halfway under the mirror.

Two elderly women sit under old-fashioned bell-glasses [bell-shaped hair dryers] with their arms crossed and resting in their laps. A third, very thin old woman with gray hair, wearing a black dress and nylons (obviously in mourning)

¹ Auntie, or in Hungarian "*néni*" is the proper way to address an elder woman.

sits on a kitchen stool close to the washbasin. As I learn she is the mayor's mother. They come once a week to have their hair set, and once a month to get a perm. Coming to the salon is also a pretense for discussing local gossip and events in the village.

As I enter the shop the conversation is halted and all eyes are glued to me. I uneasily take a chair and tell them straightforwardly about my renting situation and a little bit about my research on collectivization and land privatization. They are all extremely friendly to me, except the woman in black who keeps staring at me suspiciously. In answer to my question of why there is no place for rent, they put it in plain words: "Simply, the folks in Balástya don't trust people from the city as they consider them "outsiders" and intruders or *betolakodó*. Auntie Jolika explains that even villagers and people living in detached farmhouses who own a house in the village would not rent to anybody whom they don't know. They would rather leave it empty than rent it. Auntie Mariska adds, "Some people who own a house in the village would rather live out on their detached farm, "saving the nice village house" for their old age, but the fact is that even when they are old, they would not move into the village, and the house is left there to decay."

When I mention that I am a doctorate student at an American university they all get curious and start bombarding me with questions. It was two days after September 11. Auntie Jolika says, using the formal you, "You know, when I went home after work I found my husband in front of the TV weeping. He is disabled,

you know, so he is always watching TV all the time, there is nothing else for him to do. So he was crying and crying. I could not believe what happened, all those unfortunate people who died... I watched it on the news and at first I thought that it was another American action movie, but it was real. What happened?" Trying to avoid any political discussion of the "why-s," I tell the ladies that I came to study the effects of the land distribution in the village and its farming area. I also inquire as to whether they know any people who would talk to me about collectivization and land privatization and also ask them how their life has changed since the end of socialism. The two women whose hair was all set smilingly joined our conversation. Auntie Mariska says, "I can tell you a lot about it and my husband, Uncle Gyuri, we both worked at the collective farm for decades." The third elderly lady winks at me and adds, "Yes, she [Auntie Mariska] knows a lot about what was happening there as she worked as a kind of secretary in the office, right Mariska?" "Yeah, I sure do..." murmurs Auntie Mariska, combing her hair with her right hand. "I sure do." In the background, Auntie Jolika whispers with irony in her voice: "The land distribution committee offered me land in the far distance, where even little Jesus forgets to say 'Night-Night.' It is that far away." "Yes, the committee stole the peasants' land..."

When I ask them about how their families' life has changed since the collapse of the socialist regime, I sense a general anxiety in the tiny crowded hair salon. Auntie Mariska's answer is full of bitterness when she tells me: "It is not that

we want the Kádár regime back but we were better off. They should not have destroyed the damn collective farms. We were employed and we could work our asses off on our household plots, and go to Lake Balaton in the summer at the health-resorts. We were able to build a family house, now the only thing we could build is a dog house. This theft-capitalism made people unemployed. It is true that the shelves are full of goods in the stores but people have no money to buy them. In socialism it was just the opposite, people had money but there was nothing to buy.” Then Auntie Jolika continues: “*Yes it is capitalism for a few but for most of us; it is the worst communist regime...*”

Anxious Transformations in an “Actually Existing Post-Socialist Village”

These conversations on the bus and at the hair salon began both my physical and intellectual journey to the social life of the village were among many I had with the people living and working in Balástya. Like the bus steering from one direction to another, these conversations directed and oftentimes redirected my focus. These conversations are significant because they suggested various interrelated themes for my research and, most importantly, they defined the overarching and underlying theme and structure of my study, which is the *nature of post-socialist rural life*. This dissertation is concerned with the nature of post-socialist life as lived, interpreted, and negotiated by rural people after the collapse

of socialism. It discusses *post-socialist life and economy* and how it is expressed by rural people, and how such expressions influence their conceptions of the past, present, and future. As I observed and understood it, *post-socialist life was filled with anxiety*.

My central questions are simple. What causes anxiety, uncertainty, fear and disappointment to the villagers that was many times expressed with blatant cynicism, bold sarcasm, complete sullenness, and—often—with sadness? What does it mean to people that *now* they live in a capitalist society and not a socialist one? Moreover, how do people interpret and evaluate these political and economic changes in the micro-politics of their everyday lives? What happens to people's identity and how people invent new ways of generating livelihoods when the political, economic and social system of forty-five years of socialism—a frame of reference that people used and lived through—vanishes and an extralocal economic model is crudely mapped on the lived landscape of everyday reality?

I claim that the anxiety is driven and fueled by the transformation from socialism to capitalism, and by the visible gap between observed phenomena of the “lived actually existing post-socialism” and the political discourses of the “real post-socialism” of capitalism. Negotiations of the capitalist present in relation to the socialist past are essential for understanding practices of resistance to the current transformation, for they offer conflicting interpretations of the past, the present and also the future. Throughout my research I listened to these voices and

archived the utterances of people's everyday lives and their economy to capture the anxious transformation from socialism to capitalism while living in Balástya between 2001 and 2003.

What, then, is this dissertation all about? It is an ethnographic account of the anxious transformation from socialism to capitalism in the actually existing post-socialist village of Balástya.² I am making a reference to Bahro's work, "The Alternative in Eastern Europe" (1977), in which he distinguishes between "real socialism" and "actually existing socialism" to offer a similar distinction between an "imagined real post-socialism" and a "lived actually existing post-socialism." By "imagined real post-socialism" I mean the desires and expectations that Hungarians attached to capitalism in general, and by "lived actually existing post-socialism" I mean the experienced actuality of capitalism, which is paved with rural unemployment, lowered standard of living, and invention of new survival strategies.

In the course of my eighteen-month stay in the village, I came to the realization that the narratives and utterances seemed to share a common vocabulary that in fact highlighted *the anxiety of the critical transformational period*. After I transcribed and translated my interviews from Hungarian to English, I performed a "search word" command on the heard-expressions on my computer. The most often-heard phrases that I collected included the words

² I find the word "transformation" more descriptive and useful in my discussion, for it describes a process, not an end, unlike the word "transition," which suggests a complete change.

“obligation,” “family,” “house,” “kinship,” “help,” “reciprocity,” “mutuality,” “solidarity,” “honest work,” “celebration,” “pantry and attic are full or empty” when talking about socialist times, in contrast to expressions like “corruption,” “market,” “theft,” “new bourgeois” (*új gazdag*), “fraud,” “money-hungry,” “dishonesty,” “getting ahead,” “speculation,” “*menedzser kapitalizmus*,” and “*mafia*” when describing contemporary Hungarian life.

This common vocabulary echoes the multi-layered changes in the arenas of social life and economy that have been particularly affected by the collapse of socialism. Therefore I became drawn to the investigation of the micro-processes lodged in the moment of this critical social and economic transformation. As a full participant in most aspects of daily life and a careful observer of many dimensions of social life in the village—including pepper and potato picking, potato harvesting in hoop-houses, pig slaughtering, loading geese on trucks, cooking, gardening, local autonomy’s meetings, retirees’ club meetings, women day’s parties, name days, flower festivals, funerals, weddings, baptisms, and even village meetings about local murders—I was able to witness, and to a certain degree experience, the multiple transformations not only in the life of the village but also the lives of the families in the course of my stay in Balástya. I talked to elder women and men, for instance, who lost their thirty-year employment instantly when the collective farms closed their gates, who explained to me that it was not only their job that they lost but also their community. I listened to the stories of many, including the

socialist collective farm managers', local Communist Party elites', and cadres' who were going through their own personal and political transformation by either forgetting their communist past or reinventing themselves as messengers of a reformed socialism by remaking themselves as progressive entrepreneurs. I witnessed the confusion among the villagers when the former internalized frames of references were to disappear—for example, when the mayor of Balástya ordered that street names carrying the names of communist leaders like “Lenin,” “Liberty,” “Ságvári” should be changed to “Árpád,” “Széchenyi” and “Kodály.” I heard people contemplate the loss of other frames of references that were key elements of the “cursed regime,” such as entitlements to housing, education, health care, employment, and retirement plans that quickly faded away after the collapse of socialist paternalism. I observed how villagers responded to tested and contested Western ways of being and thinking that they described as wasteful and irrational. During fieldwork I recorded people’s voices talking about their house economy with its changes and I discovered a locally specific model of livelihood—the hoop-house, whose economic and cultural practices were always a part of everyday conversation. I also witnessed how villagers resisted land privatization and later negotiated their way through the EU’s bureaucratic regime as they invented new strategies of survival.

Following the myriad of transformations that took place in land ownership, property rights, and social relations between 1961 and 2004, I argue that neither

“socialism by design”³ nor “western botox of capitalism” could be directly mapped onto these lived landscapes of the region; what is more, as I observed, both projects were rejected by the majority of the rural population in this community.

The other aim of this dissertation is to show how the top-down governmental directives indirectly contributed to the creation of certain social spaces, which became the very grounds for local improvisations and innovations. I investigated these creative social spaces, in which such negotiations—between the economic models of the local and extralocal—took place. In this specific ethnographic case, this negotiation took place between the model of the local hoop-house economy and the market.

The settlement is a fork in the road connecting neighboring villages and international markets that would otherwise may be disconnected. I consider the agricultural community of Balástya a productive site to explore this critical transformation and also to investigate not only the political economy of capitalism but also socialism.

This study, then, is both an ethnographic account of Hungarian post-socialist anxiety and a depiction of the unequal encounter between the local and the extralocal, the small and the large, which created new arrangements of culture and new configurations of power.

³ Here I am making a reference to Burawoy’s (1999) description of “capitalism by design.” He and Kornai argue that the “artificial transplants” (Kornai 1992) of capitalism are too rigid and would be rejected in Central and Eastern Europe.

Empirical and Theoretical Landscapes of Transformations

Twenty years ago, on November 9, 1989, the “Iron Curtain” and the “Berlin Wall” separating East and West fell. The walls had come to symbolize the spatial and ideological division between the East and the West, or socialism and capitalism. After 1989, “post-communist societies” (Brzezinski 1991; Szelényi 1990) formerly segregated by the Iron Curtain and politicized by the rhetoric of the Cold War became the point of convergence of academic and non-academic interest.

The collapse of state-socialism (1989) and the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (1991) was a decisive turning point in modern history. However, there is a great discrepancy between this event’s depiction in political discourses and its lived realities in post-socialist societies. While in political discourses the fall of the Berlin Wall had come to declare the triumph of capitalism and the victory of the free market, anthropologists working in the “altering states” (Berdahl, et al. 2000) challenged these statements and showed that former socialist countries had undergone a “plurality of transitions at a great transformational cost” (Stark and Bruszt 1998) since the collapse of state-socialism. Berdahl (2000) explicates that the anthropology of post-socialism “aim through careful analyses of the contours, textures, landscapes, and utterances of everyday life to illuminate an ongoing and highly differentiated process of altering states”

(12). My dissertation is an attempt to follow this tradition in anthropology but also to expand it.

Addressing the ambiguity and paradox of post-socialism in rural Hungary, this study identifies simultaneous and overlapping transformations that included rapid shifts in political ideology and property relations, agricultural production and distribution, consumption and social relations. Examining the transformation of the Hungarian agriculture, or the “Agrarian Question” of post-socialism—which is a generative theme for this dissertation—I explore three interwoven changes: 1) transformation in land property rights; 2) capitalization of the agrarian sector; and 3) generating new ways of rural livelihoods. In attempting to describe these processes I draw on two theoretical discussions and anthropological traditions in economic anthropology: 1) the “dialectics of economy”; and 2) the “embeddedness of property.”

I claim that the problems encapsulated by the “Agrarian Question” in Hungary may be viewed as the post-socialist rural anxiety or dilemma, which magnifies on one hand and exemplifies on the other, what Gudeman (2008) describes as “economy’s tension or the dialectics of market and community”—in the post-socialist context.⁴ The community and market dimensions of economy,

⁴ Thus I explore the changing meanings of both market and community (house) economy in socialism and post-socialism. Principally, I view socialism as a community-based economy; however, this dissertation mostly focuses on rural house economies in relation to the larger economy in which they are situated. As I demonstrate, the house economy can shrink or expand as a result of the larger economy in which it is embedded but it endures in any economic system whether it is feudalism, socialism or capitalism.

“these two spheres of material life [which] are intertwined in practice and institutions” (Gudeman 1998: xii), are no longer isolated entities as Polányi (1957) assumed, existing separately from one another but “they are dialectically connected: they often conflict and resist each other, and their relations change over time” (Gudeman 2008: 4). However, their shifting meanings, as I demonstrate, had not received much anthropological attention in the post-socialist context, dependent upon emerging macro political influences.⁵

My principal aim is to explore the multiple transformations—in both formal and informal economy—as they were unfolding in Balástya. Within the informal economy (cf. Hart 1992) I include Hungarian socialism’s “shadow economy” (Kornai 1992) and “house or community economy.” Recognizing also the centrality of the “house or community economy” in post-socialism, I investigate how rural people negotiated survival strategies in the informal economy given the increasing penetration of market and capital into the Hungarian countryside after the collapse of socialism. In this view, drawing on Gudeman’s theoretical work on the dialectics of economy, the hoop-house economy is one example of a “communal or mutual economy” (Gudeman 2008: 3-4).

⁵ Polanyi’s forms of economic integration—reciprocity, redistribution, market-exchange, and house holding—are a pattern of locational and appropriational movements. These forms must be understood as models with formal characteristics: symmetry, in the case of reciprocity; centrality, in the case of redistribution; random movements, in the case of market exchange; and circularity, in the case of householding. Although Polanyi’s description of economic processes was quite influential among anthropologists, it did not implicate how economy was constructed locally and how it was modeled culturally. Moreover, his theory of the embedded and disembedded economy does not point to the possible bridge between market and household economy but kept a sharp analytical division between the two.

The idea of the house economy or the oikos model is not new; it has been at the center of discussion for centuries since Aristotle⁶ but the emergence of the hoop-house economy as a component of the house economy is novel. This model has not been applied to such a small-scale like the hoop-house in anthropology. As an integral part of the rural household economy in Balástya, my aim is to show how the hoop-house economy and its material life were constituted socially and its practices were articulated through cultural metaphors and symbolic expressions. I consider the hoop-house economy a local model of generating livelihood, where the hoop-house itself can be viewed as a social symbol and a cultural metaphor that stands for family, kin or community.

This “embedded economy” (Polanyi 1957) of the hoop-house that emerged under socialism and endured during the first phase of post-socialism, as I argue, is threatened by the European Union’s market; however, because it is the foundational brick of the house, it will persist on the margin of the larger economy as part of the informal economy. Analyzing the transformation of the hoop-house economy itself in different political and property regimes, I claim that the shifting meanings of the hoop-house economy best represents the anxious transformation

⁶ Exploring the domestic or household economy, Aristotle distinguished three levels of association: the household, village, and polis. In his view, “The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants, and its members are called, by Charonday, the ‘companios of the cupboard,’ and by Epimenides the Cretan, ‘companios of manger’” (Aristotle 1943: 251). “Householding is necessary and honorable,” while market exchange is “unnatural,” a “mode by which men gain from one another” (Aristotle 1943: 266).

from socialism to capitalism and ethnographically illuminates the dialectics of economy.

In many respects, my view of the hoop house and post-socialist economy offers a particularly compelling way of conceptualizing property and social life, which is the other key element of this transformational period.⁷ After the collapse of state-socialism, not only a new political system but also a new “property regime” (Verdery 1996, 1998) was instituted in the Hungarian countryside.

Contextualizing the post-1992 agricultural transformation and ownership structure, I explore two politically fueled events: 1) land collectivization of the 1960s and 2) land privatization of the 1990s. The first process included the collectivization of privately owned land, and the second included the privatization of collectively held land. These two drastically opposite processes and property regimes were separated by only thirty years. Both socialist and neo-liberal approaches attach significance to particular visions of property relations but in different ways. Socialist states claim to privilege social justice and politics, while western states emphasize economic performance (cf. Hann 2000).

⁷ In economics, the notion of private property has been one of the fundamental conceptions for the analysis of the relationship between economy and society. The study of economics is primarily concerned with how resources are used to satisfy people’s wants and it claims that the “economic way of thinking” allows us to make rational choices about the alternative uses of those resources. Economists maintain that since we have only a limited amount of resources to satisfy wants, we need to economize on the uses of those resources to get the greatest benefit (cf. Sahlins 1972). Efficiency maximizes the amount of output obtained from a given amount of resources or minimizes the amount of resources used for a given amount of output. In this view, efficient use of resources can be achieved if the means of production, such as businesses, farms, mines, and natural resources are in private ownership. In opposition to this view, economic anthropologists claim that this perception of property is too static and simplified because it does not point to the social, cultural or moral features of property. See: Bird-David [(1992)1998]; Douglas and Isherwood (1978a), Geertz (1974); Gudeman (1978a); Hann (1998); Sahlins (1974); Verdery (1996, 1998); etc.

My initial theoretical claim is that the binary model of land ownership—private on one hand and collective on the other—does not accurately describe the complexities of the system in place in Hungary. I ask, how do people in the moment of transformation interpret and attribute meanings to privatization and moreover to the shifting property rights from inclusive to exclusive (from collective to private)? What is the symbolic and relational value of land and how is land as property locally justified?

Many of the villagers now in their late 60s experienced first-hand both the “drama of collectivization of the 1960s and privatization of 1990s.” By analyzing these two specific processes I argue that collectivization by the socialist state and privatization of the liberal democratic state both took little account of local or cultural constructions of economy and material life.

As Aristotle (1943) explicates in *Politics* that land as property is an instrument for maintaining and sustaining life, therefore possession is an instrument, which is part of the household, and “therefore the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessaries” (254). Extending this view, Polanyi (1944), while describing the embedded nature of economy and material life, argues “to include [man, labor, land] in the market mechanism means to subordinate substance of society itself to the laws of the market” (31). If these

“commodity fictions” [man, land and labor] get on the market, then general-purpose money becomes a means of exchange and rules over social relations.

Expanding both arguments, I also demonstrate how both property and property regimes neglected local epistemologies of land use and cultural construction of land. I show the ways in which local technological innovations and cultural performances influenced economic processes, which may explain why both collectivization and then privatization were so widely rejected.

Moreover, I especially emphasize that in this specific area of Hungary, unlike in other parts of the country, it was neither the size of the land nor former party affiliation that mattered in terms of a family’s economic success in post-socialism, but rather access to this local innovation—the hoop-house. In this sense, this dissertation is also a social history of the success and the failure of the hoop-house economy.

Anthropological works conducted in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s are the predecessors of later investigations on the post-socialist land ownership and agricultural reforms (cf. Creed 1998; Hann 1980; Humphrey 1983, 1998⁸; Kideckel 1993; Lampland 1995; Vasary 1987). Their main trajectories included discussions on the nationalization of land, transition from pre-socialism to socialism, collectivization, commodification of labor, and the emergence of the second or “shadow economy” (Kornai 1992).

⁸ This dissertation does not allow me to elaborate on the workings of collective farms in the Russian context. I will primarily focus on collectivization, the significance of the second economy, and the emergence of market socialism in the context of Hungary only.

In the context of the Hungarian collectivization, Hann's (1980), Vasary's (1987) and Lampland's (1995) works are significant, for they explore the transition from pre-socialism to socialism. Arguing that while in the early years of socialism rural settlements of Hungary could be characterized by the persistence of pre-socialist social-economic organizations, the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in 1968⁹ led to the "embourgeoisement of the Hungarian peasantry" (Hann 1980), contributed to the "commodification of labor" (Lampland 1995), and created a vibrant, market-oriented, legitimate second economy (Vasary 1987).¹⁰ Similarly, Kideckel (1993) argues that the nationalization of land and establishment of collective farms in south-central Transylvania in Romania pressured agricultural workers to turn to subsistence farming in the second economy.

While these descriptions of collectivization and the relevance of the second economy are extremely useful, they do not provide too much indication for the reasons why privatization after the collapse of socialism was so widely contested throughout Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the 1990s.

⁹ The New Economic Mechanism in 1968 offered a unique model in addition to the "neo-Stalinist model" (Swain 1998) of collectivization. It strongly encouraged household plot and small-scale farming and it did so partly by following the "collectivization abandoned model," to use Swain's phrase (1998).

¹⁰ The role of the second/shadow/informal economy is in the center of some of the academic discussions. The most prominent one in relation to its function in the transition is Szelényi's article, "Alternative Futures for Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary" (1990).

Anthropologists¹¹ working in the “altering states” of CEE (Berdahl 2000) after the fall of socialism provide some explanations as to why privatization in the region faced resistance by the rural population and analyzed the similarity between forced collectivization and “forced decollectivizaion,” the intense politicization of agriculture, the ethnicization of land claims, and the retributive nature of social justice.

For example, Creed (1998) investigates the “decollectivization drama” in Bulgaria and states the “similarities testify to a continuing legacy of socialism,” and privatization was not the return of property, “but simply the restitution of property rights to official owners” (27). The “decollectivization drama,” he explains, was marked by an ill-designed plan for “liquidation of collective farms,” an “old song in a new voice” with unmotivated actors initiated by the post-socialist state. Likewise, privatization in Romania, as Kideckel (1995) maintains, was “a process, not an end; it is an ongoing social relation at the local level and civil society, and the contradiction from the past will remain” (48).

Verdery (1995), while investigating the moral and local obstacles to the restitution of property in Transylvanian villages, points at another aspect of the land issue—the phenomenon she terms as the “elasticity of land” (133), and argued

¹¹See: Bates 1995; Creed 1991; 1995; 1998; 1999; De Soto and Panzig 1995; De Waal 1996; Dunn 1995, 2000; Hann 1992, 1995, ed. 1998, n.d.; Kideckel 1993, 1995; Nagengast 1991, 1998; Stark 1989; 1992; 1996; Swain 1998; Vásáry 1995; Pine 1998; Verdery 1996, ed. 1999; Zbierski-Salameh 1998; etc.

that the mechanics of restitution came to be contested by local knowledge and opposed by the existing local power.

Other works (e.g. Hann 1998, 2000; Lampland 1995; Pine 1998 Verdery 1995) strongly suggest that “fragmented property ownership” is far more complex than one would surmise from much of the literature produced by political scientists and neo-liberal economists. The complex property relations and, in some instances “recombinant property” (Stark 1996), the latter incorporating both public and private spheres of ownership in the formations of associations, lead to the formation of “fuzzy property relations” throughout Central Eastern Europe.

My dissertation is a continuation and expansion of these ethnographic works and anthropological theories. In this work, I argue that the question of the hoop-house economy is strongly related to the predicament of privatization; for former collective members lost their use-rights to their household plots and all state-assistance they received to develop and maintain their hoop-house economy.

Property and property relations, as I apply it to my anthropologically informed analysis of privatization, is an extended conceptual apparatus, which offers a *Relational and Cultural Model of Property* incorporating: (a) cultural ideals and ideologies of property; (b) social property relations; (c) social functions of property; (d) the social practices of property; and (e) the cultural construction of property (cf. Singer 2000; von Benda-Beckmanns 2000; Gudeman 1998b, 2001; Hann 1998a, 2000). This model sheds light not only on the relational value of

property but also its symbolic value, which is embedded not only in the social but in the cultural domains as well.¹²

My aim is to explore the reluctant transformation from collective to private and examine the privatization strategies in Balástya by applying this Relational and Cultural Model of Property while exploring the strategies, and I argue that the implementation of the Land Privatization Act (1992) became very complex and corrupt both at the local and national level. Examining the privatization process of both land and assets of the collective farms in the village, I explore how the “politicization of agriculture” created a myriad of property rights and new power relations. I argue that the neo-liberal notion of private property did not account for the multireferentiality of the claims and accessibility that were presented during the privatization.¹³ This new property regime neglected local epistemologies of land use, technologies, and innovations existing prior to privatization. I claim that the innovation of the hoop-house, which was grounded

¹² “The essential nature of property is to be found in social relationships rather than in any inherent attributes of the thing or object that we call property. Property, in other words, is not a thing, but a network of social relations that governs the conduct of people with respect to the use and disposition of things” (Hoebel 1954: 424).

¹³ Anthropological interests in property relations in CEE and fSU can be grouped as follows: (1) privatization strategies and resistance to privatization¹³ (e.g. Jakubowska 2000; Hann 2000; Verdery 1999; Bates 1995; Creed 1991; 1995; 1997; 1998; Böröcz 1992; Bunce and Csanádi 1993; De Soto and Panzig eds. 1995; Keith 1992; Kideckel 1993, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Lampland 1991, 1995; Swain 2000, Los ed. 1990; Nagengast 1991, 1998) and (2) fragmented ownership and ‘fuzzy property relations’ (e.g. Pine 1993, 1998; Róna-Tas 1997; Sampson 1994, 1999; Swain 1998; Szelényi 1990, 1994; Vásáry 1995; Verdery 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1998, 1999; Zbierski-Salameh 1998; Hann 2000). These discussions demonstrate how the processes of reprivatization and decollectivization generate new concepts of property rights based on changing understanding of social relations among individuals, family networks, and local communities.

in local knowledge, expertise, and commitment to land, was completely ignored by this top-down political decision.

Therefore I claim that the advocates for a political and economic “shock treatment” of the socialist economy and the restitution of private property disregarded the complex social and cultural worlds in which people lived and worked prior to 1989. Similarly, these macro-economic perspectives neglected the consequences of the socialist history and forty-five years of social processes in rural Hungary. Paradoxically, the process of providing social justice via privatization resulted in just the opposite: injustice and corruption.

In sum, these conversations, discussions, and theories guided my own research. They provided contexts for articulating my own standpoint in regard to the depiction of post-socialist life and economy. In attempting to answer my initial question (what causes anxiety, uncertainty and fear to the villagers in post-socialist Hungary?), I used diverse resources, including a mix of archival, ethnographic, and survey research.

Ethnographic Research Methodology

My dissertation is based on an eighteen-month ethnographic field research between 2001 and 2003 in Balástya, Hungary. Having visited Balástya prior to this time during my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2000, I had already

developed relationships with women and men living and working in the settlement. Most of my research entailed the total immersion in everyday life to observe what kinds of meaning villagers attributed to the rapid political and economic changes. Most of my research was based on the systematic use of information gained by participant observation; “the method of participant observation includes the explicit use in behavioral analysis and recording the information gained by participating and observing” (Dewalt, et. al 1998: 259). I participated in gatherings, religious events, local festivals like the “Virág Fesztivál” and the “Village Days;” I worked in people’s hoop-houses harvesting peppers and tomatoes; I visited the local hair dresser’s shop to get a haircut and catch up on local gossips; I biked to the nearby settlements to get groceries; I went to the local market to buy fresh produce; I visited the Retirees’ Club to chat with older men and women; and I went to Tupperware parties with elder and middle-aged women, which allowed me to collect data in naturalistic settings. Thanks to the generous welcoming of the villagers, I was able to see most of the people on a regular basis. I have maintained contact with many of them since I left the field, and I was able to return during short visits in 2004, 2006 and 2007.

In addition to ethnographic participation and observation I conducted many interviews and had many conversations with both young and old. These included informal and open-ended interviews with primary producers and rural entrepreneurs, whom I interviewed more than twice during my stay. As

characteristic of ethnographic research, interviews occurred with individuals with whom I had established rapport and trust. (Participation in the research project by new informants was strictly voluntary and based on informed consent and valued trust and rapport).

Research on the regional history of the Southern Great Plain and the examination of property records entailed library investigation and archival work at Attila József University Library, the City Archive, and the Museum of Móra in Szeged. Investigation of extensive property records kept at the city's Land Office allowed me to trace the national, regional, and local history of land use and property rights in the settlement over time. I also scrupulously reviewed selected monographs by Hungarian scholars written on the region—for example, works by János Reizner, István Tömörkény, Sándor Bálint, Mátyás Bél, Ottó Herman, István Bokor, and Antal Juhász—in order to understand the social history of the region.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I conducted formal, structured interviews with the managers, brigade leaders, accountants, agronomists, and communist party leaders of the former collectives of “Alkotmány,” “Rákóczi” and “Móra” in order to solicit their views of collectivization and privatization. These formal interviews included questions such as: When did you become the chair/brigade leader/accountant/agronomist of the cooperative? How did collectivization take place in the settlement? What was your job prior to collectivization? Do you think that the collective was successful? When did your collective farm break up and

under what circumstances? Did you agree with the decision of the Hungarian government that promoted the break-up of the collective farms? How do you make a living now? What would you change about the Hungarian agriculture? How do you think that integration of Hungary into the EU will change the role of small and large-scale farming?

The so-called “elite interviews” conducted with the mayor of Balástya and other officials—such as the county representative of Csongrád, the chair of “Gazda Kör” (Circle of Small Holders), a parliament representative, the chair of the County Land Office, the Regional Manager of the Sapard Office, and the chair of the New Type of Association—affiliated with specific organizations and institutions in Balástya, provided me with official views and discourses of land privatization as well as information on local claims and current disputes in the settlement. These elite interviews with public figures and representatives included questions such as: What is the current state of affairs of the land privatization in the settlement? How did land distribution take place? What were the main obstacles to redistribute collective land? How would you describe people’s attitude to privatization? Where and when could people submit their land claims? What is the percentage of privately held land compared to collectively held land in the settlement and in its four districts? Do the private “farmers” receive any state assistance, loans, or credit?

In addition, in order to describe and explicate how privatization took place in this settlement I carried out “knowledge-based interviews” (Weller 1998: 367) with three members of the local Land Distribution Committee and then conducted “structured interviews” with members of the former collective farm (see Appendix, Section 1). The information obtained by these two sets of interviews or discourses were the basis for comparing and contrasting knowledge or understanding of the same event (Recompensation Act 1992). These knowledge-based interviews included questions such as: How did the land distribution and privatization of the collective assets take place in the three collective farms? Would you explain how land was evaluated and how the distribution was conducted? How were you selected to serve on the Land Distribution Committee? What were the most difficult cases regarding land claims? Were there any claims that got rejected? Could they appeal?

Furthermore, newspaper, journal articles, and statistical data collected by the National Statistical Office contributed to the gathering of more information on the executed Recompensation Act of 1992. In addition, I surveyed the official documents of the Recompensation Act issued by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (1992) and studied how it was revised by the succeeding Socialist Party and then by the Alliance of Young Democrats and the Hungarian Civic Party in 1998.

Moreover, structured as well as open-ended interviews were conducted in order to make a systematic comparison across individuals and groups (Appendix,

Section 1) regarding contemporary issues of land reforms and agricultural restructuring in the years of post-socialist transformation. Moreover, I observed how rural citizens attributed meaning to these changes by systematically eliciting items, or as Weller (1998) coins them the “cultural domains” to record informants’ own words to describe these changes. These cultural domains, phrases, and figures of speech of the selected informants allowed me to do an in-depth, semantic analysis of local epistemology of land ownership and land use (see Appendix, Sections 2 and 3).

In addition to ethnographic observation and informal interviews, I selected fifteen villagers from different age, gender, and social groups with whom I taped “life-history” interviews. These interviews involved an average of three four-hour sessions with each person over a period of one year and were enhanced by daily interactions. In order to understand the village kinship and social structure, I collected family genealogies that were essential for me to navigate among property records and familial relations.

In order to comprehend the social-cultural significance of the hoop-house economy, I participated in seasonal agricultural work on small farms and in hoop-houses, including sowing, harvesting, and feeding animals. Participation was an analytical tool, a “way of knowing” and “learning to see” (Coy 1984). I regularly attended meetings organized by the village economists, who informed the villagers about upcoming changes concerning agricultural credit and loans. In this setting,

I gained information I learned about how national politics impacted local politics. Moreover, systematic observation of social interactions and behavior at food depots, chicken farms, food and animal markets, etc., yielded more information about how people worked, interacted, and created social bonds.

While living in Balástya, I followed discussions about the upcoming national political elections in the spring of 2002 and structured formal interviews with people running for local offices to observe what plans they had for the village.

The material that this study is thus based on derives from diverse resources. The quotations throughout this dissertation stem from taped interviews, notes taken during informal interviews, and observations from my field book. I retained the village's name; however, the individuals' names used here are pseudonyms.

An Ethnography of the Anxious Post-socialist Transformation

After 1989, anthropological projects have been multifold and unfolding where anthropological practice has become increasingly complex. Hence the anthropology of post-socialist transformation has to reorient itself in its methods and professional tool-kit. It is not only that it has to have a different tool-kit, what is more, it has to have a new vocabulary. It has to— more systematically—employ local idioms in place of foreign (western) terms. Western or foreign words, for example, describing privatization in Hungary do not accurately depict what was

happening in different places. In addition to a new mental and intellectual vocabulary, new fieldwork practices may be used such as a “multi-sited research imaginary in the pursuit of ethnography” (Marcus 1998: 3) interlocking the multiple locations politically, socially, as well as interconnecting the multi-layered voices of polyphony, when the anthropologist has to be satisfied with “partial knowledge” and “partial truths” (Clifford 1986). In my study, I hope to convey some of the “partial knowledge” that I gained about some of the “partial truths.”

Anthropology, like other fields of knowledge, is historically and ideologically situated in politics and the politics of representation of the “Other” (Fabian 1983). In my ethnographic research I distance myself of depicting the rural community of Balástya as the East European Other in place of interrogating social-economic transformations in the context of the interplay between local and extralocal influences and the study of “the mix of multiple negotiated realities” (Marcus and Cushman 1982: 11). Ignoring such tendencies would put my anthropological work at stake and thus would undermine the epistemological and academic status of this research.

The people of Balástya may no longer form a bounded community of landowners, if ever, in the canonical sense of the word, but a heterogeneous one embracing groups of peasants, entrepreneurs, developers, labor migrants, refugees, illegal immigrants, Krishna devotees, prostitutes, urbanites, etc., whose only common link might be spatial and temporal in the future. The “polyphonic

model” (Clifford 1988: 25) that I tried to apply to my own research incorporates many of their voices into the ethnographic process and product. These voices offer textures of reality that need the “ethnographic eye and ear” (Berdahl 1999). In my ethnography, I hope to see these details and listen to the tunes of these multiplicities.

Instead of identifying culture as an “entity to be found, culture is an act of artisanship” where “[F]ieldwork is an encounter, and the anthropologist participates in making ethnography” (Gudeman and Rivera 1995: 244), for it is a perpetual discussion. My fieldwork was a conversation between, among and with the people of my study. In my research, I participated in many conversations and listened to others while being aware of multiple conversations and multiple voices. Presentation and not necessarily the representation of these voices must give birth to a “thick ethnography” (Geertz 1973) that could also be theoretically productive and provocative.

For me, fieldwork was a “way of doing and learning” (Gudeman and Rivera (1995: 244). Culture “encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane, and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime,” “[N]either high nor low, it is all-pervasive” (Rosaldo 1993: 26). Or as Geertz (1973) suggests, the ethnographer “explicates explications,” sorts out the “structures of significations,” when the ethnographer “is faced with a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which at once strange...

which he must contrive somewhat first to grasp and then to render” (10). In my ethnography, I hope to untangle some knots and express few webs of significations to show not only the local particularities but also macro-processes that influence them.

I argue that the “imponderabilia of actual life” (Malinowski 1984) and “what has been lived through” (Turner 1986) by the “active selves” (Bruner 1986) in the years of transformation deserves much more people-oriented attention from anthropologists working in Central and Eastern Europe. The fine ethnographic detail, summarily dismissed as “a mere anecdote” (Fernandez 1986)¹⁴ by other disciplines, could reveal “what moves people to action” (Hertzfeld 1997), and may illuminate how people make sense of their lives at this critical moment.

My on-the-ground ethnographic study on the critical transformation from socialism to capitalism offers an alternative, complementary, and humanistic understanding to the top-down political-economic investigations of this time period. I suggest that there is a gap between the top-down abstract laws and people’s practical realities that can be shown through ethnographic work. This is exactly the conceptual terrain where this anthropological work can not only supplement and challenge generalizations, broad assumptions, oversimplifications of macro-level investigations, but also provide a fine, textured, detailed description

¹⁴ Fernandez introduces the idea of ‘revelatory incidents’ by which he means that they are not so frequent in the flow of everyday life and “their significance is the fruit of participation over the long term in culture. It is such participation that enables us to give these moments of a sudden constellation of significance’s an adequate reading. I regard these moments as the prime source of insight in fieldwork...an opportunity to relate events to the structure we otherwise spend much of our time studying in the field.” (In Intro.: p. xi.)

of local experience and particularities. Therefore this research represents not only a contribution to rural economic anthropology of the region and an understanding of its property relations in the years of post-socialist transformation but it also contributes to the discussions about the intimate relationship between economy and culture.

The Organization of This Dissertation

The template and the model of the hoop-house economy are the organizing metaphor of this dissertation as well as the object of my study. In some respects, my dissertation appears to share aspects of village ethnographies; however, it extends its physical and intellectual boundaries over the local to the global. Conceptually, I view the models of the hoop-house economy as three interrelated spheres of post-socialist economy, which I call 1) minimal, 2) liminal, and 3) maximal. These spheres provide contexts for ethnographic theorization about both socialist and post-socialist transformations in Hungary. They describe the multiplicity and complexity of the critical event in human history—the collapse of state-socialism in Central and Eastern Europe. These models are also the reflections of the dynamic arenas of social life that have been dramatically affected by the fall of socialism and the introduction of the free market. Taken together these interrelated themes, I hope to illustrate not only the local particularities but

also transcend them and show macroprocesses that intersected and crisscrossed people's lives.

This dissertation is arranged into five chapters.

Chapter 1 describes Balástya as it was under socialism and as it was under post-socialism when I arrived in September 2001. It provides the reader with an outline of the village and a general history of socialist collectivization. It identifies how a seemingly atypical combination of market and socialism could create a feasible socialism in the Hungarian countryside. Drawing from archival research as well as oral life histories, I examine the symbiotic relationship between collective and private household plot farming and demonstrate how this intimate relationship contributed to the success of Hungary's market-socialism. Here I develop a unique model of the house economy, which I observed specifically in the Balástya region—the model of the hoop-house economy—and show the various ways in which this local innovation of the hoop-house benefited the entire agricultural community. The interplay between above and below, between collective and private, was indispensable to sustaining the socialist system. My aim is to explain that the hoop-house economy, an innovation and labor-intense mode of production, was not antithetical to the socialist economy; quite the contrary, hoop-house economy and socialist economy were like Siamese twins—inseparable.

Chapter 2 examines the political and historical conditions under which the hoop-house economy emerged in Balástya and became a commonly applied mode of agricultural production by late socialism. I explore the particularities of how the hoop-house design was invented and later elaborated by a local producer. I document four rural entrepreneurs' engagement in the hoop-house economy from the late 1960s to the early 2000s to illustrate how the application of this "niche technology" allowed other producers to achieve economic prosperity and social power. I argue that the local economic model of the hoop-house economy and later the green-house economy were constructed in relation to a larger and more dominant political-economy. Particular attention is paid to how the patterns of the hoop-house economy were shifting in response to often unrealistic and inhumane demands of the socialist state and later of the free market.

In many respects, **chapter 3** forms the core of the dissertation, for it sets up and expands on the argument of economy's dialectics: market and community. I explore how the hoop-house economy developed and transformed from late socialism to early post-socialism, and argue that the shifting meanings of the hoop-house economy best illuminate the tension between market and community. I develop and distinguish among three models of the hoop-house—minimal, liminal, and maximal—and argue that the liminal hoop-house economy best illuminates post-socialist anxiety in this critical transformation from socialism to

capitalism. I argue that over a relatively short period of time, after the collapse of socialism, the liminal hoop-house economy became a spectrum and fusion of local, communal, and market relations and came to embody the contradiction of both socialist and capitalist economies.

Chapter 4 and 5 explore why land privatization and the destruction of the collective farms were so widely contested and resisted by the local community. I investigate how the two processes of privatization—privatization of collective assets and privatization of collective land—contributed to the development of a tiny group of “winners” and a large group of “losers,” and I discuss why people felt trapped and powerless in the new political system and property regime. I examine how villagers negotiated the post-socialist present always in a heated dialogue with the socialist past, and I argue that twenty years of post-socialism contributed to similar social unrest and anxiety in rural people’s everyday lives as much as collectivization and socialist rule did. Through these verbal and nonverbal negotiations, recollections, and memories, I argue, new collective identities and subjectivities are constructed, formed, invented, and asserted, which must be viewed as strategies of coping and hoping.

The **Conclusion** investigates the future of the Hungarian agriculture in the European Union. It examines the future transformation of the hoop-house

economy under the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU. I show how the strict and often times irrational regulations on agricultural production may threaten the local hoop-house economic production and push this local agricultural practice on the margin of the European economy and market. Finally, I argue that EU's policies and its globalizing tendencies discriminate former socialist countries' national economies and consequently they may redraw the "Iron Curtain" between the West and the *Othered East Europe*—twenty years after the collapse of state-socialism and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

THE SOCIALIST AGRICULTURE GOES TO THE SOCIALIST MARKET

Balástya Then and Now

This dissertation is based on a two-year ethnographic research that I carried out between 2001 and 2003. My geographical focus is the agricultural region of Balástya, in the southeast of Hungary in close proximity to the Serbian (Montenegro) and Romanian borders. Balástya is situated twenty-five kilometers from the city of Szeged in the county of Csongrád, which has historically been the economic and cultural center of the southern Great Plains sometimes known as the *Puszta*¹⁵. This large and scattered farming settlement envelops 10,999 hectares of land - the largest area of arable land in Hungary.

After the Tatar invasion, this sandy and flat *Puszta* region was gradually populated, and over centuries of continuous progress the large farming settlement of Balástya was established and came under the administration of the city of Szeged. In 1879, after the Great Flood of Szeged, when the River Tisza almost completely destroyed the city, people started moving out to this remote farming area. The area was partitioned and placed under the general supervision of the gendarmerie, which oversaw the tax offices as well as public ordinances. Later in

¹⁵ The word, '*puszta*' (literal translation from Hungarian would be 'bare,' 'empty,' or 'naked.')

refers to farmsteads on manorial estates existing prior to 1945. It also denotes the eastern region of the Great Plains or the *Nagy Alföld*, which was populated by manorial workers who were landless.

1891, the area was named *Szeged-Felsőközpont*.¹⁶ The nucleus of this rural settlement assumed not only the administrative tasks from the mother-town of Szeged but also the management of the former parochial system, church, medical facilities, schools, veterinarian office, gendarme force, and the Catholic people' house (this last built by peasants living in the area).



Figure 2-1. The Catholic Church, 2001. It is located in the center of Balástya. It was ordained in 1903. The majority of the villagers are Roman-Catholic. (Photograph by the author)

¹⁶ Outskirt areas/settlements of Szeged used to be divided into two regions: Felsőtanya (including Csengele, Balástya, Őszeszék, Gajgonya, Szatymaz, Fehértó) and Alsótanya (including Röske-Szentmihálytelek, Feketeszél, Nagyszéksós, Királyhalom, Mórahalom, Domaszék, Zákány, Csorva, Átokháza), altogether 5624 households. In the outskirts of Szeged, in 1887 approximately 34.000 people, while in Szeged at the same time 54.000 people. In 1920: 39.00, 1930:45.000. (Juhász 1989) In 1879, after the Great Flood of Szeged, people started moving out to these remote areas of Szeged. According to Juhász's findings based on archival research, it can be concluded that Balástya had circa 396 households in 1887. In addition, the area included 5 windmills, and 2 schools.

Balástya became an independent village in 1950, constituting the districts of Balástya-Tanya, Gajgonya, Öszeszék, and the bigger part of Fehértó-district. The nine neighboring settlements are Kistelek (town), Kömpöc, Csólyospálos, Csengele, Forráskút, Szatymaz, Sándorfalva, Dóc and Ópusztaszer. The growth of Balástya's population was a factor in its establishment as an independent village (it had 6,369 inhabitants in 1949); however, since 1949 its population has been gradually decreasing; by 2000 it was only 3,670, and when I was doing research there in 2001 it had dropped to 3,624. The reason for the decrease is due to the fact that the mortality rate is twice the birth rate.

This somewhat typical rural area shows some other negative tendencies besides high mortality rate, including increased rural unemployment, unfavorable age structure, high suicide rate, alcoholism, and negative migration balance. Between 2001 and 2003, forty-six deaths were reported, seven of which were murders.

1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
3858	4002	4648	5595	5634	5936	6023
1941	1950	1960	1970	1989	1989	2001
6102	6369	5722	5238	4375	3972	3624

Table 2-1. Population, 1870-2001. Balástya and its four districts' population between 1870 and 2001. Source: Juhász 1989.

In the early 1990s, Balástya became a relatively affluent village as a consequence of political and economic changes. For instance, the war in the former Yugoslavia, and the then-existing embargo, made the village the center of illegal trafficking. The area became the capital for the highly lucrative business of “blonding oil.” This is a practice whereby government-subsidized heating oil, which was dyed red, was chemically bleached and resold at market value. However, during the war not only fake gasoline was traded on the borders of Balástya (mainly to Serbia) but also fruits and vegetables by the truckload.

Since Balástya now lies on the track of the new M5 freeway (formerly the E 75), connecting Szeged (southern Hungary) to Budapest all sorts of trade takes place in the village, including heroin and prostitution. Moreover, this E 75 International Highway connects Balástya ultimately to Scandinavia and the Southern Balkans. The village also accommodates short-term domestic and foreign tourists visiting the nearby historical landmark of Ópusztaszer, the National Historic Memorial Park¹⁷ and the Hindu Church¹⁸ in the region. These visitors stay at a hotel named after a locally grown flower, “Hotel Orchidea.”

¹⁷ The Ópusztaszer Memorial Park commemorates the Hungarian Conquest and the settlement of the Magyar Tribes in the Carpathian Basin. According to the national legend and origin myth, Ópusztaszer was the place where Árpád and his chieftains of the Hungarian (*Magyar*) tribes gathered in 896 AD to decide upon the laws and order of their new homeland.

¹⁸ In Balástya-Tanya district there is a Hindu Vasinava Church, the largest in Eastern Europe.



Figure 2-2. Hotel “Orchidea,” 2002. It is co-owned by two flower producing families, who began hoop-house agricultural production in the 1960s. The hotel is located 200 meters off E75 Highway, which starts from Vardø, Norway in the Barents Sea and runs south through Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Macedonia to Sitia, Greece on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. (Photograph by the author)

However, the most significant factor that endows to its prosperity is that around the village there lies 10,999 hectares of land suitable for agricultural, recreational and therapeutic activities. Balástya and its four farming districts are most famous for their vegetable produce and cut flowers, which contribute to the village’s fame and wealth. This distinction and prosperity originates from the 1970s, when a few villagers began intensive vegetable production in hoop-houses.

Thus the village came to be best known for the excellent flavor and high quality of its so-called “*primőr*” (early appearing) potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers grown in the hoop-houses. The internationally known Hungarian *piros paprika* (red powder spice pepper) comes from this region.

In addition, 50% of the cut flowers grown in green-houses in Hungary come from Balástya. These internationally known flowers are orchids, gerberas, and lilies. Since the 1970's, Balástya's economic prosperity has been based on the agricultural triumph of the hoop-house economy.



Figure 2-3. Vegetable production in hoop-houses, 2003. The main vegetables include the famous Hungarian Paprika, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, cauliflowers, eggplants and cabbages, 2002. (Photograph by the author)

As a result, a great number of new houses have been constructed and the infrastructure has been significantly improved—although only 25% of the population lives in the village itself while 75% lives out on the scattered detached farms. There are 1400 detached farms scattered through the four districts of Balástya. Most of these detached farm houses have electricity

though not all have indoor plumbing.¹⁹ In the village, there are a fairly large number of two-story family houses.



Figure 2-4. New family houses, 2003. There are a great number of two-storey family houses in Balástya that were built in the 1980s. In the background, a maximal hoop-house can be seen that is used for flower cultivation. (Photograph by the author)

By 1989 there were paved roads leading to the former collective farms' main farmsteads, called the *major*. People on detached farms either use the artesian wells available at these *major*-s or have their own *Norton* wells²⁰. These households rely less and less on the illustrious shadoofs or *gémeskút*, so typical of the rural landscape of the *Puszt*a. Since the fall of state socialism, the village of Balástya has

¹⁹ In the year of 1989, according to the official report submitted by the County Council Chair, 70-80 houses were without electricity. "Old people were reluctant to get electricity installed in their houses not because they could not afford it but because to them using electricity was alien." (Council Chair, Ferenc Rácz 1989)

²⁰ Norton wells are dug wells.

also been enriched with new sidewalks, parking lots, a sewage system, a gas system, cable TV and phone systems, and a new sports stadium. In addition the number of trading and business enterprises has also significantly increased. When I was living in Balástya the village received the national Széchenyi Plan's Grant supported by FIDESZ,²¹ which was spent by the local autonomy on the *Fecskeház*, which is a housing complex in the center of Balástya and the construction of new paved roads connecting the four districts to the center of the village.

Modes of Livelihood

Even today, Balástya's four agricultural districts are composed of detached farms whose inhabitants are primarily engaged in what I call *hoop-house economic production* and small-scale agricultural production. A detached farm falls into a traditional category of the Hungarian settlement network, called the *tanya*. People living in this region had learned through past centuries which crops to grow as well as how to produce them effectively. Today they apply the technique of "garden-culture" production in hoop-houses, which I will discuss in details in the upcoming section.

²¹ FIDESZ, the acronym stands for *Fiatál Demokraták Szövetsége* or the Alliance of Hungarian Young Democrats. It is a right wing political party in Hungary that used the Széchenyi Plan for its political lobbying.



Figure 2-5. Traditional farm house, 2001. This is a traditional detached farm house, known as the “tanya.” Two-third of Balástya’s population lives on detached farms. This farm house does not have indoor plumbing but has electricity and running water. (Photograph by the author)

Balástya and its four farming districts make up 10,999 hectares of land: it is the largest continuous area of arable land in Hungary. Balástya became one of the largest cut-flower and *primőr* (early-appearing) produce suppliers in Hungary. Vegetable and flower cultivation under *hoop* and *green houses* take up 4,000 hectares in this region, 800 hectares is used primarily for flower cultivation. Ninety per cent of Balástya’s population is engaged and/or employed in agriculture on privately owned land. The other ten per cent is employed in the local school system and administration.

The entrepreneurial-minded gardeners (*kertészek*) and vegetable producers (*termelők*) in Balástya could be—one might think—the future competitors of other

EU countries' producers. Because Balástya is one of the biggest suppliers of cut-flowers in Hungary, the mayors of Balástya and Kistelek recently proposed a plan for a flower market place, which could become the main distributor in Central-Eastern Europe.²² As Nagy²³ put it, "this will put the market within easy reach for customers from Moldova to Slovenia."²⁴

The average plot size in Balástya for agricultural production is less than 10 hectares. The village economists said to me that "only those producers will survive that have at least 2.000 m² under hoop-houses along with some plow land. But those who have only 10 hectares of plow land will not be able to make it. Everyone's future depends on the market" (Ms Ujvári, village economist 2001).

Socialist Collectivization

This chapter examines the social and economic transformation of the hoop-house economy in two interrelated historical epochs in rural Hungary: market-socialism (1968-1989) and first phase of post-socialism (1989-2004). It focuses particularly on the historical and political context of the emergence of hoop-household economy²⁵ in Balástya. More importantly, however, I am particularly

²² The source of cut flowers in general is its own "stock market," with the biggest center in Holland.

²³ Nagy was one the chair of the Móra Collective in the 80s. After the change of the regime, he became the second mayor of Balástya in the 90s. Then he moved to the nearby Kistelek, where he was elected as mayor for the city.

²⁴ Susanne Zolcer. 2005. [http://www. Budapestsun.com/cikk.php?id=16312](http://www.Budapestsun.com/cikk.php?id=16312)

²⁵ The phrase that is used to describe this type of agricultural production is *fóliázás* in Hungarian. *Fólia* refers to the vinyl that is used to stretch over either the metal or PVC ribs.

interested in demonstrating ethnographically the dialectical relationship of economy's two realms—community and market—by looking at how this relationship has been understood and evaluated locally. At the same time, I identify the peculiar nature and logic of market-socialism as practiced in Hungary from the late 1960s to the late 1980s through the prism of collectivization.

The sandy and low quality of soil taught the peasants of Balástya how to grow good quality of vegetables on the household plots by erecting these hoop-houses. It was necessary to come up with something because this soil is not suitable for growing large crops. Believe me; the Hungarian peasant is very resourceful, inventive and hardworking. (Jóska, 58 year-old man, who accepted early retirement from the collective farm. He used to be the manager of the household plot integration project in the Alkotmány Collective Farm, 2003)

What is a hoop-house? Hoop-houses dot the rural landscape of the Balástya farming area. Drawing on my ethnographic findings, hoop-house farming is unique to this region; however, it is now practiced in other parts of the world. Hoop-houses are not green houses; however, they can be an alternative to fully heated greenhouses. The basic construction of a hoop-house is relatively easy and inexpensive. They may be portable, semi-permanent or permanent; they are constructed using PVC or aluminum to create arched or “hooped” supports for a

plastic covering. The frame is designed in a way that the hoop-house keeps excessive rain off the plants, blocks the wind, raise daytime temperatures by 5-10 degrees and keeps frosts and heavy dew off the leaves. Several factors contribute to an early harvest, including adjustment of roll-up sides to adequately manage the heat, using raised beds with black plastic mulch for a warm root environment, selecting early-maturing varieties, using the right age transplants and an early planting date.



Figure 2-6. A hoop-house, 2003. This is a tunnel hoop-house, in which this family grows potatoes for the early market and sells them in the nearby Kiskundorozsma. (Photograph by the author)

Therefore, vegetable production for early or late markets in this farming region is feasible by providing out-of-season produce on the national and local

markets. It increases surplus and “profit on the small” (Gudeman 2001) to small-scale producers by prolonging the market window. In addition, it also provides an efficient use of land because of its mobility, which simplifies soil management. In Balástya, the most commonly grown hoop-house crops are potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, strawberries, cauliflowers, kohlrabies and eggplants. While hoop-houses were initially labor-intensive, now they are both capital- and labor-intensive. A heated hoop-house can produce three harvests annually, while an unheated tunnel hoop-house is usually suitable for potato cultivation or root crops.

In this region hoop-house cultivation is an economic practice—an adaptation to the environment, which provides a solution to the region’s extreme climate and poor soil quality. Historically however, hoop-house cultivation was also a response and a form of resistance to collective farming under socialism that I will discuss in depth in this chapter. Hoop-house cultivation in Balástya was a result of a local innovation, human creativity and commitment to land, labor and family. The hoop-house’s structure, function and use of material changed over time as a result of economic development; however, I would like to suggest that hoop-house economy is an extension of the rural household economy. Hoop-house economy has been a changing yet “*resilient base*” of the rural household, to use Gudeman’s concept (2001), persisting under various historical and political conditions.

Contradictory Economies

First, I will discuss the historical and economic significance of household plot farming, or *háztáji gazdálkodás* under forced collectivization in order to contextualize the emergence and development of the hoop-house economy in market-socialism. In exploring the mechanisms by which hoop-house economy emerged and how its practice was passed on from one single household to others, I look beyond the individual level of analysis, beyond the phenomenon of isolated innovation. This dissertation is about social transformations, about how changes imposed from above by the socialist state were negotiated, tested and sometimes successfully contested in a rural community. The story of the hoop-house economy in the Balástya region is—in this respect—a story of success.²⁶

The relationship between household plot farming and hoop-household plot farming is not necessarily complicated but nonetheless needs to be situated in the political economy of socialism in the late 1960s. Hoop-house economy was practiced on the household plots that were allocated by the socialist collective farms to their members; however, the innovation itself took place on a peasant's

²⁶ After the 1956 Revolution the socialist government had to make a compromise in order to maintain its dominance over the population. Its success depended on its ability to deliver not only necessary goods but also consumer goods in addition to increasing the standard of living. Hence without the fast growing second economy it would have been an impossible political, social and economic agenda to fulfill. Róna-Tas (1989) describes the dilemma of the Kádár regime as such: “The paradox of the Kádár regime faced was that to keep a system of domination based not on political mobilization and coercion but – predominantly – on the institution of state employment it had to meet consumer needs. But to meet consumer needs it had to tolerate the second economy, which meant the erosion of its principal means of domination.” (Róna-Tas, 1989: 121)

private farm.²⁷ In investigating the political economy of late socialism in which hoop-house economy emerged, I show the symbiotic relationship between the established collective farm economy and rural household plot economies. These two are unmistakably co-present and co-dependent in the 1970s up to 1989. Let me briefly outline what preceded this period.

Although the 1956 Revolution postponed for two years the state's enforced collectivization of agriculture, it was back in full force by 1958. In accordance with the Agrarian Thesis issued by the Communist Party in 1957, "agriculture [would] eventually become fully collectivized, fulfilling the socialist goals of collective production and state ownership" (in Lampland 1995:169). The communist state required commitment to the socialist attitude: "It is required that those peasants who used to work privately they must change their attitude to labor and must work communally, and learn the socialist thinking and behavior" (*The Manual of Collective's Members* 1963:26).

Under the pressure of the socialization and modernization of agriculture, peasant property was under siege by the socialist state. Coercion to join the collective farm in Balástya was widely utilized in the forms of humiliation, physical threatening and constant harassment. Social and economic pressure was put on the *kuláks* (middle peasants, labeled as capitalistic parasites by the Communist

²⁷ For my discussion of the practice of hoop-house economy, although the innovation of the hoop-house itself did not take place on the socialist household plots, I see it as a political and economic product of the collectivized agriculture.

The innovation of the hoop-house economy is very closely related to the collectivized farming as it was a negation of it.

Party) to give up their land. As a 78-year old man, a former member of the Alkotmány Collective puts it:

People had little choice but to join the collective farm. First, they only harassed those people, who owned a lot of land. The sluggards in the village reported them to the local authorities. These sluggards did not care about their methods of force (Uncle Pista, 2002).

The local authority, cadres and agitators in charge of the “procedure,” “roughed those landowners up who did not want to join the collective farm...they wanted to take 120 people from the village but I stopped them” - recalls the first chair of the Alkotmány Collective (1961-1982). As a result of forced collectivization between 1958 and 1961, by 1959 there were 2,755 collectives in the country. Within three years the members of the collectives increased to 1, 100,000. These collectives were cultivating $\frac{3}{4}$ of the country’s arable land, totaling 5, 800,000 cadastral *hold*²⁸. The average territory of a collective was 2000 cadastral *hold*. On average, there were 266 families in one collective (*The Manual of Collective’s Members* 1963: 162). Forced collectivization subsequently redefined peasants’ social status, identity and personal integrity within the local community. However, not all the people in Balástya joined the collective farms.

Although this chapter focuses on the emergence of the informal economy/household plot farming in the context of the hoop-house economy, it is

²⁸ One cadastral hold is half a hectare.

important to sketch out how socialist economy worked in order to clarify their respective roles. Thus I will describe the function and the role of collective farms and provide an ethnographic example of the “Rákóczi” Collective Farm – the largest among the three in Balástya.

Collective Farm or *Termelőszövetkezet*²⁹

According to the official records, the definition of the collective was the following: “The *TSZ*, the Collective is a ‘producing alliance,’ a socialist, agricultural large enterprise, on which the peasant on his own land as well as on the state’s cultivates the land in a modern way” (*The Manual of Collective’s Members* 1963: 162). The Communist Party hoped that providing machines and other technologies to the collective and state farms would eventually out-produce the peasant private sector, thus making private peasants compete with the socialist production, so that finally they would give up their own “excessively individualistic farming and join the collective” (162).

Hence, ideologically, the concept of the collective farm aimed at eliminating private ownership and enforcing collective property and communal labor. The state also promised these “excessively individualistic” peasants that they

²⁹ The literal translation of *termelőszövetkezet* is “a producing collective.” The abbreviated form was *TSZ*.

would be compensated for any land and assets given up to the collective. The *Manual* declared the following socialist agenda:

In our collectives, no form of exploitation is allowed. The land must be given up for collective use. The means of production, equipment and animals - except the ones on household plots - will be in the ownership of the collective. In return, the collective will compensate its members. The members of the collective must be educated in the socialist spirit (*Manual of Collective's Members* 1963: 19).

The “socialist restructuring of the Hungarian agriculture” or the socialization of the means of production, meant the beginning of central or scientific planning. This proved to be a highly centralized bureaucratic system that could also be called a coordination system, which set the rules, norms and expectations in the form of statistics. Therefore, the management of the collectives was based on scientific planning, calculation, and accounting that were all responsible for the efficiency and productivity of the collectives and state farms. The pressing issue for the socialist government was then how to reward labor performed in the collective farms. The standard form of enumeration was the work unit or work day. “Payment took the form of an annual share in cash or kind of total collective profits based on the number of ‘work units’ performed.” (Swain 1985: 35)

For example, labor thus was measured in these work units (*munka egység*) by two things; 1. the “norms” (such as acreages, liters, and tons) and 2. the type of labor done in the collective based upon categories of labor. For example, the daily norm for hoeing corn was 760 ö (1 ö=3.597 m²; 1 m²=0.278 ö; 1 cadastral hold = 1600 ö=5754.56m²) and if the member of the collective had achieved more, perhaps by hoeing 910 ö more, then the labor units can be calculated as follows: Corn hoeing belonged to category IV. Thus in this case, 910: 760 X 1.25=1.50 labor unit (*Manual of Collective’s Members* 1963:26).

However, as Swain points out, there was no clear link between the amount of work carried out and the actual size of the final reward and also because the agricultural price was kept artificially low, it was somewhat obvious that the final reward would be extremely low. It was well-known countrywide that people working in the collective farms had extremely low wages. Consequently, in order to mitigate this problem the collective farms offered social benefits to their members such as pension and health care benefits as a substitute for security in the future, and offered a form that approximated a wage rather than the annual share of the surplus. Swain notes the particular nature of the socialist wage labor as such:

“Socialist wage labor” differs from “wage labor” in the capitalist sense in that the ability to perform- it is not a commodity in the Marxist sense... [The] essence of the ‘socialist wage labor’ is not only that it is

in receipt of a wage in an economic system which has ruled out the possibility of unemployment and consequently operates according to a different economic logic from capitalist, free market economies (Swain 1985:6-7).

In the socialist economy, labor ceased to be a commodity that could be sold and bought on the market. Wages were set centrally by the socialist state, where the ideal model would be to incorporate the objective of a socialist society: social justice. It had no price, no exchange value because “it is assigned to one job, one position by the plan. Therefore, there is no comparison in which its price or exchange value could come about. Each position becomes incommensurate with all others, and each is seen to be vitally important in the functional whole of the economy” (Róna-Tas 1990: 42).

In this way, the social elite maintained complete control over production distribution and the allocation of resources. This was the time of big slogans like “productivity,” “efficiency,” and “profitability.” Nevertheless, these attempts failed to stabilize the Hungarian economy and improve the low wages of agricultural workers. Centralized planning of agriculture had various disadvantages: 1. it was not flexible, for information did not get from one place to another quickly enough; 2. it could not adjust quickly to demand, 3. it was not efficient, for it withheld performance, and 4. macro-economic decisions were made by the communist party elite who had little or no expertise in agriculture. Hence agricultural

production was prescribed centrally as an obligation, and resource allocation was prescribed according to state directives. By the end of the 1960s, these adopted policies resulted in food shortages and social unrest. Consequently, the Kádár³⁰ government was forced to make some concessions in regards to agricultural production.

The solution lay in the implementation of the *New Economic Mechanism* in 1968, which offered a unique model in addition to the “neo-Stalinist model” (Swain 1998) of collectivization. The aim of the economic reform was to revive the formal or national economy, and as such it was a response to the inefficiency of some collective farms’ productivity. It was also a critique of the shortage economy and the imbalance of the Soviet-modeled economy. State property remained; however, the government erased the compulsory plan indicators, and state enterprises like collectives gained limited independence. The New Economic Mechanism (1968) introduced market categories like customs, taxes, credit, and price policies but still wanted to fulfill the government plans. In effect, it translated government plans into market terms.

In agriculture, the New Economic Mechanism (1968) worked out by the Central Committee strongly encouraged *household plot farming* (also known in economic literature as the second or informal economy) and *small-scale farming*, and it did so partly by following the “collectivization abandoned model” (Swain

³⁰ General Secretary of the Socialist-Worker’s Party from 1956-1988.

1998) which came to be known as the “Hungarian Model” or the “Hungarian Miracle.” The symbiotic relationship between large-scale socialist and household plot farming (cf. Los 1990) was systematically and successfully pursued. The members of the collective farms received extra benefits for private production, but marketed via the socialist sector (cf. Kornai 1992; Kemény 1990; Donáth 1977).

Household Plot Economy or *Háztáji Gazdaság*

The Manual of the Collective’s Members declared the following in 1963.

In addition to large-scale farming we acknowledge the importance of *household plot economy*. It is important that our peasantry has his own household plot. It is for *subsistence* and for the *market*. Our state will provide our collective farms’ members with all the assistance these household plot economies will need (Manual of the Collective’s Members 1963:19).

And what belonged to the household plot economy? The household plot economy (*háztáji gazdaság*) was not equivalent to the household plot (*háztáji föld*). Household plot/land was one of the most important elements of the household plot economy, but not the only one. It comprised other properties such as a) the house with a yard, b) the tools, equipment and any technology needed for this type of economy, c) the *household plot*, and finally d) the animals.

How much land was given to the members of the collective for the household plot? In general, the leadership of the collective at a public assembly decided the conditions of the household plots. The amount of land for allocation could be between 800 öl to 1600 öl. (circa 0.57 hectare or 1 cadastral *hold*).³¹ The territory of the household plot included all the land used by the members of the family, which comprised the vegetable garden, vineyard, and orchard in the vicinity of the house—but not the yard, which provided a storage area for the hay, and stack yard (*szérúskert*), (up to 300 öl or 1078 m²).³²

However, depending on each and every individual family's circumstance and the members' involvement in the collective labor, more land could be required. Families could acquire more land for their use if there were dependants such as children and elderly people. Families could also receive more household plot/land if their members provided extra help for the collective when it needed more labor during the sowing and harvesting seasons.

In addition, members could even claim a household plot out of the land that they gave (up) to the collective. If the public assembly accepted that claim, then that piece was in his property—he could even sell it. Orchards and vineyards

³¹ Land measurement: 1 öl=3.597 m² (1 m²=0.278 öl)
1 cadastral hold = 1600 öl=5754.56m²; 1 Hungarian hold=1200 öl=4315.92m².
1 hectare=10.000m².
1 hold=0.575 hectares

³² It is interesting to point out here that this 1600 m² or 0.57 ha is exactly the same size of plot that the collective farms distributed to its members for household plot cultivation after 1968 and this was exactly the same amount of land to which manorial workers on the large estates before World War II were entitled to.

could be obtained only by those who joined the collective; however, their size could not exceed more than 600 ö.l.

Moreover, people who retired from the collective farm could also claim a household plot if there was no one else in the family who could work full-time in the collective. The law did not allow the members of the collective to lease more land as the person was supposed to work on the common land and on his household plot. The members of the collective could, however, purchase land from those land owners who did not join the collective. In addition, the members of the collective could rent the household plots from those who did not want one. These household plots were in the personal possession of the members. The member of the collective could lease his household plot for use or profit, which was allocated to him and was his individual possession.

Thus the size of the household plot could be increased if the family found it beneficial to work on the household plot after working all day long in the collective. The members did have to pay tax after the household plot economy: income tax, land tax and house tax. Land tax was measured by the quality of the member's land calculated in golden crowns – exceeding 400 ö.l. Household plot cultivation was encouraged in various ways by the collective leading to what I term as *innovation intense* agricultural production on these *mini plots*. The role of the household plot production was essential in the development of hoop-house

economy as it was practiced and complemented one another and I will return to this connection later in this chapter.

The household economy was also allowed to raise animals to supplement wages and to increase the national GDP of the socialist state. The collective farm member and his family could raise only 1 cow, 1-2 calves, 1-2 sows with its piglets, and 5 sheep or goats. There was no limit on poultry, rabbits or bees.

Household plot cultivation was encouraged in various ways by the collective leading to what I call *innovation intense* agricultural production on these *mini plots*. The state paid for milk produced in these household economies. These cows had to be registered. Pig fattening was also an advantageous option to perform on the household economy. Members of the collective farms could make contracts with state enterprises to sell pigs (and calves) that they raised in the household economy. One famous example of this was the 'Pick Szalámi Factory' in Szeged that contracted with collective farm members around the Szeged region, including Balástya.

Five days after members signed a contract with a state-owned enterprise; the state gave a deposit/credit (then 400 Hungarian forints) to the producer, which was deducted at the final sale. Each producer could claim 1.5 ton of feed after each contracted swine that was purchased from the state. But if the producer did not need the feed then the state would provide price supplementation: 1.50 forints/kilo for each swine at the sale. Household economies could contract only

for raising piglets, in which case, five days after the signing of the contract, the producer received 200 Forints interest-rate credit, which was calculated at the final sale. If the producer had changed his mind and wished to sell fattened pigs, then he could alter his contract. In that case, the state-enterprise provided an additional 200 forints/pig and 1.5 tons of feed. This was called the price supplementation. These conditions similarly were applied to raising chickens, forced-fattened geese and turkeys. Contracts could also be made for rabbits, bees and pigeons for sale to the state. Besides these listed products the collective could contract for other products, such as silkworms, slugs, frogs, crabs, and leeches.

It is very important to mention that in case of vegetable production the members using household plots could also contract with the local collective. The contracted vegetables and fruits had to be selected, classified and transported to the depot of the collective. Similar conditions were available for producing wine when the member could contract with the state's wine cellars. These could also supplement the income of the rural household.

Initially, household plot farming was a response to forced collectivization, large-scale, mechanized agricultural production and collective labor. In the larger economic context, it supplemented the formal and socialist agricultural production and made a socio-economic commentary on the socialist ideology of forced collective production. The socialist or formal economy was directed by central planning, and the informal or second economy was dominated by the logic

of the rural household economy. It would be too facile to suggest however that these two economies were antithetical to one another as political discourses claim it; one being collective and the other private, the latter motivated by self-interest and gains. I propose that they were in fact both based on the principles of a community economy whose emphasis was on what Gudeman (2001) describes as *maintaining* and *augmenting the base* or commons. In my view, they both belonged to the same value realm of economy driven by what Weber refers to as “substantive rationality.” The household plot economy was based on the labor of all family members and its surplus was returned back to the house to sustain the “base” and its members.

Consequently, the exchange of goods, services and labor within this “small unit of economy” (Firth 1965:27) was a statement of social and familial obligations. In the case of what I call the *big unit of economy* or the collective farm, the ideals were a statement of collectivity, solidarity and mutuality. In the larger scheme as part of the socialist ideal it aimed at providing its members with employment, housing, health care, and retirement plans. These are definitely not values of the market.

A Legit Second and Informal Economy³³

Consequently, by 1974 the Hungarian government had made serious attempts to boost the agricultural sector by providing credit and capital to these semi-autonomous enterprises. A new agricultural elite, educated in colleges of horticulture with significant expertise, became the new leaders of these enterprises. In addition wholesale prices for agricultural products were boosted and the "Green Revolution" began with the assistance of the communist party; it entailed the application of new biotechnology in agricultural production.

Donáth (1977) emphasizes that this symbiotic relationship created a dual economy in Hungary. It was recognized by the socialist government that the role of the household plot farming production in the national economy was essential to dealing with food shortages and rural poverty. In the *Mezőgazdasági termelőségvetkezeti törvény* (Agricultural Collectives Law 1968) it was stated very clearly: "In the household plot economy commodity production can be also performed" (1968:114).

Commodity production thus was carried out in addition to production for self-use and needs. By the end of the 1980s, the collectives took a significant role

³³ "In some economic writings the term "second economy" is applied to what this book calls the "informal economy." The first economy covers all that qualifies in the official ideology of the classical system as the "socialist sector," that is the bureaucratic state and collective sector, while the second economy consists of the sum of the formal private sector composed of officially permitted, small family undertakings and the informal private sector" (Kornai 1992:85).

in the market by which the product from the household plots got to the socialist state. In addition, they took on credit co-operative roles to help purchase inputs (Swain 1985).

The Agricultural Law of 1968 stated, “The cooperation between the cooperatives and the household plot economies has to be worked out in a way that it serves the interests of both the members and the cooperatives” (R. §114), and even went so far as to encourage marketing via the collectives: “The cooperatives could sell the produce from the households collectively” and “work as a transporter of household plot products” (R. §115).

In fact, it became such an elaborate corporation that livestock raised or fruit and vegetables produced on the household plots even counted toward the social benefit entitlement plan. There were more or less guaranteed purchasing agreements between state-sponsored enterprises and the household plot producers. But this cooperation was stretched even further. A note within the R. §53 of the Agricultural Law of 1968 stated that the “cooperatives could even process the produce coming from the household plots” and R. §54 said that “the collectives could provide building supply and professional, skilled work for their members if required on the household plots.”

Moreover, the collectives agreed to provide production supply and inputs (chemicals, fertilizers, manure, etc) for the household plot producers. The

cooperation between the collectives and the household plot producers was managed by the household plot integration committee, headed by an agronomist.

The development and flourishing of the second economy upset the order of the socialist state, and the process of stratification was underway in the late 1970s. The socialist paternalistic state was no longer the sole provider of incomes and goods, thus its role decreased over time; “the hidden economy is a new economy created with the state, by the people” (Kemény 1990:63). In 1981 over half of the Hungarians active in the labor force had some involvement in the second economy. Time budget studies conducted in 1977 and 1986 show that the income-earning activity outside employment increased from 63 minutes per day to 88 minutes per day on average for those working in household plot farms (Róna-Tas 1990: 9). The second or informal economy in socialism used little capital and usually needed little material input, and labor tended to be exclusively the key factor. Indeed, the biggest assets one could have in the household economy were skills, ambition, expertise, time and physical aptitude. One of the villagers remembers this era:

In the 1970s people were walking forward but they were running forward. Their carriage was running that fast. The expenditures were so low but the produce price was high. For example, when I was going to high school in 1977, one of my classmates from Balástya brought a pepper to school in January. One pepper cost 3 forints.

Imagine, one tram ticket was 1 forint and 1 liter of diesel was also 3 forints. You could make rather a lot of money if you had hoop-houses. You needed *little cash* for the vinyl back then but you needed to be ambitious, clever, and knowledgeable. Plus you had to work a lot. In a hoop-house on half a hectare you could grow a lot more than on one hectare open field (2002).

Of course, the question of whether the second or informal economy contributed to social stratification in the countryside remains. I suggest that hoop-house economy as a part of the household economy served the purposes of the members of the household. The goods and services it generated were used for their own maintenance and operation in order to improve the well-being of the households. The “profit on the small” (Gudeman 2001) was put away in household cashboxes to do major investments related to the house, such as adding rooms and floors to the house and purchasing cars or other household durables. The morphological feature of this type of economy is that it lacked the tendency to grow, and they had a peculiar form of accumulation, which tended to be social rather than economic. In most cases there were clear obstacles and limits to growth, such as lack of technology, the hardships of self-exploitation, and anxiety about both political and economic externalities that the household was not suited to cope with.

But again this resulted in a different type of accumulation, which was “accumulation of trust, respect, and obligations” (Róna-Tas 1990: 37). In this

model, rural household economies helped each other by building homes or doing the harvest on household plots. This social accumulation was required to perform economic activities in the countryside. Many participants were “investing” in their social status to gain or pass on social capital to their children by providing a better education, and this intention lay outside the market realm.

Thus the second or informal economy altered income differences in ways uncontrolled by the socialist state, by creating and distributing the consumer goods and services it produced, and by redistributing income from the state sector among the households (Gábor & Galasi 1984; Róna-Tas 1990; Lampland 1995). Consequently, the socialist state lost control over its society at two levels. At the individual level the state lost control over the labor of the workers, and at the social level it lost control over the stratification system, as it became unable to effectively influence the relative position of social groups in the Hungarian society (Róna-Tas 1990: 14).

However, only a small segment of commercial farmers and producers could be identified as entrepreneurs (Szelényi 1988).³⁴ The majority of the people were afraid of taking risks on the market; the wealth they accumulated was invested in building a house or buying livestock. In this sense the growth and intensification of the second or informal economy generated degrees of differences socially,

³⁴ In Róna-Tas's (1989), Szelényi's (1988) analysis, private part-time farming is considered part of the second economy if the household sold at least some of its produce. Hobby or subsistence farmers were considered borderline between the first and the second economy, as they could potentially decide to produce and sell their products.

economically and politically that I will discuss in the last chapter of the dissertation.

The Case of “Rákóczi Mg.” Collective Farm

In this section, I will ethnographically demonstrate this intensified cooperation between the formal socialist and informal family economy through the case of one collective farm in Balástya: “Rákóczi Collective.” This collective farm was the largest in the area in terms of land size. Between 1958 and 1962, the period of forced collectivization, three collectives were established in Balástya. Previously there had been seven small collectives, which functioned inadequately, and thus they were unified into three larger collective farms named “Rákóczi,” “Móra” and “Alkotmány.”

The official name for the collective was “Agricultural Production Collectives” (*Mg TSZ* or *Mezőgazdasági Termelőszövetkezet*). I will only focus on the “Rákóczi Mg TSZ” because it was the largest, and more interestingly, 80% of its members were involved in household plot farming between 1970 and 1980.

The territory of “Rákóczi Mg TSZ” was situated in the northern region of Balástya between the Duna and the Tisza on sandy soil. It was stretched out on 3.406 hectares of non-continuous land, out of which 2.826 hectares was used for

large-scale agricultural production.³⁵ The center of the collective farm was located in the village next to the then-existing Szeged-Budapest Highway.

The division of production by branches followed as such: plow field made up 57% of the total, pasture 26%, grapes 5%, fruits 5% and forest 2%. Non-productive land enveloped 5% of its total territory. The golden crown value of the plow field was 9.05/hectare. Therefore the land's value was extremely low, and consequently it was put into Category II, which indicated the low quality of this soil.

The composition of the land used for agricultural production was sandy. The sea-level fluctuated between 90 and 92 meters. This territory had a continental type of climate, which could be characterized as extreme: large fluctuations in temperatures (hot summers with plenty of sunshine and very cold winters) and very little rain. The land could not benefit from what little rain fell because of underground water, and thus 18% of its territory was threatened by inland waters.

The collective in general had very low profits; for the most part the input was nearly as high as the output. The efficiency of this collective was therefore minimal, and its productivity in the context of the whole Csongrád County and the country was extremely low. Rákóczi's land was more suitable for fruit and grape

³⁵ See next chapter about the fate of the Rákóczi Collective Farm's main office.

production; however, it was impossible to establish vineyards on a large scale, as the collective did not have the financial resources to do so.

The area was very much accessible, as it lay close to the Szeged-Budapest highway and the train station. Food and grain transportation was thus possible by train and by truck. In addition there was a paved road leading to the station, which made loading easier. In terms of labor, there was 7.6 hectares of land for each person. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, 20% of Rákóczi's labor force was under the age of 40, and due to Balástya's close proximity to Szeged it was expected that some would migrate there for jobs in industry, especially the younger generation. According to the recorded data, "Rákóczi" had 388 members in 1977, 370 in 1978, 352 in 1979 and 336 members by 1980. Between these time periods the average salary was between 9.600 and 11.300 forints.³⁶

The "Rákóczi," similarly to "Móra" and "Alkotmány," encouraged its membership to work on household plots and in accordance with MÉM's order of 1976 (V. 27, 19.1976). If the members (including retired people and women on maternity leave) produced vegetables and fruits on their household plots for the collective, then that labor time was compensated in terms of work units.

Consequently the collective made the following declarations:

1. the production of one fattened pig (*hizósertés*) on a monthly basis was equal to 0.25 working unit (day)

³⁶ The information derives from this Collective Farms' archival records.

2. the production of one cow on a monthly basis was equal to 1.50 working unit (day)
3. the production of every 100 liter of milk was equal to 1.00 working unit (day).

1960

News Background

X/160 CURT -

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR PRIVATE CATTLE BREEDING ON HUNGARIAN
COLLECTIVE FARMS

X
100
Munich, November 18 (Stern) -- A new Hungarian government decree providing for the promotion of individual cattle breeding on collective farms is yet another admission by implication that collective breeding efforts in Hungary have been meeting with a singular lack of success.

The publication of the new decree was announced over Radio Budapest on November 17.

This emphasis on individual cattle breeding, i.e. breeding undertaken on the collective member's private plot, cannot be described as a new development in Hungarian agricultural policy. However, the fact that an official decree has been promulgated which aims at further stimulating meat production on the private plots would seem to indicate a degree of urgency in the sector of national meat supply.

Indications that an internal Party dispute over the role of private plots within the collective farms had been settled, that most of the burden of animal breeding and meat production would continue to be borne by the plots, were evident from an article by Politburo member and Central Committee Secretary in charge of agriculture, Lajos Feher, appearing in the Party theoretical journal "Tarsadalmi Szemle" for June 1960.

In his article Feher announced that some not wholly orthodox measures would have to be instituted to carry the peasantry through what he termed the "transitory period" in the collectivization of the Hungarian countryside. This transitory period would extend itself to the point when full mechanization, animal accommodation and a sufficient fodder basis had been attained on the collectives. Until such time, among the transitory measures to be taken would be a definite reliance on the private plots as "an important basis of supply", especially of meat.

Provisions of the New Decree

Feher's considerations in "Tarsadalmi Szemle" for last June have now crystallized in the form of the new decree.

The decree calls for the use of all possibilities of cattle breeding and animal fattening by individual collective

Table 2-2. Decree, 1958. This above decree issued by the Hungarian government was to encourage private cattle breeding in the household economy.

Hence the produce cultivated and the animals raised within the “household sector” were essentially sold via the “socialist market sector.” In sum, the collective credited (*jóváír*) the working time performed in the household economy as part of the members’ work units/days, which meant that they were receiving wages. Their employment was ensured in this way, and their wages were supplemented by the household plot production.

The territory of the household plot according to the collective’s regulation could be 6.000 m² of plow fields or 3.000 m² of grapes and/or fruits. “It is evident that the integrated agricultural production in the collective and on the allocated household plots work perfectly hand in hand...” (TOT 1980/6/10). The agricultural five-year plan for Rákóczi was worked with the help of the University of Agriculture in Debrecen along with the Production Development Institute's Office in Szeged.

The plan for Rákóczi’s management was to have 4000 mother sheep, 250 cows and 150 mother pigs, and to plant 85 hectares of new apricot orchard by the 1980s. In 1977 it had 34 hectares of peach trees, 26 hectares of apple trees, 4 hectares of pear trees, 66 hectares of grapes (“*Délmagyarország*” 1976). Based upon my conversations with people engaged in household plot economy, people also experimented with growing melons and then selling them at Bosnyák Square in Budapest.

The household-plot farming production in Rákóczi was directed by the committee of household-plot farming, which consisted of a chair and four members who were elected for a period of five years. The chair of this committee was called the “household-plot farming agronomist.” His work was tied to the work of the chair of the collective farm, its accountant and its agronomists. His main task was to organize the sale of goods produced in the household sector.

The most significant use of household-plot farming in Rakoczi could be divided as follows: Out of Rákóczi’s overall territory, 580 hectares were given out for household plot farming—almost one quarter. Out of those 580 hectares, 365 hectares (circa 63%) were used for plow field cultivation. Vegetable and fruit production were carried out on 30 hectares, which was circa 5% of the overall territory of those household plots. A more significant section of 43 hectares was used for vineyards (7.4%). Pastures and forest took up 38 hectares, circa 6.5% of the overall household farming area.

The first 102 hectares remained uncultivated, equal to 17.8% of the total. Only a small portion of the plow fields was farmed using traditional techniques; to a larger extent, they were reserved for vegetable production. In addition, members grew potatoes and produced grain to feed the animals of their household economies.

The intensive use of these household plots can also be seen in animal husbandry. The continuation of animal husbandry was optimal because the

members mostly lived on detached farms and had access to the collective's technology and smaller machinery. Animal husbandry took place on the uncultivated plots, which basically meant the household yard. By 1980, the circulation and the sale of pigs increased as well as of the vegetables – peppers in particular.

Rákóczi provided the breeding stock, seeds, fertilizers, and fodder for the household economies. It also organized the collection of cow milk from the participating economies. They established four locations to do so, one of which was in the center of the collective farm. It also helped its members renovate buildings used for animal husbandry and storage for the crops and provided members with consultation regarding the organization of their labor. Harvests on these household plots were carried out with the help of the collective mostly on Saturdays and Sundays. Transportation and sale were also organized by the collective farm.

YEARS	Total income in one thousand Forint	Out of the total income, the circulation of household products	
		Thousand Forint	Per cent
1977	53.220	12.489	23.5
1978	48.063	15.373	32.0
1979	48.512	14.635	30.2
1980	59.542	17.426	29.3

Table 2-3. The Rákóczi Collective's monthly income distribution, 1977-1980. *Source:* Rákóczi Collective Farm's bookkeeping records.

According to this table, it can be seen that on average one quarter of the total income of Rákóczi originated from the sale of produce or grain raised on the household plots. However, compared to the average income countrywide, the total income was extremely low. It is important to mention that vegetables and fruits were sold via the collective in minimal amounts because *Zöldért* (a state-owned vegetable depot) always waited until the day of the sale to announce its prices, which made the depot incredibly inflexible and not in tune with the market.

Therefore, to the members of the collective involved in household plot farming, the sale of vegetables and fruits was more favorable if it was carried out in the free market, where the price was much higher than that of *Zöldért*. By late 1980, however, the income out of sold products and services had changed to show a negative tendency.

Definitions	Index: %
Sold produce, products, animals	61.5
Income out of rotating funds	128.2
Income out of services	203.2
TOTAL	94.6

Table 2-4. Index, 1977. Index is in reference to the year of 1977. *Source:* Rákóczi's Collective Farm's bookkeeping records.

The income out of sold products and animals decreased by 38.5%, in comparison to 1977. The following reasons can be detected:

1. The sale of plant potatoes was significant in 1977-78 because some of the households began cultivation under hoop-houses. Thus, household economies no longer required plant potatoes from the collective, as they could produce those by themselves under hoop-houses.
2. The provision of feeds in 1977 was ensured by the collective farm, which provided a large portion of these feeds directly to its members; however, since 1979 the provision of feeders had been carried out via *ÁFÉSZ* (State Buy & Sale Alliance).
3. Services performed by the collective farm, such as tractor plowing, were no longer needed and decreased compared to their number of 1977. Private

economies began purchasing their own small machineries to use in their household economies, so they did not depend on the collective for as much.

The symbiotic relationship between the collective and household production was essential because the collective sold both its own products and products coming out of the household plot farms. If household plot products were sold via the collective, it meant that the collective received state assistance. Therefore it became beneficial to the collective to organize the sale of vegetables because of these subsidies. It was in the interest of the collective to support its members. But some vegetable and fruit growers sold their produce independently of the collective. By 1980, these household plot producers, and people engaged in animal husbandry, could require subsidies from the state only if they made a contract with the collective regarding sale. They received subsidies if they bought small tractors, small machinery, vinyl sheets to cover the hoop-houses, and steel frames. However, these small-scale producers and peasants working in the household economy had to pay taxes.

They were obliged to pay tax based on the size of the land, and if their annual income was more than 150.000 forints, they had to pay a certain percentage of the excess. The only people who did not have to pay taxes were the elderly and disabled, and people whose land size/household was less than 1500 m², within

which they could not have more than 800 m² devoted to the production of grapes, fruits and garden vegetables.

The county of Csongrád, in which Balástya is located, played a significant role in vegetable production for the domestic market. According to the order of MSZMP³⁷ of 1976 (XI. Congress, 1006/1976 MT) it became more clear why it was important to support the household plot farming by almost all means of necessary. By 1979, in Csongrád County, greenhouses covered 7 hectares of land and hoop-houses covered 286 hectares, 52% higher than socialist/large scale hoop-houses. It is important to emphasize it here that the three collective farms had no hoop-houses in Balástya but for instance in the nearby Zsombó they did at large-scale on the farms owned by the collectives.

Paradoxically, collective farming of half of Hungary's arable land produced 39% of the country's gross production, whereas individual and household plot holders, owning 15% of the country's arable land, produced 42% of gross production. (Pető and Szakács 1985: 467) Subsequently, by the end of the 1970s, the second or informal economy in its multiple forms was blossoming. "[...]commercial household farming began to take off only in the 1970s when fodder, corn, and other farm inputs became also available in stores, not only as in-kind benefits paid by the collective" (Juhász and Magyar 1982 in: Róna-Tas 1998:192).

³⁷ MSZMP stands for Magyar Szocialista Munkas Part, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

1961

X CURT HUNGARIAN PRIVATE PLOTS TO STAY

F117

MUNICH, SEPT. 28

X
210
Hungarian Research and Evaluation Note — That the passage of the CPSU draft Party program dealing with agriculture have caused further uneasiness among Hungary's already disturbed and none too happy peasantry can be deduced from the careful attempts to explain the effect upon Hungarian agriculture of the passages dealing with the private plots of kolkhoz peasants and thus to reassure Hungary's rural population that no abolition of the plots is at present being contemplated. Ferenc Erdei, Secretary-General of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, undertakes such explanation in the September 26 issue of "Nepszabadsag".

Erdei is one of the Hungarian regime's most distinguished "fellow travelers". One of the writers of the pre-war village explorers group (and author of the noted novel "Mobile Sands"), Erdei was formerly a member of the left-wing of the National Party, and is regarded today as one of Hungary's principal non-technical agricultural spokesmen.

In his current article in "Nepszabadsag", Erdei, after quoting extensively from the relevant passage of the CPSU draft program, attempts to outline for his readers the implications — or lack of them — for Hungarian agricultural policy for the foreseeable future. Erdei writes: "at the present stage of our (agricultural) development, and for a long time to come, too, the household plots will be necessary and proper; account should be made of this fact in our agrarian policy as it is presently being evolved.

In the wake of an intensive collectivization drive covering three successive winters and followed by an at least partially disappointing harvest this year, Hungary is faced with the danger of a sizeable fodder shortage(x) and a consequent drop in its already inadequate meat (particularly pork) supply. Since a good deal of the fodder, as well as close to half of the country's hog stock, comes from the private plots, the importance of keeping up the morale and incentive of the peasants to maintain the productivity of the plots is obvious.

(x) See the Keseru article in the Hungarian Press Survey pouched today.

01/1705

Table 2-5. Decree, 1968. This decree discusses the significance of the second economy that flourished after 1968. Household plot farming and collective large-scale farming were simultaneously pursued and contributed to the relative wealth of the Hungarian countryside.

People in villages were involved in the household plot economy. Sharecropping, and technological services were worked out between families in the countryside. It was “a move away from the model of a naturalized economy of socialism to a market-driven commoditized universe” (Lampland 1995: 219); however, I claim that while the peasants may have become more market-oriented and money-driven, that did not mean the end of the peasant culture and the ultimate function of the rural household economy, which was to maintain itself. Rural people’s loyalty to land, their families, and communities remained. “Mutual services, good-exchanges, work-exchanges in house building are rooted in peasant cultures” (Kemény: 1990).

I wish to emphasize that many people felt responsible for the land they gave up in 1947, and later in the 1960s, and therefore in some ways household plot farming was *a return to land*. On these tiny mini plots, people did their best; they used all their physical strength and innovative skills. Moreover, working successfully and innovatively with land, even if it was a small plot, earned prestige, respect and social status in rural communities. In the countryside, the mediating link between the political economy of pre-socialism and the household economy was land.

The people’s construct of the land or soil in Balástya was linked to the land’s divine and anthropomorphic attributes, As elder villagers explained their relationship to land: “the land gives and takes, it sweats and bleeds and when it is

thirsty it drinks.” Hence, the peasants’ relation to land was very powerful, in which land seemed to be dominant and god-like but at the same time had humanistic properties capable of immense suffering and struggle. Therefore land as a natural agency gave food to the people as a gift. This kind of metaphorical template, “the cosmic economy of sharing” (David-Bird 1998), did not disappear with market-socialism. In sum, land did not become a commodity for rural folks in the years of late socialism, people were very much connected to the land even if they did not own it any longer.³⁸

Conclusion

The growth of the second or informal economy signaled a shift towards commodity production. Family consumption increased, entrepreneurial activities and “economic work communities” (*gazdasági munkaközösségek*) were flourishing with the assistance of the collectives in the 1980s. The role of the informal economy changed over time but remained reliant on the social commitment of the household members to land, labor, and family. Gradually, the state lost control over its urban and rural citizens for it was no longer the sole provider of money and goods. It was a long process of de-state-tization of power, where the informal economy was created with the help of the state, but by the rural people.

³⁸ Similarly as Gudeman explains it that people's construct of the land itself was closely linked to this pattern of external control and internal use. Land just like similarly to the Physiocrats, was modeled as if it were a natural pool or reservoir which could be drawn upon to support the agricultural cycle. Land has a natural power, "crops were to land as human hair was to the head. The metaphor appeared in the verbal expression used for practical activities" (Gudeman 1995: 5).

Thus the *Central Plan* transformed into *Market Socialist Plan*. Market-socialism, in a way, represented a mixed market and community economy, and their relationship to one another was not antagonistic. I suggest that collectivization and industrialization functioned as the markets where a wide range of economic, political and social practices took place. In this time period the standard of living considerably increased for rural folks compared to the pre-1945 conditions. Many large two-storey family houses were built in the 1980s in the village of Balástya, and on the detached farming area people tried to save money for furniture, appliances, and private lessons for their children. As of the former employees of the Alkotmány Collective farm said to me:

They should have left the damn thing (collective farms) as it was. People got used to working in the collective farms. People were better off under the Kádár regime than they are now. Those who wanted to work under socialism worked their ass off, even 26 hours a day on their household plot. The price of potato was the same of gas back then. We were able to build a house, now the only thing we can build is a doghouse (2002).

The state continued to control prices and trade; it heavily subsidized the agricultural sector while keeping the retail food prices low. At this time, a “feasible market-socialism” could be maintained but an enormous national debt was accumulated.

In this chapter I have shown the symbiotic relationship between collective farming and household plot farming. I have argued that they both were dependent on each other for labor, resources and innovations. Therefore, Hungarian market-socialism represented a hybrid economic model that seemed to be beneficial to both the socialist state and its rural citizens.

Chapter 3

INNOVATION INTENSE SOCIALIST ECONOMY

The Emergence of the Hoop-House Economy

In this chapter, I offer an ethnographic account of how hoop-house economy emerged and became to be practiced on these household plots in Balástya. The relationship between *household plot farming* and *hoop household plot farming* is relatively straightforward: they co-existed and overlapped. Some families began hoop-household plot cultivation of vegetables on the allocated household plots and some did not. Some took risks and invested more labor time and later money in them and some did not. Some became agricultural entrepreneurs and some remained small-scale producers. They both brought their produce to the markets - the rural entrepreneur to generate small profit and the small-scale producer to generate cash. The entrepreneur's goal was to become independent and self-employed while the producer's was to supplement his wages by earning some extra income. As I described at the beginning of this dissertation the hoop-house economy is both labor and capital intensive, which emerged as a result of a local innovation in Balástya. Today, in this farming region, 90% of the population is engaged and/or employed in the hoop-house economy; however, in

the 1970s not everyone had the initiative, the motivation, the curiosity, the cash or the extra labor time to begin hoop-house economy on the household plots.

I argue that people who began hoop-house agricultural production in the 1970s are the ones who are independent private entrepreneurs today with capital. Some anthropological literature on post-socialist transformation suggests that there is a social continuity that bridges pre-socialist to post-socialist wealth (cf. Thelen 2003). In case of the Balástya region, I observed something novel in the development of wealth and power. Wealth formation was not in correspondence with the size of the land, or in direct correlation with the socialist household plot farming, but was due to the innovation of the hoop-house. Hoop-house vegetable production became a significant source of creating value and surplus value with labor power pulled together by family members.



Figure 3-1. Minimal Hoop-House Economy, 2001. is based on the household members' labor. It produces primarily for household consumption and use. (Photograph by the author)

When I was doing fieldwork in Balástya, I kept asking villagers, producers and peasants³⁹ about when they started working with hoop-houses. No one could give me a precise answer, except for “it started sometime around the late 1960s.” Then I usually raised this question: “Do you remember who started it in Balástya?” and the typical answer was, “It must have been one of the elder florists.” Today, 50% of Hungary’s cut-flowers, such as orchids, gerberas and lilies, come from Balástya. In pre-socialism Balástya was a wine- and fruit-producing area. Often I was reminded to make a distinction between gardeners and farmers. By gardeners, the villagers meant florists and producers who grew vegetables and flowers in hoop-houses or green-houses, and by farmers they strictly meant people who grew wheat, corn, rye or alfalfa and raised some livestock.

In Balástya today, there are four families who own green houses. These families are the Morvai, the Varga, the Bozsó and the Gido. These four families are considered the wealthiest in the community. What all these four families have in common is that they all began hoop-house cultivation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What makes these four families distinct is the path each took to become rural entrepreneurs and greenhouse owners.

³⁹ By peasants today, I refer to a group of people who are engaged in a mix of vegetable and crop production supplemented or dominated by animal husbandry. In Balástya, this group of people usually is comprised of older people who were brought up in pre-socialism.

From minimal to maximal hoop-house economy

In the Balástya region, “everyone worked on the allocated household plots in one way or another,” but not everyone took the risk of building hoop-houses. Therefore I came to distinguish between *two interrelated types of household plot economy*. The first one was rooted in the Domestic Mode of Production, or DMP (Sahlins 1975), and therefore was engaged in peasant family-type farming on the allocated household plots with the inclusion of intense animal husbandry, while the second type transformed the household plots into small rural enterprises with the *innovation of the hoop-house economy*, and included limited or no animal husbandry.

What are the similarities and differences between these two types of interrelated household plot economy? Both types of household plot economy existed in parallel with the collectivized economy. In essence, both types of household economy produced for use and to generate livelihood. Both were embedded in “subsistence economy” (Gudeman 1976). They both relied on the household members’ labor time and continuous physical effort (cf. Chayanov) to generate a livelihood outside the collective sector. Good management of the hoop-house economy, similar to the household plot economy, ensured that after the expenditures there would be leftovers or remains (*surplus*) to take to the market. Both had ideals embedded in being thrifty and increasing savings, which

emphasizes that the household economy differed in important ways from the profit-and-loss calculation of a business: it not only reproduced itself in the material sense, but the money that was saved was returned back to the house's base.

Household economies never generated profit in the market sense in the 1970's and 1980's; rather, rural folks who were engaged in the hoop-house economic production made "profit on the small"⁴⁰ in the socialist market, which allowed the families to extend and augment their household's *base* in creative ways, which I will describe in length when I illustrate the process of the hoop-house's innovation. I suggest that the semi-autonomous hoop-house economy is best understood as a structure of economic production, which in some way transcended the DMP (cf. Sahlins 1972)⁴¹.

As I implied, the hoop-house economy had ties to the market; however, it was symbolically and physically located in the same value realm as the rural household economy, whose distributive practices lay outside the value realm of the market: it was not profit driven in the neo-liberal market economy sense. Most of its material practices were organized through the house/tent, and the lexicon for these comes from the physical dwelling: the *fólia sátor* (vinyl tent or hoop-house) as a shelter became the metaphor for the vinyl tent as economy. The shape

⁴⁰ See Gudeman 2001.

⁴¹ Sahlins argues that the DMP harbors an antisurplus principle geared to the production of livelihood and is endowed with the tendency to come to a halt at that point. Hence, if "surplus" is defined as output above the producers' requirements, the household system is not organized for it. "Nothing within the structure of production of use pushes it to transcend itself (1972: 85).

of its foundation could be rectangular or square, modeled after the house itself. Although today's hoop-houses look very elaborate,⁴² they did not always appear so sophisticated.

Innovation as Art

In Balástya, László Morvai, a florist now in his 70s, was the one who built the first hoop-house, which at that time looked neither sophisticated nor elegant. It was built out of cold-frames,⁴³ which were covered with neither vinyl nor plastic but mere canvas. It was a short tunnel house in which he experimented with growing potatoes. Today he owns greenhouses and grows orchids for both the national and international floral market.

He wishes to retire from the family business, but his son Morvai Junior is not willing to take it over yet, as “he would rather do anything else but be a peasant.” The Morvai family house is still located on the same spot where the ancestral family property was once established, except the house is no longer made out of adobe like the traditional houses in the Great Plains, but of bricks. The beautiful peach orchards once surrounding the old Morvai farmstead are long gone, as greenhouses like mushrooms grew slowly around it.

⁴³ Cold Frames are used to begin the spring season 6 to 8 weeks earlier. One could sow hardy seeds that much sooner, in the warm earth inside the cold frame.

On the patio of his hotel's restaurant, he proudly told me the story of his innovation. The origin of the hoop-house began in the time of forced collectivization (1958-1962) that "he and his father escaped but not his brothers." He comes from a peasant background and he has two brothers. His parents lived on a nine-hectare territory, which included the house and the agricultural land. He started working in the agricultural sector in 1956. Prior to 1956, he worked in a catering trade in Szeged, but because it did not pay too well he decided to move to Balástya, where his parents lived and worked. He started independent farming and never joined the collective farm. "I was neither a collective farm member nor a party (communist) member nor will I," he told me with a definite smirk on his face. "I always remained an independent producer." He lived in Szeged during the final phase of forced collectivization so the agitators could not get hold of him. One of his brothers became a member of one of the collective farms, but his father and he remained independent producers. His father kept animals and owned pastures, in addition to owning vineyards and orchards, but was never engaged in vegetable production. "At that time keeping animals was paid well."

When he got married in 1956, he received one and a half hectares of land as part of his inheritance and wedding gift, and that was when he began seriously working in agriculture. Even today he still works in agriculture as a florist, and the size of his land has never increased: it is still one and a half hectares that he inherited from his father. His wealth was never dependent on the size of the land,

but rather on his “willingness to work hard and learn something new.” In addition to the completely mechanized hoop-houses that can be found on his property, he co-owns the hotel “Orchidea” and one of the local pubs with his ex-wife’s current husband.

Morvai’s maternal uncle lived in the nearby settlement of Csanyitelek, and Morvai often rode his bike to visit his relatives. His uncle’s wife was from Bulgaria, “where gardening originates from. I started watching how my uncle and his wife were doing their vegetable gardening and I became to develop an interest in it,” said Morvai with visible enthusiasm. In the open fields at that time he grew kohlrabies, cabbages, peppers, carrots, parsleys. He also grew strawberries that were highly sought out at the Budapest food market. Within two years, Morvai had made the necessary economic progress to make the next step, but he wanted to do something more than open-field vegetable gardening. His uncle and his wife only used the so-called Bulgarian frames or cold frames to shield the plants from the cold, but they had never used heated greenhouses.

At the Budapest food depot, explained Morvai to me, producers from the town of Gyula used to be the ones who brought their produce, such as cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes, to market the earliest, and he wanted to find out how they could achieve that:

I wanted to learn their production technology of peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers. It is Gyula where the technology comes from and I decided that I would build somewhat of a green house. It was back in 1959 or so. I had 500 cold frames laid out on 800 square meters and I set up these frames in five blocks. The interesting thing to mention here is that there was no vinyl/plastic at that time to cover these cold frames. Therefore what I did was the following: I covered these cold frames with canvas. In January I put the pepper starters under these cold frames and every evening I covered them up with canvas. And in each morning I uncovered the cold frames and that was the heating for them (2002).

A year later, Morvai extended the area from 800 square meters to 1000 square meters (0.1 hectares), but this time he used a Soviet boiler in which water was heated as steam, which was run through PVC pipes to provide warm air for the pepper starters. The boiler was fed by coal. He hired one man who was responsible for operating the boiler at night and thus was able to maintain the right temperature for the starters. The next step Morvai made was when vinyl became available for purchase in Hungary, he explains:

At the beginning of 1960 that was when vinyl was manufactured for the first time in Hungary. The widest strap was a 1 meter and 20 centimeters and what I did was I ironed these straps together for length. And I used these to cover the cold frames. Later they made vinyl straps that were 4 meters and 20 centimeter wide. That was in

1963. I covered the frames with this vinyl and I even made more wood frames out of planks and covered those, too. I heated these with a boiler. The height of these houses was almost 2 meters; they were 6-7 meters in width and its sides were closed by dirt poured on them. I had peppers in these (2002).

By the end of the 1960s Hungary was producing vinyl sheets that were 8 meters and 50 centimeters. “I was the first one in the county of Csongrád and in the village that bought the first vinyl sheets.” In Hungarian these sheets are called *fólia*. The economic practice itself thus is called *fóliázás*. Morvai adds, “It [*fóliázás*] is a local given”:

I had a friend in the collective farm, József Sztancs⁴⁴ who was the head of the gardening sector there and we discussed the problems of intensive gardening. But he was a member of the collective and I was independent. I made a few steps ahead and then I made more steps ahead. I did everything myself. I was ambitious; I learned everything myself and I loved doing it. I gained expertise and then people came over and watched what I was doing. By then I had a very serious hoop-house economy (2002).

⁴⁴ József Sztancs’s sister was the headmaster of the local elementary school. She married Jóska Egri, who was one of the local communist party leaders. They were both very much involved in this horticultural practice in the 1970s and even today. Today they hire illegal Romanian workers to work in their hoop-houses.

By the late 1970s, his hoop-house economy had expanded from 1.000 square meters to 3.000. When the 12-meter-wide vinyl straps became available in Hungary he began employing the technique of double heating. His neighbors and people from the detached farming communities of Balástya came to learn this new method by watching. These people also bought vinyl and erected their own simpler hoop-houses on the household plots allocated by the collective farms. A woman in her late 50s explained:

It was and still is a damn hard, manual intensive labor but you could make an honest and good living out of it. However, today not everything depends on your will-power and expertise but you need a little bit money and really good nerves to make it worthwhile (2003).

During land privatization in the mid-1990s Morvai had the opportunity to buy more land, but he said he could live off his original land inheritance just fine. “I could have bought 20 hectares during privatization but I did not. I can make a comfortable living on this one and a half hectare of family land. If one does it well and you are ambitious then it provides you with a very nice income.” Morvai worked in vegetable production for 20 years with the same cold frames that started his hoop-house economy in the late 1950s. Today 8.000 square meters (less than a hectare) is under hoop houses. After 20 years of vegetable production he began

growing cut-flowers. Now he does 50% cut-flowers and 50% vegetables. Both these types are in hoop-houses throughout the whole year; in summer and winter time.

Five years ago he tried to do only flower production, but he could not sell, as the demand was low, so he was forced to go back to producing vegetables as well. In 2003 when I was living in Balástya, Morvai applied for a state/EU-Sapard Plan funded agricultural grant that he won. He received 40% assistance from the state to modernize his irrigation system. Before receiving the grant he employed two men to water in the hoop-houses with hoses; now he saves labor with his computerized irrigation system. He gave details of the cultivation process to me:

Due to the light condition, I usually start sowing in late December and early January in the hoop-house. I put the starters in the dirt by late February. Tomatoes and peppers grow for three months. I have early tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers in May. I take them to the whole-sale market in Szeged, I don't go to Budapest. After these really early ones, there are new ones again. In August and September I plant the new starters in the dirt and thus I can produce until December. In late November again you can take the early ones to the market but for these you need heating. That means that I can have yield 3 times a year (2002).

When I asked him if he felt he had missed any opportunities, he said he wished he had bought Dutch greenhouses in the 1990s. During the Horn administration in Hungary the purchase of these glass panels and pre-made green

houses was largely subsidized by the post-socialist state. The producers received 75% state assistance in the first year, though later it was only 30-40% assistance. The government encouraged producers to start green house cultivation. He said to me, “But you still needed some financial capital to buy these pre-manufactured green-houses even if there was some state assistance.”



Figure 3-2.Maximal Hoop-House Economy, 2003. This is a green house, which is entirely computerized. It is used primarily for flower production. The glass panels were purchased in the early 1990s, when the Horn government offered a state-assisted program to agricultural entrepreneurs. The innovator of the hoop-house took advantage of this program and built green houses on the edge of the settlement by the railroads. (Photograph by the author)

Morvai admires these modern green houses because there is less precipitation, the heating and airing system can be easily set up and the insulation is a lot better. However, he prefers his own innovation, which is using a double layer of vinyl instead of only one in the winter. The distance between the two

layers is 10 centimeters. He pumps hot air between these two layers while there is snow outside (-2 C), and the snow does not melt off the hoop-house because the inner layer insulates so well. He convinced me that the double-layered hoop-house with the proper heating system is compatible with a green house and consequently less expensive:

I experimented with the technique of the hoop-house a lot and I figured it out on my own what works and what does not. If I pumped hot air between the two layers then the hoop-house got fully inflated hence it provided complete insulation and heat for the plants. Consequently, I needed to spend less on heating the hoop-house. This is more economical than a green house. The hoop-house is a rival of the green house.

Today Morvai is anxious about what the EU's CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) will bring for the Hungarian producers. "You have to work a lot more for a lot lower gain. The cost of energy, heating, gasoline, and vinyl and chemicals is already horrendous. I can sell neither the flowers nor the vegetables for that much more. The allocated expense, the money that you spend on these is not reflected at the market," said Morvai. He is skeptical about the fate of small-scale producers and thinks that they will give up working in agriculture or at least face a distressing alternative: 1) double the size of the land, double the work and double

the production to make the same amount of income as he did before, or 2) lower their standard of living and “just vegetate.” His only hope is that the taste of Hungarian vegetables when they appear in the market will ride roughshod over all Spanish vegetables.

Rural and Urban Kitchen Gardens

Here I would like to draw quick attention to another type of gardening, which is in very close relationship to the house and its base, namely gardening in the *konyhakert* (kitchen garden). The *konyhakert* has always been a characteristic feature not only of the Hungarian countryside but also the urban areas as well. “Attending the *konyhakert*,” which has traditionally been the task of women, refers to growing vegetables and herbs for the kitchen. It meant that when families needed carrots, parsley, peppers, tomatoes, dill, garlic, onions, for any dish or soup, for those “you don’t have to run to the grocery store or to the neighbor’s.” As it is situated usually behind the house (at the front, one may see flowers) the house’s physical immediacy embraces the kitchen garden. When Hungarian housewives say, “Whatever the house gives out,” they mean that not only do you not go to the store and spend money, but also that you use up whatever is available in the kitchen’s pantry. Hence, the household adds to its savings. The kitchen garden’s tasty vegetables are separated from the chickens by a light fence;

however, during some hours of the day when someone is home they are left free to roam.

The chickens that people raise are not for everyday consumption. They are used as egg layers, for the eggs that are used as part of the traditional Sunday family lunch when they are cooked by the housewives. These kitchen gardens are part of the peasant tradition and they did not disappear with the emergence of multinational chain food stores such *Tesco* and *Cora*. The kitchen garden represents independence from the grocery stores/market and is a source of great pride for the gardeners, who often times compete with their neighbors for success⁴⁵.

These kitchen gardens produce for household use and consumption only, unlike vegetable and fruit gardening done on the household plots. In the latter case the surplus usually ended up on the local market called the *piac* or the Budapest food depot.

⁴⁵ For urbanites, it was a very similar situation. They had kitchen gardens as well, or in the Great Plains people had *tanya-s* (detached farms) where they had grown some vegetables and took care of peach, sour cherry trees or vineyard. If their small farm was not so far from their home, let's say in a biking distance they even had a dog out there that scared off strangers and thieves. After working hours they biked out there for a few hours but the weekend was the time to be spent completely in these gardens.



Figure 3-3. This is the Szeged “Piac” (Market) where one can buy fresh, locally grown produce along with imported goods. Hungarians usually go to this type of market once a week. Photographed in 1996. (Photograph by Richard Holt)

From Hoop-House to Green-House

The second florist in Balástya is Illés Gido, who lives on the detached farming area called Balástya-Gajgonya. He is engaged in flower production as well as running a pig farm. He grows cut flowers such as gerberas and raises one hundred pigs. His house seems like an oasis on the dry and sandy dunes of the Puszta. He used to be the agronomist and brigade leader at the Rákóczi Collective farm, and was in charge of animal husbandry. In this very collective his father, József Gido, worked as chair in the 1970s. His ex-wife, who is a very successful rural entrepreneur herself, is the daughter of Kőrössi, who was the first chair of the first collective in Balástya (called Szirtusvirág Collective Farm) which was established

during the voluntary phase of collectivization in 1947.⁴⁶ Hence Gido Junior and his family had the “right” connections in socialism to transfer their social and political capital to financial capital in the first phase of post-socialism.

Like many of the peasants under collectivization, Gido also began intensive vegetable production on his and his father’s household plots in the 1970s. The majority of the villagers who worked with Gido in the same collective talked about him and his father in a very negative way. One producer said that Gido’s well-known saying was, “Don’t work but think,” which reflected his moral attributes and his relations to others. Various stories circulated about his moral standing and work ethics in the collective farm. He was even accused by a few of stealing some cows from the collective: when “he drove the collective’s trucks loaded with cows to his own farm he replaced those for his own skinny ones,” said one of his co-workers.

Today he owns 30 hectares of land. During privatization of the 1990s, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter, Gido bought up many recompensation vouchers and acquired more land. In addition to land, “he was close to the fire” due to his previous position in the collective and managed to purchase some valuable machinery of the collective for a song. He hires external labor in his

⁴⁶ Initially, in the first phase of voluntary collectivization there were three types of collectives established and regulated by Government directives in 1948. Three types were officially set down, categorized by the proportion of production resources and labor required to be collectivized or left in individual control. In types 1 and 3, collective members regained some autonomy and individual responsibility in production and labor & land input. In type 3, collective members gave their land and animals to the collective when they joined. These members collectively farmed on a day-to-day basis and shared out the net revenues in proportion to their inputs of labor and land through the year. (cf. Vasary 1987)

greenhouses and most of the labor is performed by women from Balástya-Tanya and Romania. Mariska, Gido's neighbor, who occasionally works for him bundling flowers in the market season, is paid 150 forints/hour, tells me: "He pays Romanians 120 forints/hour just because they are Romanians." Mariska's husband, Uncle Peti becomes furious when we talk about Gido:

Mariska just runs through the fields and leaves everything behind even the soup on the stove when Gido calls. I know Gido like one knows bad money. He was a thief under socialism and he is a thief now under theft-capitalism. He has not changed. He wants to get fat on other people's lard (2003).

Gido and Morvai were never friends due to the fact that Gido was and still is a devout communist, unlike Morvai. However, similar to others in this farming region, he copied and learned Morvai's technology of the hoop house vegetable production. He began his hoop-house economy on his household plot. As I mentioned earlier, these household plots were allocated by the collective farm to its members: each member of the collective had the right to half a hectare of household plot; however, a family could have more than half a hectare. For instance, if there were four members in a household all employed in the collective then they were each entitled to half a hectare of household plot. In this case it

added up to two hectares, which was more than enough to begin intensive hoop-house agricultural production.

As Gido was the son of the Rakóczy Collective's chair and also its agronomist, he had easy access to the collective's technology, tools and other assets that were crucial in establishing himself as an independent vegetable producer in the 1980s. More importantly, he had all the necessary connections and he "knew all the small doors" to get things done on his household plot in the 1980s. His hoop-house economy grew larger each year. By the end of the 1980s he had enough capital to invest in another type of vegetable production technology new in Hungary: the greenhouse. Gido took the financial risk to buy greenhouses when the socialist state helped producers purchase the Dutch pre-fabricated greenhouses at the beginning of 1990s. Those producers received 75% assistance from the state, and that is when Gido began growing cut flowers to be transported to the national market for sale. He made a remarkable *profit*, but again it was with the help of the formal support of the collective and his social and political connections gained in socialism. Today his pig farm suffers from the general crisis of animal husbandry characteristic to Hungary, so he focuses on gerbera cultivation only. Just like the other florists in Balástya he is worried about the future of the flower market in the EU as competition increases year by year.

Specialization and Commercialization

The third-wealthiest family is headed by Pal Varga, who specialized in flower cultivation exclusively. His path to rural entrepreneurship differed from Morvai's and even Gido's in various ways.

I managed to set up an interview with Pál Varga late in the evening in the fall of 2001. His house is situated by *Kapitanyság*, close to the railways; it is a two-storey house with an enormous courtyard. The gigantic green houses tower over of the flat fields of Balástya. The iron ornamented gate is locked. After my friend and I identified ourselves via the intercom, the door automatically opened and Varga invited us in. Outside I saw three middle-aged women diligently sweeping the dust off the yard. When they saw us crossing the yard they swiftly disappeared behind the green houses. They were Romanian migrant workers.



Figure 3-4. Maximal Hoop-House Economy, 2002. These green houses are located by Varga's family house. He exports the flowers to EU countries. (Photograph by Varga)

We went into the house and took the marble steps to the dining room. The whitewashed walls were decorated with hunting trophies and stuffed wild game. Ms. Varga ushered us quickly in and offered some mineral water. The host took a serious long look at me. When I told him that I was researching Hungarian agriculture after the break-up of the collective farms, and the hoop-house economy, his response was, “I am not doing any illegal activity here. Everything is legit.” He may have noticed that I took a glance at his workers.

His green houses are monstrous compared to those of producers who have small tunnel and unheated hoop-houses. They are completely modernized and westernized green houses. Varga tells us very proudly, “Everything here is computerized; from planting through irrigation and heating of the green houses. All I need to do is push the buttons on my computer.” The size of the land covered with greenhouses is 5 hectares (50.000 square meters). Varga inherited his land from his father, who used to be the chair in one of the collective farms.

The villagers say that he also copied Morvai’s technology of the hoop-house vegetable production, but today he only grows flowers – lilies: “He stole his knowledge from Morvai like everyone else and then expanded his green houses. His flowers are gorgeous; there is no question about that.” Varga also began working with hoop-houses on his and his family members’ household plots on more than two hectares. “He devoted all his time to work on his household plots, unlike us who had little time to work on ours.” How could he devote and invest

more time than others? “He,” says Joska, “was very clever. He, on paper, completed the obligatory 180 work units for the collective. How did he do that? Well, he hired day-laborers (*napszámos*) to work for him. Essentially, those day-laborers worked on the collective’s land while he was building his own empire on the household plots.” Both he and his father were members of the collective, but they did not get along too well, according to village hearsay. Varga, earlier than all other florists, began growing flowers that had a huge domestic market in the 1980s.

During the privatization period he grabbed a few assets from the collective farm where he and his father worked. He became an entrepreneur who makes a considerable amount of capital, but the labor is no longer carried out by him or his family. The woman who helps Romanians receive work visas and health benefits while in Hungary (who is originally from Transylvania but moved to Balástya during the Romanian Revolution in 1989) tells me:

The dirty work on the Varga farm is done by illegal Romanian workers. They work in the heat even when it is 45 Celsius degrees. They don’t wear any masks or protecting gloves when they use chemicals for the plants. Varga pays them 130 forints an hour but does not provide them any food, only shelter out on his detached farm in one of the old houses (2003).

The first wave of Romanians came from Transylvania, but today they come from Bucharest or even Brasov. They are not always agricultural workers but

intellectuals or engineers. 50% of Romanians work legally in Balástya, which means that they have insurance, which was HUF 15.500 in 2002. Official papers need to be sent to Kolozsvár if someone wants to get a resident or working permit in Hungary. The woman who tries to take care of these Romanian workers has a van. She or her husband drives the workers to the Romanian-Hungarian border and back. On the border, Romanians have to demonstrate that they have enough money while in Hungary, therefore they need to show 250\$ or Euros so they can leave Romania. The woman gives them this amount of cash in advance and later they pay her back. She or her husband also transports these workers in the minivan to the farms outside Balástya such as Zákányszék, Csengele, and Petőfiszállás. In Balástya, mostly large-scale entrepreneurs hire outside labor; however, it is not unusual for small-scale producers to sometimes hire Romanian workers when there is a major harvest.

Varga, similar to Gido and Morvai, took advantage of the state-assisted purchase of greenhouses in the early 1990s, but by this time Varga had also switched from vegetable to flower production back in 1980s. This capital investment became centered solely on lily production in green houses. Today, he competes for the market with the other florists in the area and other EU florists.

The fourth family is the Bozsó, a well-respected family in Balástya. This couple in their late 30s took over the enterprise from their parents in the 1990s. Their cut-flowers are marketed internationally and their flowers get to flower

exhibitions. The members of this family are universally admired by the people of Balástya. The Bozsós “achieved their economic and financial success by honest and hard labor.”



Figure 3-5. Flower production, 2002. The Bozsó couple produces flowers for the international market. Each summer they participate in the village’s Flower Festival. (Photograph by the author)

The older couple, now in their 70s, began hoop-house production in the early 1970s by following Morvai’s technology. They used the so-called tunnel, unheated hoop-houses for growing potatoes. This type of hoop-houses did not require heat but did require a lot of labor and care. Step by step the elder Bozsó couple on their household plots expanded the “science” and decided to complement the potato with strawberry production. The technique they implemented was very similar to the use of the tunnel hoop-house, but instead of using semi-opaque plastic vinyl they used black ones vinyl. The reason for this is

simple: the black vinyl collects the sun's rays faster and therefore the soil warms up quicker, which is perfect for the strawberries as they need heat for faster maturity.

These two products, potatoes and strawberries, were transported after their harvest to Budapest's whole-sale market or the nearby Kiskundorozsma, where they were quickly sold to merchants. The early yield and flavor of the potato from this particular family made the village known for its "balástyai krumplics" (Balástya potatoes) throughout the country. Since the price of gas under socialism was very low and heavily subsidized, the cost of transportation did not matter that much and this family made enough capital to also invest in greenhouses, in which they grow roses. Today, the Bozsó family, just like the Morvai, Varga and Gido families, face competition with other EU florists, especially the Dutch.

Act of Innovation and a Niche Technology

I have argued above that hoop-house economy was a local model of livelihood, whose material life was constituted socially and sometimes articulated through cultural metaphors and shaped by local epistemologies of land use. The hoop-house was *an act of innovation* and hence *a form of art* that had a considerable impact on the local economy and later on the national economy.

The innovator, Morvai, changed his tools and the materials he used; he altered the environment and the landscape. His act, since he was not in isolation from the community, changed other individuals' relations to the environment, Nature and consequently social relations within the community of Balástya. Or as Gudeman points out, profit starts with innovation, but “this creation of value is dependent on the presence of community. The innovator not only created a product, or a new form of production or distribution, but a relation to others” (Gudeman 2001: 21). The innovation changed human relations in respect to these changes (including changes in relation to the environment, land, labor, tools, resources, and raw materials).

In this sense the innovator, Morvai, connected other people through his innovation of the hoop-house. Why? People copied and mimicked the new technique he was using. Thus the process of innovation and the innovation of the hoop-house mediated between him and the relations that emerged in his presence. It became a new “base,” which invited new actors into this communal scene. His innovation contributed or added to the base of his household, the village, and the nation—which is a different community but nonetheless still a community. In the series of the hoop-house's innovation there were masters, learners, apprentices, and craftsmen.

Thus this innovation emerged in a total situation. This total situation included Balástya's sandy soil, vinyl sheets, industrious hands, creativity and

ambition. All these components of this total situation were very neatly linked to a moral community, as Morvai said, “and if one did it well, it provided an honest living for the whole family.”

This innovator of the hoop-house kept adding to the base of the community each time he altered the hoop-house. “Through the use of *traces*⁴⁷ from himself, the innovator created a way of doing, indexed in an object or service that becomes a model for others” (Gudeman 2001: 147). In this view, with the aid of this human trace or legacy, the innovator Morvai linked people together who may not have been in any contact prior to his innovation. Thus the innovation, the *thing*, the hoop-house in this ethnographic situation, became a mediator between people of Balástya’s four districts.

The innovator as I described above was enthusiastic about learning new ways of gardening—in a way he became obsessed with the idea of creating something new. It was his vocation and his ultimate calling. It was not necessarily for any intermediate gains, but rather “trying oneself out,” and he certainly did not mind if others in Balástya copied his invention as long as it remained within the community and people from different villages did not do the same. In this sense, the hoop-house economy producer shared his base within a face-to-face community, where capital did not markedly distinguish him from his competitors in the 1980s.

⁴⁷ Gudeman, in his theoretical work on culture and economy, develops the perspective of innovation. “The innovator’s act becomes a cultural trace.” By cultural trace he means “a memory distributed among members of a community,” like a legacy. (Gudeman 2001: 146-147)

However, by the 1990s his hoop-house economy was *capital intensive*, unlike earlier when it was *labor intensive* and demanded many hours of labor day and night. Today, his hoop-house economy production is engrossed in the market, for it generates profit and growth.

The innovation of the hoop-house, as Morvai told me on many occasions, was step-by-step, learning-by-doing, a “little by little, a bit ahead each time.” The hoop-house’s structure, its technology and its materials evolved. But this innovation or learning-by-doing was not in isolation or independent of the social context in which it emerged: it was situated within this community of peasants and producers. “People came and my neighbors were watching what I was doing. Then they also planted starters.” These people copied his technology and also experimented with new ways of doing; however, he was able to absorb the initial profit as a return for his and his family’s work.

It is important to mention that competition did not grow quickly, since others who tried to adopt the new method of vegetable cultivation were employed full-time at the collective and, and Morvai was never a member of the collective farm. Others who worked in the collective could devote less actual labor time and thus less practice time to this new form of production. Morvai’s son, although he did not want to do agricultural work for a living, observed and learned this craft from him, therefore this art form was passed on from father to son. Morvai’s social status increased and his family was well respected: innovative skills in enhancing

agricultural production in tight communities increased one's social status and position in the socialist period.

In the late socialist period both father and son worked in this economic unit of production and their standard of living was much higher than of other villagers. In the 1980s, consumer goods were sparse, thus what Gudeman (2001) has termed "the profit on the small" that the hoop-house generated was spent on extending the foundation of the house. The extension of the house was done vertically as the Morvai family added a storey to their house. From the 1970s until the 1980s, many family houses were built in the village. As I emphasized earlier, the home was the biggest investment of the rural household: it had to be built, added onto, maintained, repaired and serviced, and the socialist state was ill-prepared to attend to these tasks.

Building a house was one of the most difficult areas of the socialist economy due to constant shortages of building supplies and materials. Until 1982, the private ownership of trucks was illegal in Hungary, therefore in Balástya horse-drawn carriages were busy transporting materials to the construction site. Building a house, or rather transforming the ancestral adobe house, was a big job and hardship for the Morvai family. It took several years and was completed after the workday was over and on weekends with the help of extended family and friends. Several households were engaged in this labor exchange, which was embedded in balanced reciprocity. This labor exchange excluded any form of money or

compensation in any currency. What was usually offered included cooked meals, biscuits, soft drinks, cigarettes, coffees, wine or beer, which are traditional tokens of rural hospitality. Consequently, it united family members and created solidarity among rural households in Balástya.



Figure 3-6. Lippai family, 1998. At the end of a laboring day, the family, friends and relatives have dinner together that the housewife prepares; wine, beer and “pálinka” are almost always offered with a two-course meal. (Photograph by the author)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the ways in which the hoop-house emerged in Balástya as a result of a local innovation. It emerged under the collectivization era and was practiced on household plots when collective and family farming was simultaneously pursued. I argued that the size of these plots were very small; however, the technique of the hoop-house allowed the

maximization of small plots with great productivity and quality. In the case of all these families, the Morvai, the Varga, the Gido and the Bozsó, one can see that all began hoop-house economic production in the 1970s when they primarily grew vegetables. By the late 1980s they accumulated enough capital to expand this technology. They were able to seize the opportunity when the state offered assistance to producers wishing to intensify their production in 1990s. The Hungarian government offered a 75% subsidy for the purchase of green-houses. Consequently, by the mid-1990s these rural entrepreneurs had switched their production from vegetables to flowers. They are all florists, except Morvai who does both vegetable and flower production. They all have *capital intensive* green houses; however, Morvai, who made the initial innovation of the hoop-house technology, has both green- and hoop-houses. They are all entrepreneurs who hire external labor on their farms. When I visited the village of Balástya again in 2008, I was told that Gido and Morvai gave up flower production and only Varga and Bozsó still grow flowers in greenhouses for international export. Gido and Morvai returned to vegetable production and animal husbandry. They sell their products at the nearby Kiskundorozsma's wholesale market, which is the second largest wholesale market in Hungary, after Budapest.

In this chapter I have also investigated the emergence and transformation of the hoop-house economy in market-socialism. I have argued that it produced “profit on the small” in the late socialism of the 1980s, but it has become a

generator of “profit on the large” in the post-socialism of the 1990s for very few. Moreover, I have suggested that the concept of the hoop-house economy can be viewed as an extended metaphor, an image that the rural households drew upon to reflect the intricate property, social and human relations in the transformation from market-socialism to market-capitalism. In the farming region of Balástya, hoop-house economy became a spectrum and fusion of familiar, local, communal and national economic models. It was modeled after the “base” (Gudeman 2001) of the household, and this household extended its base. This extended base, the hoop-house economy and its material life were therefore socially constituted and shaped by local epistemologies.

Drawing on Gudeman’s extensive work on the dialectical relationship between the community and market, I have proposed that the development of the hoop-house economy was the production of the larger economy’s two realms and their respective values: 1) market and 2) community. Hoop-house economy in late market-socialism embodied the community and family dimensions of economy, and in early post-socialism it represented both community and market; “these two spheres of material life [which] are intertwined in practice and institutions” (Gudeman 1998: xii). The two realms of economy were not isolated entities existing separately from one another—they overlapped; however, as I will show in the next and the last chapters of the dissertation, their significance or dominance change from time to time depending on political and economic externalities.

Hence figuratively speaking, the hoop-house is a changing yet resilient and enduring base of the household economy, and its management is what Aristotle may call “art,” and is not identical with “wealth-getting” or market/commerce (Aristotle 1943: 260). Such models are not rigid, they are not necessarily indicators of a system nor of a totality, they are “made and remade...never finished, they are experiments in living” (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 15). Obviously, the local model of the hoop-house economy and green-house economy were constructed in relation to a larger and more dominant economy, whose patterns shifted in response to the presence of the socialist state and later the free market, the latter being the focus of the concluding chapter.

Chapter 4

LIMINAL HOOP-HOUSE ECONOMY AND POST-SOCIALIST ANXIETY

Overlapping Types and Spheres of Economy

During my research in the farming area of Balástya, I observed three co-existing types of the hoop-house, and consequently I came to distinguish among the following types, which I call 1) minimal, 2) liminal, and 3) maximal hoop-houses. In this discussion, these three local templates refer to the development of a hoop-house's structure, infrastructure and physical manifestation. Conceptually, however, I claim that the embodiment of the three types of the hoop-house also symbolizes the three interrelated spheres of the post-socialist economy, which I call 1) *minimal*, 2) *liminal*, and 3) *maximal hoop-house economy*.

Drawing on Gudeman's and Rivera's (1990) and Gudeman's (2001; 2008) theoretical framework, which characterizes the model of the house and market economy, I propose that both the minimal and liminal hoop-house economies in their material practices and functions are a form of house or community economy, and therefore the underlying economic model of these two is the house. In the context of the maximal hoop-house economy, I suggest that this model resembles the market.

The Model of the Hoop-House Economy

MINIMAL	LIMINAL	MAXIMAL
SUBSITENCE	SUBSITENCE AND MARKET	MARKET
EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL RELATIONS	EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL RELATIONS	EMBEDDED IN IMPERSONAL TRADE
MARGINAL	MARGINAL AND CORE	CORE
MAINTAIN BASE	INCREASE BASE	INCREASE PROFIT
LABOR AND INNOVATION INTENSIVE	LABOR AND CAPITAL- INTENSIVE	CAPITAL INTENSIVE

Table 4-1. The model of the hoop-house economy.

Throughout my dissertation, I use the model of the house economy as an example of “communal or mutual economy,” which is situated locally and “constituted through social relationships and contextually defined values” (Gudeman 2001; 2008: 3-4). Both community and market make up the “two facets of economy” or the “two realms of economy” (Gudeman 2001). In the post-socialist

economy, the minimal and the liminal hoop-house economy is one type of a community economy, with a complex relationship to the market, as I will demonstrate. Gudeman explicates this dialectical relationship:

The relationship is complex: sometimes the two facets of economy are separated, at other times they are mutually dependent, opposed or interactive. But always their shifting relation is filled with tension (Gudeman 2001: 1).

Among the three models of the hoop-house economy, I argue that the model of the liminal hoop-house economy best demonstrates the dialectics of community and market, for it is situated between the minimal and maximal models and can shift in both directions. Hence the model of the liminal hoop-house best illuminates the *anxious transformations* in post-socialist Hungary: 1) the transformation from socialism (community/collective) to capitalism, and 2) the transformation from house to market. In my view, the end of state socialism signals these two interrelated and concurrent transformations. One of them coincided with the break-up of the collective farms and collective property, and ended communal farming. The other transformation corresponded with land privatization and the expansion of the market, which marginalized a vast number of the rural house economies. In conjunction with the distinction between house and market, I employ a model of margin and core that itself has several

implications. Using local vocabulary, terminologies, and metaphors I will describe the material practices of these three types of economy and propose that these concomitant forms of the hoop-house economy encapsulate the quandary of the present post-socialist transformation in rural Hungary.

In fact, the movements of these three household economies best mirror the social-economic consequences of the disintegration of state-socialism. These three conceptual facets of the hoop-house economy unveil the precarious and anxious nature of post-socialist life, for they represent the various positions these rural households occupy in relation to the larger economic circumstances of the village, Hungary, and Europe.

Three Types and Three Models of the Hoop-House

In this section, I will focus on the three types of the hoop-house, as talked about by families in Balástya, in order to discuss the varied movements of the hoop-house economies. By “types” or local templates, I refer to the development of the hoop-house’s physical structure and infrastructure. Embedded in a specific political economy, its physical embodiment is also a reflection of the evolution of the existing forces and means of production. Moreover, the model of the hoop-house economy is a conceptual tool defining the myriad of interconnected transformations that included change in property regimes (landed property

ownership and property relations), political ideologies, and most importantly change in social relations and mutuality.

In order to explain the relationship between hoop-houses and the larger economy more clearly, I employ Gudeman's terminology of the "*base*" when I discuss the importance of distinguishing among the three hoop-house models. One of the value domains he calls the "*base*" or foundation:

[...] consists of *shared interests*, which include lasting resources (such as land and water), produced things, and ideational constructs such as knowledge, technology, laws, practices, skills, and customs. The base comprises cultural agreements and beliefs that provide as structure for all the domains. These locally defined values—embodied in goods, services, and ideologies—express identity in the community. They are unpriced, heterogeneous, and often sorted into incommensurate spheres (Gudeman 2001: 3-4).

Gudeman and Rivera describe the model of the house and the market in the context of the rural Colombian house economy:

The principal features of the house model can be quickly summarized. A rural economic group is known as the "house" (*la casa*). It has a "base" (*una base*) or "foundation" (*un fundamento*), which is its wealth...The house has two projects. Its first is to "maintain" (*mantener*), "sustain" (*sostener*), "support" (*suportar*), or

“keep” (*guarder*) itself...The second project of a house is to “augment” or “increase” (*aumentar*) its base. The rural folk try to expand both the wealth of the house and its physical foundation (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 39-40).

The physical structure of hoop-house itself has undergone a significant transformation since the 1960s; it has been augmented by local innovation, creativity, and artisanship. Hence it has been individuated and individualized. Its structure has gone from temporal to permanent or from moveable to immovable. The structure and material use of the first or what I call *minimal hoop-house* type or template have gone through stages of development from minimal to maximal. In this discussion, *augmentation*⁴⁸ refers to the increase of the base by innovation. The innovation of the hoop-house “technology” is a new mode of production, which in itself creates value for the house economy. On the other hand, in the context of the maximal hoop-house economy, the innovation of the hoop-house generates profit.



Figure 4-1. Minimal Hoop-House, 2003. It is portable and easy to set up. (Photograph by the author)

By the end of the 1990s, few of the minimal hoop-houses evolved into modern hoop-houses and a very few even developed into greenhouses when I did my research in 2001-2003; however, the great majority of the minimal hoop-house economies remained on the margin of the economy. Here, in the category of the maximal hoop-house I place both the technologically advanced hoop-houses and the greenhouses, for an advanced hoop-house can have the same production capacity as a greenhouse.

In post-socialist Balástya, the structure of the minimal hoop-house is relatively simple; it is easy to set it up and it is easy to take it apart and move it. These hoop-houses are unheated and have no irrigation system in them. The producers usually grow root vegetables such as potatoes, onions, carrots, and the

like in them. Consequently, the minimal hoop-house economy produces primarily for household consumption, subsistence, and “for the kitchen.” It can partially or wholly produce its own means of maintenance; it produces as outputs some of the inputs it requires. This economy is never fully engaged or dependent on the market. The minimal hoop-house economy can grow or increase its *base*⁴⁹ but its expansion has its limits. Its fundamental aim is to support the members of the household and maintain the base. This movement or circuit involves Base→Base’ and Base→Money→Base.’ In the first movement, “this is the notion of returning to seeding,” and the second, “in which base materials move from house to market and back, is repFering the base” (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 51).

Minimal, Liminal and Maximal Hoop-House

The structure and material use of the first or what I call *minimal hoop-house* type or template have gone through stages of augmentation from minimal to maximal. (In this discussion, *augmentation*⁵⁰ refers to the increase of the base by innovation.) In the category of the maximal hoop-house I place both the technologically advanced hoop-houses and the greenhouses, for an advanced hoop-house can have the same production capacity as a greenhouse. In the context of the maximal hoop-house economy, the innovation of the hoop-house generates

⁴⁹ The base refers to the wealth of the house; land is primary in a rural community, but it also includes seeds, tools, and animals.

⁵⁰ See more: Gudeman (2001; 2005)

profit. By the end of the 1990s, few of the minimal hoop-houses evolved into modern hoop-houses and a very few had developed into greenhouses when I did my research between 2001 and 2003; however, the great majority of the minimal hoop-house economies remained on the margin of the economy. The minimal hoop-house economy can grow or increase its *base*⁵¹ but its expansion has its limits. Its fundamental aim is to support the members of the household and maintain the base.

Between and betwixt the minimal and maximal hoop-house economy—the marginal (household) and the core (the market)—there is an overlapping use and function of what I call the *liminal hoop-house economic production*. The structure of the liminal hoop-house can be rather elaborate and sophisticated. In the majority of these hoop-houses there is either some kind of irrigation or heating system installed. The vegetable gardeners grow a variety of vegetables in these hoop-houses, such as peppers, cabbages, tomatoes, kohlrabies, eggplants, etc. Consequently, the liminal hoop-house economy has a peculiar nature, for it is caught between the house and the market, and hence involved in the movement or circuit of Base→Money→Base.’ It relies on the labor of the household members but it also hires external labor. It is actively involved in the “money economy” to remake the base; however, it does not generate “profit” in the market sense.



Figure 4-2. Liminal Hoop-House Economy, 2003. In this liminal hoop-house economy, the couple produces all types of vegetables for both household consumption and market. These hoop-houses use irrigation but are not necessarily heated. (Photograph by the author)

In my view, the practices and ideologies of the *liminal hoop-house economy* that I witnessed during my research illuminate the tension between economy's two realms, for these two belong to different value domains: "mutuality" and "market" (Gudeman 2008).⁵² Thus it represents a mixture of the house and the market

⁵² Gudeman explains that "mutual transactions include allotting, apportioning, and reciprocity (which are often intermingled). Markets include commerce or the trade of goods and services (which include ideas), and finance or the trade of money and financial instruments" (Gudeman 2008: 150). These two belong to

economy and the conflict between them. Additionally, in essence it demonstrates exactly what I identify as *post-socialist anxiety*. The liminal hoop-house economy best embodies the contradiction and anxiety between those different value domains—incommensurate and commensurate values. As Gudeman argues:

Economy, I find, contains both a mutual and market realm. These two value domains are dialectically connected: they often conflict and resist each other, and their relations shift over time. I call this model the *tension in economy*, and I try to show how calculative reason emerges through repetitive transactions between suppliers and buyers to become to central force in economy's dialectic (Gudeman 2008: 4).

The continuing transformation in post-socialist Balástya as I witnessed from house to market was fueled by competition, instrumental rationality, calculative reason, and enumeration in search for profit. Simultaneously, I also observed the movement from market back to house, which was marked by uncertainty, struggle, necessity, and distrust in search for security. These two movements of House→Market and Market→House coincided with the burgeoning emergence and spread of a capitalist market coupled with the land privatization in rural Hungary in the late 1990s.

two distinct value domains: the social and the market realm or the domains of incommensurate and commensurate values.

I suggest that both minimal and liminal hoop-house economies are *peopled economies*, embedded in “mutuality or communality” (cf. Gudeman 2005; 2008). Peopled economies’ objective is to maintain, keep up, and augment the base through the investment in social relations or sociality. Although the *liminal hoop-house* is situated between the house and the market, swinging back and forth like a pendulum, it is still rooted in the value domain of the house. In its movement, both commoditized (market economy) and non-commoditized (household economy) practices are thus invoked and involved.



Figure 4-3. Liminal Hoop-House Economy, 2003. This producer grows cabbages in these hoop-houses for sale at the nearby wholesale market in Kiskundorozsma. (Photograph by the author)

For this reason, I argue that there is a mix of formal and informal features exemplified by the model of the *liminal hoop-house economy*. This hybridism and duality demonstrate “economy’s tension” (Gudeman 2008) and this tension results in what I observed as *post-socialist anxiety* in rural Hungary. The penetration of capital into the countryside contributed to a decline in agricultural production as well as rising rural poverty and unemployment, necessitating rather than mitigating the need for new survival strategies, and the minimal hoop-house economy responded to this shift by providing a mere livelihood for the majority of Balástya’s residents.

Consequently, by the early 2000s, the liminal hoop-house economy became a spectrum and fusion of local, communal and market relations.



Figure 4-4. Liminal Hoop-House Economy, 2003. This hoop-house has both irrigation and heating installed. The crops requiring warm air and a lot of water are the peppers and tomatoes. (Photograph by the author)

In Balástya, a few hoop-houses evolved into advanced ones and some into greenhouses in Balástya. As I showed it earlier, only four families' economy belongs to the category of the maximal hoop-house. All these four families have greenhouses and one family has both (advanced hoop-houses and greenhouses). These are very sophisticated; the structure is complex and the infrastructure is computerized. The structures are permanent and thus require a lot of maintenance. The entrepreneurs are commercial flower producers whose maximal hoop-house economy is engaged in the circuit of Money→Base→Money'. This economy is thus the locus of capital-deepening and profit generating situated in the domain of trade.

While greenhouse and advanced hoop-house economies are *capital-intensive*, minimal hoop-house economies are *labor-intensive*. Whereas *maximal hoop-house economy* relies on external labor force often outside the community or even the country, *minimal hoop-house economy* depends on the unpaid labor of the household members. In between we can find the *liminal hoop-house economy* that is both *labor and capital intensive* relying both on the labor of the household members and also external labor force.

My research demonstrates that the hoop-house changes in response to the political superstructure in place: it can expand, but it can also shrink. Consequently, the model of the hoop-house economy has come to illuminate Hungary's past and present land policies, property ideologies and political

economies. I argue that the hoop-house economy itself is a changing and enduring yet “resilient base” of the household, persisting under various historical and political conditions, whether socialist or capitalist. Clearly, the tension surrounding hoop-household economic practices point to the limits and contradictions of Hungary’s integration into the EU and market-capitalism, which is the focus of my dissertation’s concluding chapter, in which I discuss the future of the hoop-house economy in the European Union.

Minimal and Liminal Function of the Hoop-House

In this section, I elaborate on the basic and also the more developed function and role that the hoop-house economy takes in Balástya in order to document and understand this local economy’s origin and development. The application of hoop-house economic production that emerged under collectivization on household plots spread and became a widely used economic practice in this agricultural region by the late 1980s. The majority of the Balástya community, in one way or another, participates in it.

As I showed earlier in this chapter, however, not everyone took—or rather *could* take—the financial risk and labor commitment to expand or transform the hoop-houses as the Morvai, the Varga, the Bozsó and the Gido could. These individuals are rural entrepreneurs engaged primarily in commercial flower

production, but the majority of the villagers remained vegetable producers. This latter group that comprises 80 percent of the population of Balástya's four districts' has either *minimal* and/or *liminal hoop-houses*.

The minimal hoop-house economy is embedded in social relationships existing within the household, whose members participate in reciprocity and sharing. The reciprocal ties and sharing as I demonstrate it here also mold labor relationships and define distribution and consumption. In Balástya, the minimal hoop-house economies mainly produce for self-subsistence, and their aim is twofold: 1) to maintain, sustain, keep and support themselves, and 2) to “augment” or “increase” their bases (cf. Gudeman 1995). The liminal hoop-house economy is also embedded in mutuality and sociality; however, labor relations are not necessarily molded by reciprocal relations but by contracts among individuals. Their aim is also to “increase” the base and acquire “gains” and hence their involvement in the outside market is more visible.

In order to situate the function and role of the minimal and liminal hoop-house economy, I will speak in-depth of four families by describing their engagement or involvement in these two types of hoop-house economy. The first two families are the Bitó and the Keresztes, who have minimal hoop-houses and practice animal husbandry in addition to vegetable production. The members of these two households retired from the collective sector in the early 1990s and now are in their early 60s. The other two families are the Papdi and the Halász; both

families are engaged in liminal hoop-house production. What makes these two families' economy and life different from the previously described ones is that there is no animal husbandry, which is one of the major distinctions between the two types of hoop-householding. The members of these two households also became unemployed when the collective farms got dismantled; however, they were much younger. The Papdis are in their early 20s and the Halászs are in their early 40s. These four families share similarities and differences from the perspective of their involvement in the household-plot cultivation in the years of collectivization of the 1970s and 1980s, and also their access to land, financial and social capital, technology, and other resources in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Minimal Hoop-House Economy and Primary Producers

During the years of land privatization, as I show in Chapter 4, people who retired from the collective sector lacking the technology, money, and the physical strength to develop their household plots and/or improve their hoop-houses became primary producers or *őstermelő*. "Primary producer" is an official category for small-scale producers whose income coming out of the sale of vegetable production and animal husbandry is very minimal.⁵³ If one is officially registered

⁵³ What is a primary producer? The 236/1998. government decree fixes the data supply and registration obligation of agricultural producers as follows: 2nd §. (2) The obligation of data supply concerns that agricultural producer who wants to draw on subsidy determined by a special decree of the Minister, provided a) the producer uses at least one hectare of arable land or grass, or 500 m²s vine plantation or

at the Mayor's Office then s/he is entitled to receive state assistance. To be eligible for assistance one has to obtain a registration book. This registration book indicates the amount of land that the primary producer owns and it also shows what that land is used for.⁵⁴

For example, in the Bitó family, there are two registered primary producers: Jóska and Katika. Both husband and wife are retired. They own 2 hectares of agricultural land; they are engaged in hoop-house vegetable production and animal husbandry. The vegetables and pigs they sell are a way to supplement their low pension, and this is a very common survival strategy not only in the Balástya region but elsewhere in rural Hungary.⁵⁵

The male head of the household is Jóska, who is in his early 60s. In their village house there lives the expanded family: Jóska's wife Katika, his mother Aunti

orchard, or without spatial limitation carries out horticultural production, or b) in case of lack of land use, he keeps at least one standard animal. (an adult sheep or bigger animal), or c) carries out sylvicultural, venery or piscatorial production (in: Kata Rácz 2002).

⁵⁴ 1. 1-10 hectares for plough land plants, you get 12.000 forints/ha except for rice and hemp.
2. 10.1-300 hectares only for ear grains, corns, protein plants (peas, soy, horse beans), oily vegetables (sunflower seeds), you get 8.000 forints/ha.

The owner or user of vineyards or orchards can claim assistance if he does not own arable land larger than 10.1 hectares and/or the size of his vineyards or orchards are no larger than 1-10 hectares. In this case you get, 12.000 forints/ha.

Other conditions for eligibility:

1. 40 percent of seeds used in the fall planting must be sealed for wheat, rye, triticale.
2. In case of other sowing seeds, like corn, 40 percent has to be sealed.
3. You must have receipts written to you for sowing seeds, and chemicals without tax to be eligible for assistance. In case of animals, the assistance goes as follows:
 1. Only to maintain the stock. In case of female cow it is 20.000 forints/a cow. In case of female sheep and goat it is 1500 forints/ a sheep or a goat.

⁵⁵ Everybody sells something for cash in a rural village-fruit, eggs, vegetables or pickled foods but this activity is also well-known to urbanites, who have "kitchen gardens" on which they also produce a small amount of vegetables or fruits for sale at the weekly market or *piac*. Having access to the *piac* is a must for both the rural and urban population in Hungary. In addition to the *piac* today one can see both older men and women sell flower, eggs, jams, fruits and vegetables in front of larger grocery stores in towns.

Edit (80 years old), Jóska's and Katika's son Feri (32 years old) and their daughter-in-law Piroska (30 years old). Everyone in the Bitó family has to contribute to the household's well-being; and usually these activities are divided along gender and age lines. The Bitó family has 26 hoop-houses in which they raise early potatoes. These tunnel-like hoop-houses are simple in their structure and are fairly easy to set up, maintain and take down. One *fólia ágy* (a hoop-house bed) is only 50 m². The 26 hoop-houses are stretched out on circa 1600 m² or 0.57 ha plot. These hoop-house beds are not heated and are therefore referred to as “cold hoop-houses.” The harvest is transported and sold at the nearby Kiskundorozsma's wholesale market.

In addition to the intensive hoop-house potato cultivation, they also grow peppers and grains in the open fields. There are two types of peppers that they produce and sell: one type is for pickling and the other type—the spice pepper—is for canning. They have a contract with the Szeged Paprika Factory, which buys up their yield. The grains that they grow are for feeding the pigs. Each year they raise 20 pigs that they sell to the Pick Factory in Szeged, but they keep and slaughter 3 for household consumption. Those 3 slaughtered pigs' meat (including lard, sausage, blood sausage, ham, bacon, liver, etc.) are used and shared with Jóska's brother and Katika's brother, thus by 3 households.

Both Jóska and his wife, Katika—who in fact “closed the gate of the “Alkotmány” Collective Farm on the last day of its operation”—found themselves

without employment in Balástya, so they were “forced into early retirement” in 1992. Similar to many villagers who worked in the collective farms and had to retire, they chose the path of becoming registered primary producers⁵⁶ to complement the monthly pension. In 2002, when I was doing my fieldwork, there were 1000 registered primary producers—a large number considering the fact that Balástya and its four districts’ entire population is around 3400 people, which includes the very old and the very young.⁵⁷

Jóska began working in the collective sector in 1965; first he was employed in “Rákóczi” when he was only 16. He worked there for 17 years, until 1982, when—as he bitterly commented—“My nerves gave up on me. It was too much. The cup was full and I wanted to work more on my household plots.” In 1982, he began working in “Alkotmány” and became the chair of the *household plot integration project*, which he enjoyed doing. His wife Katika also worked in “Alkotmány,” not

⁵⁶ In the year of 2002, the following categories were used by the Land and Regional Development office for registering agricultural producers: 1) primary producers and 2) agricultural entrepreneurs. A primary producer has a certificate that proves his status as a producer; it also indicates his annual income, his use of chemicals, etc. The category of the primary producer was initiated in 1997. They have a simplified version of tax. They get a tax relief for 20 percent if they have presented the bills for their expenses. (100000 forint tax relief). In Balástya there are 1000 primary producers and there are 50 agricultural entrepreneurs.

a. There is the itemized tax up to 250.000 forints and then 250.000 to 2.000.000.

b. Average taxing. They take 15 percent of the income and whose 12.5 percent is the income tax, in case of vegetable production. In case of animal husbandry, it is 6 percent and whose 12.5 percent is the income tax. In case of vegetable production, the producer pays 15 percent of his income, the producer who raises animals pay 6 percent of his income. For example, if the sales revenue is 1.000.000 forints then his income is 60.000 and he pays taxes after this 60.000 forints. Upto 200.000 forints it is 12.5 percent. Above 200.000 forints it is 25 percent. Upto 400.000 forints it is tax free for primary producers.

⁵⁷ I would like to note it here that not all people who do agricultural work or subsistence farming are registered as primary producers for various reasons that I don’t discuss here in the dissertation.

as an agricultural laborer but as an office worker in charge of the allocation of health benefits.

Since Jóska's father, brother and wife were all working in the collective farm, the family was entitled to 2 hectares of household plots. On their household plots they grew grain, feed corn for the animals, and potatoes. It is important to mention here is that the Bitó family did not set up hoop-houses on these household plots. As Katika recollected those days in a lethargic voice, "We grew grains and potatoes, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. That is how we got ahead a little bit." The Bitó family raised pigs for sale in the household plot economy and that is how they were able to improve their lives. "Back then, if you sold two fattened-up pigs, you were able to buy a used car and had enough cash to start building a house for your family," sighed Jóska, who added, "the only thing you can build now is a house of cards."

The family is originally from the detached farming area of Balástya-Gajonya, where Auntie Eszter and her husband were born, lived and got married in 1944. In 1973, the family decided to move to the village where they started building a three-generation house. Thirty years later their house is still under construction. "The house is not even finished but it already needs major repairs," murmured the head of the household, and "we still drive the same old Russian 'Zsiguli' that we bought in 1983."

Before collectivization, the Bitó family owned 2 hectares of agricultural land; they were considered poor peasants by the community. During land privatization, they claimed those 2 hectares of land that they received back in one stretch. In 1992, Jóska was one of the members on the Land Distribution Committee in the village; however, he did not benefit from his position like some of the other committee members, except that he could keep the same household plots that the family used under collectivization.⁵⁸

The size of their land neither shrank nor stretched over the years from pre-socialism to post-socialism, nor did family change their primary activity: vegetable production and animal husbandry. The plot size remains 2 hectares; they grow potatoes and peppers in addition to raising pigs.

The Bitó family has some machinery for their economy, such as a sprayer, a fertilizer machine, and a disk harrower that they share with Jóska's brother-in-law and his younger brother László. The three families purchased a tractor together in the early 1990s and also share what Jóska called a "one-hundred legged vehicle" or as it is known in the region—"Ilonka's horses."⁵⁹ Jóska explained it to me:

You know, we don't have a combine (harvester), a seeding machine, nor a baler but we have a disk harrower and this *know-it-all vehicle*,

⁵⁸ See Chapter 3, in which I in detail discuss the land distribution process and Jóska's role in the Land Distribution Committee.

⁵⁹ During collectivization when the collective farms took away all the draught horses from the peasants, one of the men fabricated an engine that pretty much substituted for the labor of a horse. The party secretary in charge of collecting the horses had the first name "Ilonka," and that is why the vehicle received the nickname of "Ilonka's horses" or "*Ilonka lovai*."

“Ilonka’s horses” that a peasant can use all year around but the other ones are specialized machines. Those specialized ones we don’t need to own. We hire agricultural entrepreneurs to do those special kinds of labor and we pay them. There are 8-10 entrepreneurs with large agricultural machines in the village and they do those jobs (2001).

This “one-hundred legged vehicle” or “Ilonka’s horses” that his brother perfected over the winter days of 1971 originally had the “Pannonia” engine of a motor bike. Then László placed a different engine in it that was able to do more than just transport things; it was also able to plow the fields with a bit of a help. It became perfected over the years and then instead of having an engine of a “Trabant” (East German car) using gasoline, which became very expensive – this engine was replaced by a diesel-run “Golf.” This vehicle was widely used in Bitó’s *socialist household plot economy*, for it was small in size and thus could easily move around on the household plot of 0.57 hectare. This slow vehicle (its maximum speed is 50 km/hour) was therefore a multifaceted one. It was a great invention and just like the hoop-house production, it was copied by other villagers in Balástya.

Jóska proudly explained it to me: “Anything that can be accomplished with the help and solidarity of the family is the best way to remain independent and it also keeps the family together.” Then he quickly added, “*Yes, I am independent today but capital-dependant.*” But in order to keep this somewhat independent

household running everyone in the Bitó household has to perform certain daily duties—even Auntie Edit, who is in her 80s. She explained:

I take care of the pigs. I don't have to carry the heavy buckets of kitchen scrap to the pigsty, just pour it out for the pigs. I can't lift up heavy things any more. I also look after the chickens and other animals in the yard. I take care of the kitchen garden, too. And I have lunch ready by 11:30-12:00, when Jóska and Katika come in from the outside. Then I do the dishes after lunch. That's all I do. If I am not able to do this any longer, I would feel completely useless (2002).

Jóska and his wife do all the other physical labor such as planting, hoeing, weeding, and harvesting. Additionally, Katika does everyone's laundry. Their son, Feri who is 30, does not work with the land at all, unless he is asked by his father to contribute during the sowing and harvesting seasons. Instead, he is responsible for repairing and maintaining all the vehicles and machines needed and used in the household economy. Feri went to a vocational school and became a technician. He commutes to Szeged every day because he works for the national bus company there. His wife Pannika also commutes to a nearby village where she works at a private German shoe factory. They have no intention of taking over any land when

the parents can no longer work it. Feri told me repeatedly, “The Hungarian agriculture is doomed and I don’t want to be a peasant. I don’t like to hoe.”⁶⁰

The Bitós don’t have any investment plans for the future, just “to sustain the present standard of living for at least ten more years and be able to afford to visit relatives in Transylvania.” The last time Jóska and Katika went to Transylvania was four years ago and the last time they saw a movie was seven years ago when the “Alkotmány” took the peasants to Szeged. Katika consciously compared the two regimes when she talked about their life in socialism and thereafter:

When we had the collective farms, the members went abroad every year; we went to Croatia to the beach, to Transylvania to visit Hungarian villages, and even Czechoslovakia. We even went to the theatre to watch the “The Tragedy of Man”⁶¹ at the National Theatre of Szeged. What is good in this new freedom? We just work and work more. It is never enough. There is uncertainty about what tomorrow brings. In socialism we felt secure; we had jobs, free education and health care and solidarity in the brigades and among families. Now that is all gone (2003).

Two Movements of the Minimal Hoop-House Economy

The Bitó family does not spend any money on entertainment or travel, and the idea of “eating out” is a strange notion for a rural family, since you do not have

⁶⁰ When I visited the family in 2004 Laci’s wife lost her job in the shoe factory of Kistelek and became unemployed. Jóska told me, “you see, in the Kádár regime, this could not have happened. People had jobs.”

⁶¹ “The Tragedy of Man” (1861) was written by the Hungarian writer, Imre Madách.

to pay for what you can prepare in your own kitchen. The Bitó household, similar to many other households in Balástya, has little savings and consequently it is extremely expense-conscious. “Money or cash,” which is a rare commodity in their house, Katika told me “is very little.”

The money we make from selling our potatoes, peppers, and pigs is rotated back (*visszafogat*) into the house. We have to pay for our gas bill, which is 25,000 forints, then the sewage and water bills are 15,000 forints, the phone is 10,000 forints, and the electricity is 20,000 forints a month (2002).

These expenditures must be covered by the household in order to “hold” or “keep” its base and its members. This model shows that cash made by selling the produce is “returned to” the house to “keep it running.” Thus it is Base→Money→Base.’ Jóska keeps a notebook in which he has two separate columns; one for “giving out” (expenses) or *kiadás* and the other one for “taking in” (income) or *bevétel*. At Christmas time, he adds and subtracts the numbers in each column to see how the house has performed that year. What is left is spent on goods that the household needs.

The goods that their household consumes are “necessities” such as clothes, soap, detergent, salt, sugar, oil, flour (and other foodstuffs they don’t produce), but goods that have to be acquired from the market are considered “luxuries” and

therefore looked at with suspicion. During our conversations when talking about his family's expenses, Jóska frequently emphasized, "I don't drink alcohol, I don't smoke cigarettes, and I don't use any cologne. I don't need those things, but my son Feri has a fancy taste in food. To him sour cream is not good enough; he fancies mayo and tartar sauce." Luxuries are thus not needed to maintain or keep the base of the Bitó household. What is more, luxuries are viewed as imprudent since they don't contribute to the base. In sum, in the rural house economy, saving for the future is in opposition to waste and luxury.

Therefore, the Bitó household economy is organized around two movements or circuits 1) Base→Base' and 2) Base→Money→Base' (Gudeman and Rivera 1990; Gudeman 2005; 2008). The first movement or circuit, Base→Base' does not require money: goods flow into the house and are kept within the house. They are used up or spent to maintain the base and its members. When Hungarians produce for household consumption to sustain themselves they often use the word *fenntartjuk magunkat*, which means "we hold up ourselves."

The Bitós produce their own food, from potatoes to beans, and the remainder is stored for the rest of the year; this is the movement of Base→Base'. Whatever the household can produce to support the base, or as villagers often put it: "Whatever the house can provide (give), for that you don't have to the run to

the store,”⁶² which means that you don’t have to spend money. In this way the household “makes immediate savings” and is not involved in market activities. However, the Bitó household economy in fact exists within a market context yet survives by avoiding making purchases.

Expenses the Bitó family has to spend money on must be “saved out” (*ki kell spórolni*), “economized” (*ki kell gazdálkodni*) by being thrifty (*spórolós*). Another word Hungarians often use refers to saving money: “saving money with money” (*takarékoskodni*). Money or cash is a rare commodity in the rural house economy, therefore the household members must “use up the house” or the base in order to avoid spending money. Leftovers have to be used up first to avoid the expenditure of cash. The word “leftover” is mostly used when referring to food; leftover food or *maradék* needs to be eaten first before a new meal can be prepared. One who does not eat the leftover food from two days ago is considered fussy and spoiled. In this economy there is no waste, nothing can be “thrown out of the window,” which is also a mode of frugality and parsimony. The practice of parsimony is also seen when various goods and objects are reused. The act of prudence becomes a mode of “making savings.” Money has to be saved more like a material object. All these house activities are linked closely to “making savings” for the future of the “base,” “foundation” or the “well-being of the household.”

⁶² Villagers often told me this by using these phrases, “amit a ház kiad, azért nem kell a bolba szaladni, és pénzt kiadni érte.”

In the second movement or circuit, Base-Money-Base' goods that are produced or raised by the house leave the house or the yard. In case of the Bitó family, they sell peppers and early-appearing potatoes. The spice peppers are sold to the Paprika Processing Factory in Szeged and the so-called apple peppers to the canning factory in Sándorfalva. Similarly to other *minimal hoop-house economies*, the Bitó family raises a few pigs annually, primarily for sale. In this exchange or transaction the family receives money or cash; however, the cash is not profit, for this money is returned or rotated back to the house's base or "put away" for the future, which is "uncertain."

The end result of both movements (Base→Base' and Base→Money→Base') is the same—namely to "keep up," "hold up," or "lead" the house and sustain its members. Again, the house is neither the locus of profit-making, "capital deepening" (cf. Gudeman & Rivera 1990), nor reinvestments. The most observable interaction of the house with the larger economy, whether socialist or capitalist, is through the weekly and monthly markets. At these markets, the household economy's failure or success is on display. Balástya people participate in two basic market scenarios: *piac* and *vásár*. A *Piac* usually refers to a weekly-held market, while a *vásár* is a monthly-held one. Also a *piac* is small in size where one can purchase or sell vegetables in smaller quantity, while a *vásár* is large in size and one can purchase or sell large animals as well. A food depot is also called a *piac*, but it is designated as *nagybani piac* referring to the larger quantity of produce

purchased and sold. There are two *nagybani piac*-s in Hungary, one in Budapest and the other in Kiskundorozsma—only few kilometers away from Balástya. All these varied types of markets then serve as storage and trade sites. Balástya producers refer to the activity of selling their produce at the wholesale market as *piacozás* (“to market” or “marketing”).

The Bitó family, similar to others in the village, also participate in rural barter, which is “an off-the market exchange” (Gudeman & Riviera 1990) that does not involve money and is also a mode of saving for the future. Katika goes to the chicken farm to perform day labor, but asks for chickens in exchange for her labor rather than money. She said, “I can put them into the freezer. You need to tank up for tomorrow.” This act is also a form of making savings for the uncertain tomorrow and is performed through the practices of housekeeping, hoarding, preserving, conserving, and storing. The villagers refer to a person who is frugal and thrifty as someone who “knows how to handle money well.” If one does not produce certain foodstuffs, then buying up lard, rice, onions, apples, and flour in large quantity for the entire year is also considered as savings. Hence purchasing items in bulk is also a sign of being thrifty because it is less expensive per item and also comprises future funds.

The ideal way of making savings is when the “house produces everything” for its own use. The Bitó family has its own sowing potatoes, and seeds for the potatoes and peppers, which means that they do not have to “give out money” or

pay for them: this is also thrift. The potatoes require less labor or materials to grow than the tomatoes, and this also makes savings by releasing labor time for other household duties. Also the potatoes they cannot sell or are of lower quality will be fed to the pigs.

While in socialism the minimal hoop-house economy was quite successful to increase its base, in post-socialism it solely stood on the margin of the larger economic framework in which it came to be embedded.

Minimal Hoop-House Economy on the Margin of the Post-Socialist Economy

This minimal hoop-house economy is embedded in social relationships and mutuality like all community economies. Its base is a system of social values, which is a counterpart of capital and profit. (It is cemented in the act of reciprocity and hence the base is shared or even extended. This domestic model of household production and consumption was generated by an encompassing political economy of market-socialism of 1960s, and further influenced by contemporary market-capitalism of 1990s.

The model of the Bitó family's minimal hoop-house economy is not the only example in Balástya. There are numerous retired people are engaged in this economic practice. When villagers talk about this type of production they say what they do is *parasztizálás* (“working and being like a peasant”), for this unit of

domestic economy reflects the more or less traditional peasant mode of production (cf. Chayanov 1986 [1966]; Harris 1977) that includes crop cultivation, “kitchen gardening,” and animal husbandry.⁶³

For instance, the Keresztes family, who live out on the detached farming area of Balástya-Gajgonya, is also engaged in this type of domestic economy. Péter and Mariska are in their early 60s and both are registered primary producers. Mariska’s mother, Auntie Aranka, who moved in with them for “her old days,” is over 80. Therefore the immediate Keresztes household consists of three retired people. The married couple has two daughters, who no longer live with them but rather with their own families.

Péter, Mariska and Auntie Aranka all worked in the collective sector. The couple worked in “Rákóczi” and “Alkotmány” Collective Farms for thirty years as agricultural laborers. They both suffer from some illness. Despite the fact that they are retired and ill, they work from dawn to dusk around the house, in the hoop-houses, and in the fields, and they also regularly perform day-labor. Mariska, who has some neurological problem, told me, “I get cramps in my head so bad that I have to shout out of pain but I have to care of the house and its surroundings.” She takes up a lot of manual jobs and works for the greenhouse owner, Illés. Péter is considered by many an excellent cook so he is often asked to prepare *gulyás* at weddings. He is also invited to be the chief at pig slaughters at other villagers’

⁶³ See also: Clammer (1985); Dalton (1962); Geertz (1967); Gudeman (1978); Lenin (1948); Nash (1967); Taussig (1968).

houses. He suffers from serious diabetes and has to give himself insulin shots three times a day so he can only take up few of these outside jobs. Their household income is negligible.

During my fieldwork, I visited the Keresztes farm on many occasions. One could say that is a typical Hungarian farmstead. The visits to their farm included many conversations, discussions, large breakfasts and even larger dinners, and a lot of physical labor. The summer breakfast tables were always heavy with large slices of fresh white bread, cottage cheese mixed with sour cream, red and yellow peppers, ripe sweet tomatoes, blood and regular sausages, bacon, ham, boiled eggs, horseradish, eggplant spread, coffee, and home-made peach liquor. Many times I helped harvest potatoes, pick peppers and carrots, and assisted Mariska at their pig slaughter parties. Most of the conversations I had with the members and friends of the Keresztes family took place before, during, or after work completed out in the fields, in the yard, or in the hoop-houses.



Figure 4-5. Pig slaughtering, 2002. It is typical that Balástya people raise a few pigs for household consumption and a few for sale for the Szeged Pick Szalámi Factory. It is a fundamental element of the minimal hoop-house economy; animal husbandry is coupled with vegetable production. (Photograph by the author)

The adobe house, which is located by the side of the yard's fence, has two rooms: one bedroom and the so-called "tidy room" that is reserved for guests (now occupied by Auntie Aranka). There are two kitchens: the summer one and the winter one; however, the summer one situated outside the house takes the central position of the whole house in completing daily chores—most importantly preparing food, cleaning the dishes and canning. Mariska cooks in this tiny, hot summer kitchen every day until winter time, when they move the stove, along with the small gas canister, into the dining room, which is the largest room in the house. The other kitchen, located inside the house, has a large freezer and two

small refrigerator—and is never used for cooking. Next to the kitchen is the pantry, full of canned goods, colorful jars, bacon, sausage, ham and trays of eggs.

Both Péter and Mariska come from a peasant background. Péter's parents joined the collective in 1947 with 2.5 hectares of land, whereas Mariska's parents, Auntie Aranka and her husband, joined the collective with only 400 \square öl of land (1600 \square öl=1 *kad hold*=0.57 ha). In 1961, in the second phase of collectivization, Péter and Mariska joined the collective farm without any land. As a result, during land privatization, according to the Land Privatization Act of 1992, they were entitled to receive 30 golden crowns,⁶⁴ and 2.5 hectares of land that Péter's parents owned prior to collectivization. The Keresztess could not claim the ancestral paternal property for it was grabbed by one of the members of the Land Distribution Committee and during the years of collectivization it became a forest. However, they could request land around their house, for their neighbor was not interested in claiming that particular piece. Therefore, the Keresztess have 2.5 hectares of land around their house, which was used by the "Rákóczi" Collective Farm for thirty years. The other 2 hectares they were able to purchase with their 30 golden crowns are not situated next to the property; it is mainly used as a pasture for their goats and sheep.

They are engaged in animal husbandry in addition to vegetable cultivation and crop growing. They raise eight cows, fifteen pigs, a few sheep, a couple of

⁶⁴ People who joined the collective farms without any land were entitled to have 30 golden crowns. These people were the descendants of former landless peasants who used to work on large manorial estates.

goats, six curly-haired pigs known as the Hungarian *mangalica*, one horse, chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Each year, similar to the Bitós, they contract with the Pick Factory of Szeged to sell twelve of their pigs. They grow potatoes only in their unheated hoop-houses for both household consumption and sale. These tunnel hoop-houses take up 300 square meters; they are rather small. In the open fields they grow corn, grains, peppers, cabbages, and tomatoes—some of which are sold—but some of the crops raised in the “kitchen garden,” such as onions, garlic, carrots, and parsley, never leave the house for the market.

The Keresztess exchange products and labor among extended family. “The exchange sphere of the use-value system; however, remains subordinated to the aim of self-sufficiency”... “as sufficiency, not surfeit is the aim” (Gudeman 1978). At harvest time and pig slaughters, the family members, relatives and friends get together to perform the work, and in this way cooperation among various households is created. No one gets paid and no money is involved in this transaction; however, all the people receive a few sacks of the harvested items such as potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, and apples; after the pig-slaughter people arrive home with bags of sausages, bacon, liver and ham, and everyone is fed throughout the day of labor. “We don’t hire people,” said Mariska, “we don’t spend money on that. We help one another.” When friends come and help, “they need to be served back.” In this exchange of labor and products not only co-operation is created

among the households but a sense of mutuality and dependence. In this sense, extended family relations are super-structural to production relations.



Figure 4-6. Dinner, 1998. The extended family is served dinner after work outside. When friends and relatives help, “they need to be served back.” (Photograph by the author)

In the rural economy, food is of central importance and is usually plentiful. The family produces as much food as its members consume. Often they relate the consumption of food to a sense of ownership or possession when they say, “You own as much as you eat.”⁶⁵ Péter explained it to me sadly when thinking of the future of his economy:

⁶⁵ In Hungarian: *Az a tied, amit megeszel.*

We are *not* crying because we have enough food to eat. We can provide for ourselves but we can't go forward. We are rather regressing. We don't have any machinery. We have nothing. We will soon become beggars (2003).

The Keresztes's minimal hoop-house economy, similar to the Bitó's and many others', lack the financial capital for any investment, and hence "money needs to be pressed out" (*kiszorít*) or "the belt needs to be tighter" (*meg kell szorítani a nadrágszíjat*). The pension they receive after their 30-year employment in the collective sector is extremely low thus their involvement in the hoop-house economy is a mode of survival on the margin of the larger economy. Their hoop-house economy, which is minimal, thus only supports the base but does not increase it.

Liminal Hoop-House Economy and Cash Cropping

In between and betwixt the *maximal hoop-house economy* (profit-oriented) and the *minimal hoop-house economy* (subsistence) there lies what I term the *model of the liminal hoop-house economy*, which is the focus of this section. Here I apply Arnold Van Gennep's famous term of "liminality" to my own ethnographic case to explain a specific situation that I observed during my fieldwork. The word "liminality" comes from the Latin word of *līmen*, denoting a "threshold" or a state

between two different states or stages. This liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, tension, anxiety, and indeterminacy. The hoop-house economy of cash-cropping that I describe here precisely shows those characteristic features of liminality; it is liminal because it is caught between subsistence and commercial farming. It is liminal because it demonstrates the dialectics of economy: household and market (cf. Gudeman 2008). It best represents the tension and contradiction between these two economic realms, often fueled by uncertainty and filled with *anxiety*.



Figure 4-7. Minimal Hoop-House Economy, 2002. In the background, tunnel hoop-houses can be seen. They are located in Balástya-Gajgonya. (Photograph by the author)

At a more theoretical level it also embodies the contradiction of both socialism (community economy) and capitalism (market economy). The liminal

hoop-house reflects a period of transitions or transformations from one state to the other; however, I suggest that there are three particular situations that may occur: 1) the liminal hoop-house economy under external pressure transforms into a minimal hoop-house economy, 2) the liminal hoop-house economy has the possibility for a dynamic change and transform into a maximal hoop-house economy, and/or 3) the liminal hoop-house economy remains in a liminal state and becomes permanently liminal. During my fieldwork I witnessed all these three movements and transformations, and also their reverse.

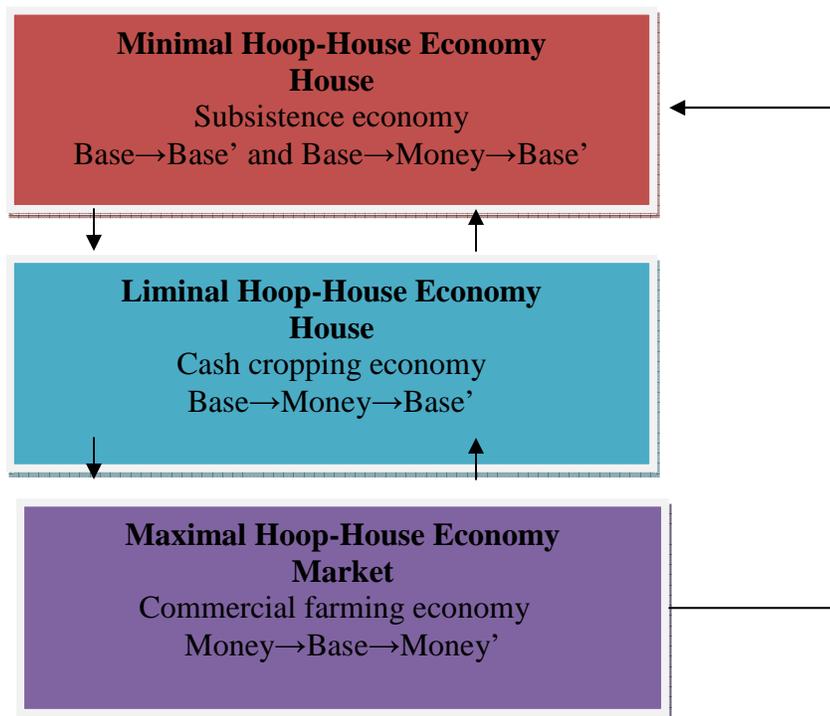


Table 4-2. Transformations and Movements of the Hoop-House Economy.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the rural area of Balástya began to experience a more direct penetration of capital by the outside economy. The principal change

came with land privatization in 1992, when the collective agricultural sector was destroyed and land became a market commodity. Consequently, the change in Hungary's political economy put an impact on the local economy and the hoop-house economy underwent a significant transformation. This transformation of the hoop-house economy is best reflected in the movement of *Minimal Hoop-house Economy* → *Liminal Hoop-house Economy*; however, I need to emphasize that only some families were able to make a step forward in this direction. To make this step forward—in the uncertain years of post-socialism—certain conditions needed to be present.

The shift from subsistence farming—performed previously on the *socialist household plots* and including potatoes, onions, cabbages, beans, and corn—to cash-cropping early-appearing or *primőr* potatoes, peppers, cabbages, and tomatoes in the hoop-houses was a difficult transition. When the liminal hoop-house economy began to participate in this cash-crop economy, it had to manage not only the flow of goods but the flow of money.

Some independent producers who had some experience with hoop-house production on their household plots began to focus mainly on the cultivation of these very specific cash crops. Potatoes and cabbages had always been raised not only on the socialist household plots but also on plots that were allocated to manorial workers in the pre-socialist era; however these crops were raised for household consumption and the surplus was sold to make a little cash. In market-

socialism, as I previously showed, making “profit on the small” in the informal economy allowed peasant-workers to improve their lives and increase their standard of living (Base-Money-Base’).

In the mid-1990s, the principal constraint on the further development of the hoop-house economy and its intense involvement in cash-cropping was the lack of financial, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1972). In the first years of post-socialism, various forms of capital were very much needed that integrated money (loans, credit, grants), connections cultivated in the socialist era, and education in horticulture. In the following paragraphs, I speak of two families, the Papdi and the Halász, which both practice liminal hoop-house agricultural production. However, their access to those three forms of capital is dissimilar.

The infrastructure of their hoop-houses, compared to the minimal hoop-houses that I discussed in the case of the Bitó and Keresztes families, are rather sophisticated. In these hoop-houses, there is a system of irrigation and heating, which both contribute to the faster maturity and better yield of the vegetables. Moreover, the material of the vinyl and the ribs available (metal or PVC) for purchase is much more advanced, providing a better shelter and environment for the plants in the cold.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Today there are different types of vinyl available for constructing a hoop-house, which are rather expensive. They all vary in price depending on the quality of the vinyl. For example, the “Foliaplast” firm had produced polietilen [do you mean polyethylene?] vinyl since 1991. It makes six different types of vinyl. 1) filmic vinyl, which insulates well and suitable for the cold season, 2) vapor-free vinyl is used to prevent plant spottiness, 3) infrared light absorption vinyl can increase the temperature by 1 or 2 Celsius degrees and thus shortens the time of plant maturation by 10-15 days and diminishes the possibility of frost

The first family's economy is that of the younger Keresztes daughter's and her husband's. Hajni Keresztes is a primary producer, and her husband Jóska is a registered entrepreneur. Hajni is on maternity leave and receives 16.000 forints/month, for she did not hold any employment prior to her pregnancy.⁶⁷ The couple is in their early 20s and has a two-year old daughter. Hajni has a high-school degree, but her husband Jóska only has an elementary school certificate. On both sides, the parents come from a peasant background. Their primary income comes from working in agriculture. Their farmstead is situated close to the main highway that runs from Budapest to Szeged. The house that they live in used to belong to Jóska's father. They took care of the ill father, therefore Jóska inherited the house. It is a small, traditional house with some barns and a large courtyard. I visited this young couple on a few occasions in the summer of 2002.

Their hoop-houses take up 3000 square meters. One hoop-house is 350 square meters. They have eight 12-meter long hoop-houses; they are located right next to the farm house. In a hoop-house there must be 30 centimeter space between each plant and there must be 80 centimeters left for a walking path. The place is really crowded and it is very hot inside; each and every inch is utilized.

These hoop-houses are heated. They are heated by industrial gas in the winter that comes from a mixed burning boiler. Jóska told me proudly that "the

in an unheated hoop-house, 4) temperature saving vinyl increases the temperature, 5) light reflecting vinyl that provides even reflective light, and finally 6) constant temperature vinyl avoids too much heat.

⁶⁷ It is circa 80 USD/month. The minimum wages are 50.000 forints/month in 2002.

heating is all automatic”; however, Hajni, commenting on her husband’s bold statement, said, “It is so damn automatic that he has to get up three times at the night to see if it still runs fine.” There is an Israeli micro-sprinkler; however, tomatoes must be watered by “ditch-watering.” These hoop-houses must be at least 15 Celsius degrees, but the peppers and the tomatoes need 25 Celsius degrees. They use the hoop-house for both the starters and the plants. One seed is 2 or 3 Hungarian forints and one plant can be 20 to 30 Hungarian forints, hence it is worth starting the plants from seeds. Jóska purchases sealed Dutch seeds for certain vegetable plants, for “they are considered the best quality.”

In the summer of 2002 when I went over to their farm, they had 1200 tomato plants, 5000 kohlrabies, 2500 pepper plants and 5000 lettuces. Jóska usually transports the produce to the wholesale market in Budapest. Hajni was worried that he would not be able sell the kohlrabies, just like last year when they had 16.000 plants but could not sell them. The market was full of kohlrabies and they lost all the money, time and labor. They even had to borrow money from her father and pawn her gold jewelry. “The market is so uncertain,” she said solemnly, “one year you could sell the kohlrabies and the next year you can’t. It is so unpredictable.” She quietly told me when Jóska stepped out of the house for a smoke that she did not like to work in agriculture and she did not like to live out on their farm. She has a certificate in trade and she would like to work as a cashier at TESCO supermarket in Szeged, but her husband does not let her. This is his

destiny, he thinks. If he does not try to make it as an independent producer, he will end up being a wage laborer. Jóska explained:

I was born into this peasant life and work. I am familiar with this region. To be a peasant that is all I know. I would not move into the village or to Szeged. I would go insane in a cage (apartment). We are fine out here. No one tells me what to do. I am my own master (2002).

However, he does not want his daughter to work in agriculture when she grows up. “I don’t want her to be a peasant,” he said. “I don’t want her to do this dirty work in the hoop-house. It is nasty and hard work.” Much of the work in the hoop-houses was performed by the couple, close relatives and friends. The young couple does not raise any animals; their sole income comes from the sale of produce raised in the hoop-houses.⁶⁸ Now their liminal hoop-house economy stagnates and the Papdis have a difficult time making ends meet, for they are unable to sell their cash crops. The vegetable market is full.

The other family who participates in the cash crop economy is the Halász. While both families would like to invest in their economies, the Halászs seems to be in a better position, for they are able to sell their produce. Zsolt Halász has a

⁶⁸ Hajni’s parents, Péter and Mariska, provide them with pork and poultry for the entire year.

different story about how he began his economy. He had some financial, social and cultural capital to jumpstart his own economy in the mid-1990s.

Zsolt, who is 40 years old now, used to work at “Rákóczi” Collective farm from 1988 to 1993. When the collective farm got dismantled he became unemployed, like hundreds of other old and young people in Balástya. In 1994, he took advantage of a governmental loan set aside for young unemployed people wanting to launch a new career. There were also some agricultural grants available that Zsolt was eligible for. Therefore, with the help of some state assistance and a grant, he could build his first four hoop-houses on 1500 square meters in 1994. He is a registered rural entrepreneur today.

His wife, Éva, is one of the two village economists working at the Mayor’s Office.⁶⁹ Her responsibilities include, among other things, the registration of the agrarian and land assistance. As a village economist, she is one of the first to be informed of any opportunities that the Ministry of Agriculture offers to rural entrepreneurs. Both Zsolt and Éva are college educated; what is more, they received their higher education in the discipline of horticulture. Zsolt went to the “College of Horticulture” in Kecskemét for three years and then completed another three years at the “University of Agriculture” in Keszthely. During his college

⁶⁹ Éva became a village economist in May 2000. The category of a village economist was introduced by the Ministry of Land and Region in 1999. Her areas of interest are EU and family farming. She finished the College of Horticulture in Kecskemét. She is in charge of seven settlements in the region. Her responsibilities include providing reports on:

a. production estimation b. damage reports c. statistical data d. gasoline aid
e. agrarian assistance and f. land assistance.

years, he spent each summer as an apprentice at “Rákóczi” learning the ins and outs of agriculture and collective farming. He also received a stipend from this collective farm and thus established some connections with its leadership and management. When he finished college, he became employed at “Rákóczi.” First, he became a brigade leader, and then a leader for the fruit branch.⁷⁰ As a result of his education, employment in agriculture, and his involvement in the household-plot cultivation, Zsolt gained a vast expertise and knowledge of the agricultural sector and established significant connections with the management.

Zsolt’s parents were never members of any of the three collective farms in Balástya: “They were left out of agriculture,” Zsolt reminisced. His mother was a teacher and later became the headmaster of the village’s boarding school. His father was an electrical engineer in the 1950s in Szeged. Zsolt said, “They lived well off their wages thus they did not have to do hard labor in agriculture.” His paternal grandfather, Antal Halász, owned a thresher in the 1940s, but his main income derived from his salary as a policeman (he was originally a locksmith). Antal Halász’s wife did not work in agriculture either but was a dress-maker. Therefore, “They lived off their trade,” Zsolt explained. Although Antal Halász and his wife owned some 2 hectares of land, they cultivated only 1 hectare, which was a peach orchard. In 1961, they gave up all their land to the collective farm. On the maternal

⁷⁰ In the mid-1980s, the Rákóczi Collective farm had plum, peach, and apple orchards and a vineyard.

side, however, Zsolt's grandparents owned 5 hectares of land and they primarily lived off some agricultural labor and animal husbandry.

In 1993, most of this landed property was claimed by Zsolt and his cousins. Zsolt acquired 4.3 hectares of land that he cultivates and farms today. He combines hoop-house economic production of cash crops with plow-field farming of grains. He has hoop-houses on 5000 square meters, which is a rather large territory for hoop-household cultivation. Heated hoop-houses cover 1500 square meters. These latter hoop-houses produce all year round.

He does not raise any animals, but his father does, so the grains on 2 hectares are fed to his father's pigs. Zsolt is a commercial producer who specializes in the intensive production of early cabbages for export only and grows some grains in the open fields. He compared occupations and differentiated among producers:

I am not a peasant. I don't do the whole cycle like growing grains on plow fields and alfalfa for the pigs. I don't fatten pigs. I don't crawl in the dirt looking for potatoes. That is dirty work. I don't do such a thing. I am completely committed to vegetable production in hoop-houses. I am a gardener. If you are a gardener, you could still live better off than an average factory worker (2002).

He also went on to tell me proudly that a gardener like him “must have an in-depth knowledge of the plants’ needs” such as the optimal time for planting, the necessary lighting conditions, the right temperature and the proper mode of heating and airing. Zsolt grows the same vegetables each and every year in the following order: In the spring, he produces early cabbages in the hoop-houses and potatoes on a half-hectare open field. At the end of June, he harvests the potatoes and plants carrots in their place. In the summer after the harvest of the early cabbages he also plants yellow peppers (2/3) and tomatoes (1/3) in the hoop-houses for the fall. At the end of October or at the beginning of November he picks the peppers and tomatoes and starts planting lettuces (2/3) and green onions (1/3) that can be harvested at the end of January.

Hence the Halász family harvests vegetables three times a year instead of twice, which is a very intense mode of vegetable cultivation requiring a lot of expertise and labor. This intensive cultivation needs a lot of manual labor; therefore Zsolt also hires external labor to do all the work in his hoop-houses. Besides manual labor, this type of economy is also in need of capital for further investment. Capital inputs rose dramatically because of the need for new varieties of seed, fertilizers, and pesticides, and despite the use and availability of machinery, labor inputs also increased.

His economy yields remainders, leftovers, extras, surplus, and also “profit on the small” created by the past innovation and fine management of the hoop-

house economy. In sum, it creates value. His economy's transaction is based on the movement of Base-Money-Base' and therefore this circuit strengthens the base. Expanding and increasing the base of the Halász family's hoop-house economy requires various resources, from land to water, but also resources such as education, connections, and monetary funds that the Papdi family definitely lacked from the very beginning. Almost all Zsolt's vegetables produced in hoop-houses cultivated are sold for export. In this sense, he fulfills a "productivity niche" (Gudeman 2008: 104) abroad. He is not the sole holder of this technology, but Zsolt has trade connections cultivated during his college years. His former college cohorts now employed in foreign trade assist him in finding a market. Without these additional resources and funds the Papdi family's liminal hoop-house economy has difficulty augmenting its base and it is very likely that it will shift back to mere subsistence production.

Conclusion

In this chapter I showed the ways in which the hoop-house had evolved from minimal to maximal since 1960s. I demonstrated how the hoop-house economy's role and function had changed over time. I argued that the underlying economic unit in the context of the minimal and liminal hoop-house economy is the house, while in the context of the maximal hoop-house economy it is the

market. I also suggested that the liminal hoop-house economy best demonstrates the dialectics between economy's two realms: house and market as it is trapped between two value domains.

Chapter 5

GREAT EXPECTATION, GREAT TRANSFORMATION AND GREAT DISSAPPOINTMENT

“Mentally and Physically Sick Socialist Economy” and Western Brand-*ing*

In this chapter, first I will describe how dominant neo-liberal economic discourses portrayed socialist economies and how these discourses contributed to the legitimization of western interventions into Hungary’s political-economy after 1989. Second, I will demonstrate some of the more prevalent interventions and show why they failed, for the most part, so bitterly.⁷¹ After the fall of state socialism (1989) there was general exhilaration and euphoria among Hungarian citizens regarding the change in the political and economic climate. With regard to Hungary’s unique position in the formation of “market-socialism” and the organization of the informal economy after 1968, countless western and non-western experts anticipated that Hungary would undergo a smooth transition from market-socialism to market-capitalism—compared, for instance, to Bulgaria or Romania after 1989. Moreover, due to Hungary’s historical participation in the

⁷¹ Or, to explain this feeling more figuratively, I recall the sarcastic way people often times talked about operations performed in Hungarian hospitals in socialism, considering the quality of medical technology and care: “The operation was successful: just the patient died of it.” Similarly, the introduction of the free market took place, but in parallel the people who had to face up to it became financially, socially and morally paralyzed.

dismantling of the Iron Curtain in 1989, it was predicted that Hungary would be one of the former socialist countries most prepared for the political and economic transition. Despite these predictions, with the change of the regime came severe economic decline, political instability and social unrest.

In 1990s, the dominant discourse about the transition in political science and economics produced an expanding literature on the required remedies of how to “fix” Eastern European politics and economy. These literatures unequivocally promoted a universal model of political and economic development that was ideologically linked to the superiority of the capitalist mode of production, private property and a free market-economy. The proponents of the great transition theory⁷²—the transition being from “*post-stalinism*” to “*post-communism*,” to use Szelenyi’s and Brzezinski’s phrase—claimed that “the disintegration of communism is the final victory of modernity’s great achievements, market economy, and liberal democracy” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:1). As I will show in the next sections of this chapter, the *ideological cleansing*⁷³ of the socialist system

⁷² Among the predicaments the following political-economic and sociological analyses were foregrounded: the collapse of Marxist-Leninist regimes and its communist leadership (e.g. Hansen 1997; Jowitt 1992; Lane 1996); privatization (e.g. Abrahams 1996; Kovács 1996; Poznanski 1994); market economy (e.g. Begg and Pickles 1998; Bruszt and Stark 1991; Stark 1992); democratization (e.g. Beyme 1996); civil society (e.g. Arato 1994; Cohen and Arato 1992); and nationalism (e.g. Bárányi 1994; Bollerup and Chistensen 1997; Csepeli 1991; Unwin 1998).

⁷³ Simultaneously, in the “Era of Colonial Capitalism,” (Kelly 1999), or rather “era of neo-colonial global capitalism” as I phrase it, a post–Cold War discourse can reproduce and reiterate on one hand the unequal geo-political division, and on the other the social-cultural boundary between the West and the now “Other-ed East.” The fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain did not raise the curtain of partition between the two opposed poles. Moreover, the rigid representation and perception of CEE and fSU exacerbated an altered appropriation of the East by the West (e.g. Bunzl 2000; Grant 1995; Parman ed. 1998; Ries 2000; Wolfe 2000b).

proved to be a highly contested agenda; it gave birth to “an unexpected and altered opposition” to it nationwide.

As Verdery (1996) and others point out, the transitionalist method of the 1990s insisted on the radical treatment of former socialist countries’ economies and claimed that “shock therapy,” operating internally and externally, would bring about transition from the “sickness” of socialism and totalitarian regimes to the “health” of liberal capitalism. I think that from this western-centric perspective (see: David Lipton and Jeffrey Sachs 1990; Joseph Brada 1993) the *mentally and physically sick socialist economy* (I use this phrase to sum up the neo-liberal approach and thus western representation of the socialist economy) needed to forget much of its past in order to make a full recovery from it.

Political and economic advisers from Western Europe and the United States flocked to Hungary to offer professional opinions and to pay a visit to the socialist mental patient, offering the advised shock treatment as well as prescribing the proper antidote. This antidote involved a dose of de-centralization of the government and privatization of collective farms and factories, a dose of the free-market civic society, consumerism, flexible investment, and proper cultivation of a new political elite. Therefore this macro-economic project aimed at destroying the socialist state sector (considered the main parasite on the national economy), including its role in production: “heavy industry” (*nehéz ipar*) and agriculture (*mezőgazdaság*: “the economy of the fields”). All in all, the aimed total makeover

of the Hungarian socialist economy and political structure turned into a *mélange* of sour taste. The national industrial and agricultural production fell drastically, and so did the standard of living. The question is then: How to evaluate these processes socially, culturally and morally? Or, put another way, how did people who experience these changes attribute meanings to these ever-changing macro-economic decisions in the micro-politics of their everyday life?

I argue that these macro-level investigations of government and economy did not aspire to illustrate dramatic social and cultural changes and (their on-the-ground consequences) as experienced and interpreted by individuals, families, and small and large communities throughout post-socialist Europe. It is because these narratives fail to acknowledge that a Western and/or neo-liberal economic and political model—“capitalism by design” (Burawoy 1996) or “artificial transplants” (Kornai 1992)—cannot be directly applied or mapped onto the social-cultural and historical landscape of Hungary. These external paradigms promoting land privatization and/or decollectivization, as I will show in the next sections, neglected formerly existing patterns of access to resources and technology, local economic practices, social standing and wealth, claims of authority and local understanding of land holding and use. The injection of an external blueprint into the veins of local economies, as I observed during my research, was widely resisted. In sum, hastily *enforced models* in post-socialist societies “will be rejected by their living organism” (1992: 260). Privatization and/or decollectivization in

Balástya were often times compared to the stages of mental illness such as *insanity, schizophrenia, and pure madness*.

The concept of private property is central to the understanding of this anxious transformation taking place in Hungary after 1989. The binary model of the ownership of land—private on the one hand and collective on the other—does not suffice to accurately describe the intricacies of the system in place in Central Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Both neo-liberal and Marxist-Leninist approaches attach excessive significance to a particular vision of property and property holding: socialist states claim to act in favor of their citizens to promote equality, solidarity and social justice, while western states emphasize economic efficiency, instrumental rationality and individualism. In this section, I will concentrate on few discussions that cluster around private property in order to show the *reluctant transformation from collective to private property* in Balástya.

Reluctant Transformation from Collective to Private Property

Private property is central to this transformational period because land—owned collectively since 1961 under socialism—became a market commodity, which means that it could be alienated and sold in markets. According to the neo-

liberal economic view, efficiency is achieved through such alienation of resources and market competition. In order to compete, individuals or participants in turn must be efficient in their use of resources. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that with the transformation from socialism to capitalism (if that is the case), some people grabbed resources, including land and technology, which gave them a stronger starting position in markets.

I argue that the neo-liberal economic perception of property is too static and simplified because it does not point to the social, moral and local features of property. It does not explain that property relations are embedded in social relations; rather, its focus lies in the interest of the individual and not the community. In transformational societies, like today in post-socialist Hungary, Hann (1998) describes:

At the micro-level, property relations form the myriad ways in which people build up their social identities through holding and using a variety of “things” in their environment. At the macro-level, the anthropologist also needs to address issues of political power and control over the distribution of “things” in society.
(Hann 1998:3)

Similarly, Katherine Verdery (2004) expands on the notion of property, which I found useful in my analysis:

I prefer instead to see property more complexly as a cultural and social relationship and a system of power. It is a cultural construct by which persons are linked to one another and to values through culturally specific idioms. Property is also about boundary making: it sets up inclusions and exclusions, “belongings,” including what “belongs” to whom and who belongs to or has affinities with some larger entity that occupies a relation to specific values or objects. (2004: 192)

Thus property, as I applied it to my analysis of land privatization processes in Balástya, is an extended conceptual apparatus, which postulates a *Relational Model of Property* incorporating: (a) cultural ideals and ideologies of property; (b) social property relations; (c) social functions of property; and (d) social practices of property (cf. von Benda-Beckmanns 2000; Gudeman 1998b, 2001, 2008; Hann 1998a, 2000; Singer 2000).

This *relational model of property* can contribute to the understanding of how land and other assorted valuables as *property* were locally justified, which can shed light on why privatization was so widely resisted in post-socialist countries. Comparing the “efficiency” and “rationality” of communal versus private property of land under socialism and post-socialism will further question the legitimacy of the existing dichotomies (West and the rest or private versus collective) and the current competing ideologies. This binary model of ownership—private on one

hand and collective on the other—does not accurately describe the complexities of the system in place in Hungary.

In order to provide an explanation as to why privatization in the region met with reluctance and resistance, Bates's (1995), Creed's (1998), Hann's (1995), Kideckel's (1995), Vászary's (1995), Verdery's (1996), and others' ethnographies offer the following areas for exploration: the similarity between forced collectivization and decollectivization, the intense politicization of agriculture, the ethnicization of land claims, local epistemologies of land use and entitlement, and the retributive nature of social justice.⁷⁴

For example, Creed (1998) investigates the privatization process in Bulgaria where the "similarities testify to a continuing legacy of socialism," which he refers to as the "socialist subconscious" (1998: 26). The idea of socialist subconscious is an attempt to reveal the continuity of subtle ideas, behaviors, and attitudes routinized and practiced during socialism, what I call the "socialist habitus" of the socialist practice. According to Creed the "decollectivization drama" was marked by an ill-designed plan initiated by the post-socialist state for "liquidation of collective farms," an "old song in a new voice" (1995) with unmotivated actors.

⁷⁴ See: Bates 1995; Creed 1991; 1995; 1998; 1999; De Soto and Panzig 1995; De Waal 1996; Dunn 1995, 2000; Hann 1992, 1995, ed. 1998, n.d.; Kideckel 1993, 1995; Nagengast 1991, 1998; Stark 1989; 1992; 1996; Swain 1998; Vászary 1995; Pine 1998; Verdery 1996, ed. 1999; Zbierski-Salameh 1998.

In a similar vein, Dunn (1996), Lampland (1995) and Verdery (1999) counteract the notion that property concerns the disposition of objects; they discuss the social relations—relations among people, moral conceptions of ownership—that make property legitimate or, in other contexts, problematic. I suggest that in the case of Hungary the relevance of social capital and the expansion of informal networks are to be studied as the condition, as well as the result, of new ownership structures.

These and other exceptional anthropological works demonstrate the complexity of land privatization and its local implementation in former socialist countries. I situate my own work as an integral part and continuation of these ethnographic projects on collectivization and decollectivization. My research amplifies and echoes the conclusions drawn by the early “ethnographies of transition”⁷⁵ in regard to the nature of the post-socialist property regime.

This chapter is therefore a contribution to these debates in the Anthropology of Post-Socialism and an extension of them. I consider the concept of property a sufficient analytical tool, which connects categories of ownership, identity and personhood, power and knowledge. This chapter not only supplements and challenges the generalizations, broad assumptions,

⁷⁵ See: Bates 1995; Creed 1991; 1995; 1998; 1999; De Soto and Panzig 1995; De Waal 1996; Dunn 1995, 2000; Hann 1992, 1995, ed. 1998, n.d.; Kideckel 1993, 1995; Misztal 1999; Nagengast 1991, 1998; Stark 1989; 1992; 1996; Swain 1998; Vásáry 1995; Pine 1998; Verdery 1996, ed. 1999; Zbierski-Salameh 1998, etc.

oversimplifications, and knowledge production of macro-level investigations about socialism and post-socialism but also provides detailed, on-the-ground descriptions of local experience in Balástya.

“This is a Mafia, Not a Country: Hungary is Doomed to Fail”⁷⁶

Uncle Pista, now retired, who used to be a member of one of the collective farms in Balástya, was convinced like many others that the new democratic system intentionally excluded and discriminated against Hungarian peasants. After the change of the socialist regime in 1989 to the new democratic government, the *Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (Hungarian Democratic Forum) initiated the liquidation of collective and state-owned farms as well as the abolition of the entitlement to household plots and passed the Compensation Act in 1992. Privatization or *magánosítás* became the mantra of the mid-1990s in the Hungarian countryside.

It seems as if the government deliberately wants to eradicate the peasants. It wants us to kick the bucket. This is a Mafia. They should have left the damn thing [the institution of collective farms]

as it was. This is not a country; *this is a mad house*. This country is doomed to fail” (Uncle Pista ⁷⁷ of 74, 2001).

The Antall⁷⁸ government saw the privatization of land as an essential, politically necessary act and not as a socioeconomic one. Compensation became a compromise among a coalition comprised of the Antall government, the Small-Holders Party and the Christian Democratic Party. As Raskó explains (1998), “The land issue became the primary tool of the campaign and lobbying.”

Initially, this fairly conservative government attached a moral principle to a political decision—namely that it aimed at compensating *all the victims of the socialist system*, not only those whose land was confiscated between 1947 and 1962 during collectivization, but also in part those who were members of the former aristocracy prior to the 1945 Land Distribution. In addition, its agenda aimed at the political rehabilitation of those who were political victims of the 1956 Revolution. Hungarian prisoners of war, who were forced into labor camps in the former Soviet Union after WWII, or their extant families, were also entitled to some form of compensation. This became a great impediment during land distribution as not only those who lost land but also those who suffered non-property damage could bid for land.

⁷⁷ In Hungary, the formal and polite way of addressing an older man is “uncle,” which is not the same as maternal uncle or paternal uncle.

⁷⁸ The first Prime Minister elected democratically in 1990.

Consequently, all the varied political atrocities and historical injustices, once buried in the national history and personal memories, were framed in a discourse that resonated notionally with the majority of Hungarian citizens. Paradoxically, this new era produced a wide spectrum of “losers” and a minute fragment of “winners.” Privatization of land and other means of production that was supposed to promote economic efficiency and high productivity led to the dramatic decrease of agricultural production in the Hungarian countryside.

The gross production of Hungarian agriculture decreased significantly in the beginning of the 1990s due to these changes in market and holding structure that took place, together with the political changes. The decrease hit both livestock breeding and plant cultivation, although the drop was more significant in livestock breeding. The larger part of gross production (52.7 percent in 1998) comes from plant cultivation while the smaller part (47.3 percent in 1998) derives from livestock breeding. While agriculture comprised 12.5 percent of DDP in 1990, it comprised only 5 percent of the national GDP in 1998 (Sapard Plan 2000).

In addition, the 1992 Land Compensation Act resulted in 1.5 million private owners who received on average less than 2 hectares of land per person: 50.000 to 60.000 full-time primary producers having about 5 hectares of land and 1.2 million part-time producers with less than 2 hectares of land (Kovács-Sapard Plan 2000). This ultimately contributed to a fragmented land ownership and fuzzy property rights. Land privatization instituted not only a new property regime but also

initiated the transformation of former property rights and entitlements. Hence at the societal level, new rural identities emerged with different ideas of land entitlement, access to resources and authority.

Consequently, the break-up of the collective and state farms heavily impacted the lives of the people working in the agrarian sector.⁷⁹ As Kovách and Csicsvari (2002) explicate, the year of 1993 came to symbolize the “black year” in the history of the Hungarian countryside. In January 1993, the new democratic government, along with the land privatization act, dismantled the institution of household plot farming, which provided a “surplus income” to the collective farm members under state-socialism, as I discussed it in my previous chapter. People formerly working in the collective sector lost their jobs and in addition lost their entitlement or use-right to household plots on which they practiced more or less successful family farming. In short, this year marked the social and economic marginalization of the rural population of Hungary.

The level of employment in villages lags behind the national average. In 1998, the national unemployment rate was 10.4 percent, while it reached 13.8 percent in the villages and even 20.3 percent in villages with fewer than 500 inhabitants. In 1990, 955,000 people were employed in agriculture, which was 17.5 percent of the total labor force, while in 1998 it employed nearly 280,000 persons,

⁷⁹ 86.3 percent of the territory of Hungary (8 million hectares) is productive land, 66.6 percent (6.2 million hectares) is agricultural land, 50.6 percent (4.7 million hectares) is arable land, so the ratio of both agricultural and arable is significantly higher than in most countries in Europe. Calculated at current prices, the weight of agriculture within the GDP was 6 percent in 1994, by 1998 the ratio of agricultural GDP dropped to 5 percent. (SAPARD Plan: 2001)

7.5 percent of all employees, so employment in agriculture decreased significantly. The number of employees in food industry decreased by 35% from 200,000 to 129,000 (Sapard Plan 2000: 16). The reasons for the decreases were the conversion of the holding and ownership structure, and the fall in production following the reshuffle of the external market and economic conditions. As a response to the myriad of drastic transformations in people's everyday lives during this time period (1989-1999) was an alarmingly high rate of suicides, cases of liver sclerosis death, mental illnesses, and spouse murders in Hungary (the highest suicide rate in the world according to WHO in 1997).⁸⁰

“Theft-Capitalism is the Worst Communist Regime”

By the mid-1990s, agricultural production decreased, rural unemployment increased, and subsequently the standard of living dropped, resulting in people's disillusionment at the new democratic regime and its future. As János (age of 65) told me:

⁸⁰ In some areas in the countryside suicide is so general that no family remains unaffected. In recent years a number of small and isolated settlements in southern Hungary came to be known as 'suicide villages' as their rate is even higher than the average national figures. Until 1996 there were 4,500 recorded suicides a year in Hungary, which was the highest per population figure in the world. Not only many people kill themselves in Hungary but they also often choose brutal methods: they jump down wells, hang themselves, or drink pesticides. Gloom, depression and suicide seem to be part and parcel of Hungarian culture. "You can hardly meet with a Hungarian who wouldn't have relatives or friends who really committed suicide—it's a kind of national disease, it's a kind of sickness," says Péter Muller, a Hungarian playwright who has written a play about Gloomy Sunday and has studied the suicide phenomenon.

We had to and we did swallow the frog in 1961; there was no other choice under socialism [meaning: forced collectivization and working in the collective farms] Of course, I was crying when they took my father's land and even my wife's chickens from the backyard but as time went on people got used to working in the collectives. We were employed, we got some salary and we could work on our household plots. This *theft-capitalism* made people unemployed. In the Kádár regime there was no unemployment. If you had no job you were considered the enemy of the public and it was recorded in your ID card. Now they pay you if you don't work. I don't get it..."[meaning: the state pays unemployment benefit] (2003).

Responding to my question about whether this system is socialist or capitalist, one of the older men replied: "Yes, this era is capitalism for few, but for most of us (primary producers and peasants) it is the most corrupt of all regimes. It is the worst communist regime. It is theft-capitalism." People in the village often framed the state of affairs as a problem of ethics, loose morality and the "end of communality." Some constantly compared the two regimes and expressed that they felt trapped rather than liberated by the new market forces.

At least under socialism everyone got ahead, and now we are going backwards. The shelves of the stores are full of goods, but people have no money to buy them. In socialism, it was just the opposite - people had money but there was nothing to buy (2001).

They also sadly commented on the fact that families and kin-groups that used to work together and help each other out under socialism now don't even talk to one another. People were very much concerned with the loss of communality and solidarity, as Erzsi—who worked at one of the collectives for 25 years—explained to me sadly:

Every year, the truck of the collective farm took the whole brigade to the National Zoo in Budapest. Every summer, we could go on vacation to spend 2 weeks at a State Health Resort at Lake Balaton with our families. Now that is all gone. No brigades, no events organized by the collective, no family vacation, everyone is on his own (2002).

People became obsessed with making money and competition at all levels. “If someone has a red Audi in the village today then the next week someone will have a pink one.” Alternatively, a woman in her late 60s remarked on the changes in people's attitude to one another. “[P]eople became envious of one another. Or, as the old saying goes, if my cow is sick then my neighbor's cow should die,” meaning that people became ill-willed, egocentric and very individualistic.

There was often an internal negotiation about the just or unjust nature of the former regime. During numerous conversations, the people of Balástya wanted to convey the message to me that it is not that they now approve of the former

systematic oppression of the socialist state, but rather that today they feel completely disempowered. As some of the rural people said, “You know, in the past [in socialism] the big fish stole from the State but the big fish let us, the little fish do ‘it’ at a smaller scale.” Or, alternatively:

We do not want the Kádár regime back; however, we were better off then. If we sold two fattened pigs, we could purchase a new *Moskvich*,⁸¹ but for that much now we cannot even buy a used car (2001).

The radical change in economy and ideology required new types of social networking and contributed to a new social structure in the village. Villagers were not sure whom to trust and whom to call enemy. Their social world changed, requiring villagers to refigure their social relationships, acquire new social skills and learn new social habits.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed on many occasions that “people work twice as much, from dawn to ‘blindness,’ as they did under socialism, but today make half as much as they used to.”⁸² They associated hard physical labor with value-creation and the new regime with corruption and speculation. The changes in rural folks’ social world required them to refigure their social relationships,

⁸¹ A Soviet car model driven in Central and Eastern Europe.

⁸² The expression in Hungarian is: *Dolgozni látástól vakulásig*.

acquire new social skills, and learn new social habits. Peasants in the settlement often claimed:

It is *wild-capitalism*. It is fraudulent market behavior and fast fortune making. It means unemployment and homelessness for us; they [the politicians] don't practice what they preach or *bort iszik és vizet prédikál* (drink wine while preaching of water).

The complex social and cultural world in which people lived and worked under socialism did not “wither away with the socialist state.” As Sándor expressed his confusion about the values of the new capitalist system regarding the standard of living and labor, he said:

If I wanted to work under socialism I could work my ass off, even 26 hours a day. Then I could build a house for my family. Now the only thing I could build is a dog house (2002).

Despite the general notion and argument from the West that socialist citizens did not work hard and were lazy, many of the testaments that I heard and witnessed myself proved otherwise. One must not forget about the so-called communist Saturdays when socialist citizens had to work half a day and their

children had to go to school. It may be argued that they did not put as much effort into their low-paying jobs as into their second and third shifts, but this does not mean that the so-called working morale was low.

The advocates for radical political and economic transition from market-socialism to market-capitalism, as I argue, disregarded the complex social and cultural worlds in which people lived and the ideals that they worked for. Macro perspectives neglected the consequences of local social/ist history and 45-years of social processes. Turning back to the trajectory of capitalism of the 1940s proved to be an implausible and contested agenda nationwide.

Privatization of “Alkotmány,” “Móra,” and “Rákóczi” Collective Farms

In this section of the chapter I describe some details of various problems that arose in the first phase of post-socialism. I focus first on how collective assets became privatized, and second, on how land was allocated. Giving specific ethnographic examples from my own research, I point out that the hastened implementation of privatization and the liquidation of collective assets proved to be extremely complex and its results destructive for the majority of the rural folks.

From 1961, official economic activities in Balástya were carried out in three collective farms and through household plot production on detached farmsteads. At the beginning of the collectivization period (1947) seven small collectives were

formed, and in 1961 they were unified into three integrated collectives:

“Alkotmány,” “Móra” and “Rákóczi.” The settlement's whole territory is 10,999 hectares, of which 223 hectares comprises the territory of the village and 9,755 is productive land. Most of the land was in the possession of these three collectives and landed in private hands when share proportions and compensation vouchers were distributed through the Compensation Act that was implemented in 1993.

The breakup of the three collective farms began long before 1992/1993. According to one of the former chairs of the Alkotmány Collective, “Since 1985, the collective farms had begun vegetating and eventually died; they exhausted all their wealth.” This opinion was shared by a near majority of the people and was very often asserted: “Basically, the collectives put an end to themselves as they went bankrupt; they could not pay their members any longer. They could not pay and whatever could be turned into money was sold for shit and piss,” as explained by Ferenc, who used to work in Alkotmány Collective “until it closed its gate.”



Figure 5-1. Balástya Alkotmány MG. Központi Irodája, 2002. (The Central Office of the Alkotmány Agricultural Production Collective) The gate with this sign is still up there. The building is now owned by the local preschool. (Photograph by the author)

Many of the local people in Balástya on various occasions, however, said that they could not believe that the collective farms would be dismantled. “We did not believe that the song was over,” said Jóska, who worked in two collectives altogether for 27 years. For the most part people were very much aware of the fact that the collectives were highly subsidized; however they expressed their sentiment for the loss of the collective. Katika, who worked at the Alkotmány Collective, told me quietly so others could not hear, “The last time I went there and locked the office, I was crying.” She was the administrator for the Trades Union Social Insurance Center for 20 years at this collective. As a result of the collective’s break-up she retired “voluntarily” and became involved in small-scale farming with her husband and mother-in-law.

The question of how to distribute the assets and land of the collective farms became the main discussion in the settlement. The liquidator of the collectives

could be the president of the directorship or the main accountant. The liquidation process was indicated in the company book and the files about the collective farm's members were to be archived for 20 to 50 years, however while doing research I found neither the files nor the company books. After the arrangement of files and debt collection, the company court allowed the final liquidation of the Collective. When that was done, the remaining members were supposed to have been informed about the existing wealth of the collectives. Afterwards, the share proportions were to be distributed.

First, the liquidation committees in the village had to devise a plan on how to allocate collectively used assets and distribute land to its members and non-members. They had to calculate the “wealth of the collectives.” This process, known as *vagyonnevesítés* (wealth naming) included the “wealth of land,” technology, relinquished machinery, “the value of salaries earned in the collective, and the value of produce sold via the collectives over their operation” (Hann 2005). Or in other words, *szövetkezeti üzletrész* (business share) was defined by the wealth naming of the collective farms as stated in the legal codes of the individual collective farm (1992/ II. Law). The collectives issued these shares and then individuals outside the collective’s realm could claim them. Later on, the state, with various conditions, took as its responsibility to pay or redeem these. The *vagyonnevesítés* became prolonged. This could be seen by the very fact that the liquidation of the collectives was not finished even 10 years after the break-up

of these collectives when I was living there between 2001 and 2003. For the most part, collective assets were privatized, but land was not.

In the first step, the collective farms turned themselves into holding companies, but gradually they operated with an increasingly minimal workforce and were finally abandoned. In 2002, the cashier, receptionist, stock-keeper and payroll accountant of the Móra collective were the only remaining employees who received payment. No matter how minimal their salary was, it still raised criticism in the village. As some people commented:

At Móra Collective there are still two people sitting in the office doing nothing and they even get paid for it; the last chair and his accountant Jóska. The chair has the office of Móra in his own house. The accountant himself, whose parents were *kulák-s* comes to the village for an hour or two, has his coffee and goes back to the city (2001).

In late-socialist Hungary, managers of state-owned companies and of collective farms, along with the communist leadership, gained an influential status in decision-making and building of social capital. These relationships could be called upon for “doing a favor” at any time, or as it is expressed in Hungarian, *az egyik a másiknak vakarja a hátát*. (“one scratches the other one’s back”). In reference to this phenomenon people often said it was “whom you knew that

mattered, not how much you knew.” Or in Hungarian the phrase of *protekció*⁸³ was used to describe these intricate social connections or the possession of social capital.

If you knew the right person in the administration then you had access to “things”, like getting a state apartment, or an admission into college for your child, or you could have a nice office job for your brother-in-law arranged if you had these ties or were able to “move around in the right circle” (*jó körökben mozog*). But these “doings of favors” operated at all levels of the society, not just on the top. It trickled down to every sphere of the social networking. The *koma – sógor barátság* (“brother-in-laws’ friendship” or “godparents’ friendship”) webbed the whole country horizontally and vertically.

The assets and shares that were up for grabs included machinery, roads, buildings, cooling units, barns, sheds, tractors and office buildings, as well as portable property such as computers, typewriters, telephones, doors, sinks—even toilets were “carried away under the veil of the night” (*széhorták*). Faithful to the “socialist spirit,” which was phrased by people as “what is the state’s is ours,” relatively small objects kept disappearing, but the majority of valuable assets were

⁸³ *Protekció* in socialist Hungary refers to “having influential friends,” “being well backed,” which worked at all levels in the society. As the saying goes, [I]t does not matter how much you know, what matters is who you know. As I said it worked at all levels, not only in regards to the Communist Party and the Ministries but also in grocery shops, state departments stores, hospitals, schools, etc. For example, if you knew the shop assistant you could have access to a kilo of bananas, which was a rare commodity in socialism, “from under the counter,” “set aside” by the shop assistant for you. To return this favor was not obligatory but could have been called upon in other situations. Or, in case of hospitals, if your grandfather was an alcoholic and the family did not want him around then he was put into a state rehab for as long as possible, if you knew someone who could arrange that for you in the administration.

acquired by those “who were close to the fire or were in office.” Similarly, as Uncle Peti put it very angrily:

...those people already in cushiony positions brought grist to their own mill. These good-for-nothing people had some cash or were buddies with the committee members; they bought up the property of the collectives. These scoundrels (*csirkefogó*—petty chicken thief) took everything (2003).

In the upcoming paragraphs I demonstrate how social capital earned in the socialist times was quickly transferred into financial capital in the first phase of post-socialism. It is important to note that social connections and networking of all kinds that existed at all levels in the Hungarian society had a strong purchasing power during privatization. In addition to these established connections and power relations at the top, there was a strong interconnectedness among the communist party apparatchiks and the collective farm managers of the farms. These connections wove the social fabric of the village and, as I show, these connections were hard to cut.

For instance, former accountant László Aradi from the Alkotmány Collective Farm and his wife, who worked at the village council as an economic advisor in socialism, purchased the food depot that was once in the property of this collective farm. The last chair of this very collective became the co-owner of

this food depot. The depot's location is very favorable as it is by the railway station. As both Aradi and his wife used to work closely with the council president (*tanácselnök*) prior to privatization, the family members were also recipients of favors. Consequently, the Aradi daughter was able to purchase a storefront for her beauty shop for a song during the first phase of privatization. How did she become the owner of a beauty shop—from being a renter to an owner? There were two interrelated transactions. The collective's storage building had two joint rooms. One of them was rented to her by the council in the early 1990s. The other room was rented to the council president's wife, Auntie Rózsika, who further sub-leased it to the Aradi daughter's husband. He paid Auntie Rózi 4000 HUF/ month, approximately 20 USD/ month. He established his liquor store right there. When the council was privatizing its assets, in the first turn these assets were offered for purchase to those who already were renters. Thus the storage building was put up for sale. The Aradi daughter purchased one part of the building and, since Auntie Rózi was not interested in the sale, the Aradi daughter's husband bought it. As she explained to me, "The other part of the house itself was rented by an 80-year old woman (Auntie Rózi, who was the council president's wife) who did not wish to buy it so it became ours." Then she added with some irony, "Yes, it was *protekció*."

Another asset of the Alkotmány Collective, Lake Öszeszék, became a co-owned property of the same family—the Aradis—and of the second ex-mayor's,

the latter being a chair of this very same collective in the mid-1980s. The lake is less a “fishing lake full of carps” as advertised today in tourist magazines and more a welcoming home for reeds and cattails. Traditionally, houses in this region of the Great Plains were roofed with reeds; during the turistification of the area, reed became a much-prized commodity for roofing houses for tourists. As Ili the beautician explained to me, “You just have to cut the reeds once a year and collect the money for that.”



Figure 5-2. Privatized lake, 2002. The Lake of Ószeszek is today privately owned, 2002. (Photograph by the author)

These two examples thus demonstrate that former social/ist ties, connections and social capital established under socialism were vitally important in the first phase of post-socialism in regard to who could have quick and easy access to former collective farms’ assets. These assets, as I have shown above,

included an array of movable and non-movable items—in my examples, a lake and a storage building. The social connections and networking outlasted and survived the collapse of the socialist system; what is more, as I suggest here it became strongly intertwined with the transformational period *per se*.

In the case of the second collective farm, the liquidation of the Móra Collective began after the harvest of 1993. In February 1994 there were still 480 members but by 1997 this number decreased: there were only 60 members, the chair, 5 administrative workers and 2 retirees. The liquidation and closure were recorded in the company book on August 21, 1997. The liquidator—without a legal successor—liquidated the collective farm. The liquidator, who happened to be the last chair of the Móra Collective, sold the sheep farm first and then the Machinery Park. He also put up farmsteads (called *major*) for sale. The Zöldmező Major, which had a sheep farm with 100 sheep, was purchased by one of his cousins, Pál. The currency that came from the sale was put on a bank account, supposedly to pay off the collective's debt. The former chair/liquidator told me, "We tried to call a meeting about the liquidation but the members did not show up," putting the blame on the membership's disinterest and sense of irresponsibility. The process of selling certain assets to selected members, or rather selected kin, was widely frowned upon by most of the villagers in Balástya.

These examples show that former collective farm members were highly skeptical of the just nature of the allocation of assets based on their former

knowledge of the directorship of the collective farm. This distrust transpired during these liquidation meetings when the members “failed” to show up. They “failed” to show up because they felt that vital decisions were already made beforehand without them being asked. Their skepticism, rooted in distrust, was translated as disinterest and severe apathy in the public discourse of the collective’s directorship.

In the upcoming paragraphs I reveal other instances that show that at another level of connectivity some villagers utilized their former positions and jobs in the collectives in order to make claims over certain assets such as machinery and various types of technology. In the case of the Alkotmány Collective, the riches available for distribution included 3600 hectares of plow field (corn, wheat and alfalfa), 30-40 hectares of cultivated land (for garden vegetables like spice peppers), 100 hectares of orchards and vineyards, 200 pigs, 100 cows, and 100 sheep. These were to be distributed in addition to other assets like pigsties and barns. Villagers often explained it to me that people who were “already close to the fire” had the greatest opportunity to grab these resources.

For example, two men now in their late 60s who worked at the Alkotmány Collective took advantage of their fathers’ party affiliation as party secretaries. One of them is the wealthiest entrepreneur and a very influential political actor in the community. It is not only that his father used to be the party secretary in the 1960s but his father-in-law served as the first chair of one of the seven collectives back in

1947—named *Szirtusvirág*. This entrepreneur purchased the pig barn of the Alkotmány Collective, equipped with full technology and mechanization and some 200 pigs, for a song. The other man who took advantage of the initial confusion revolving around privatization was the combine driver. Due to the social and political capital that his father accumulated as a party secretary, he was the first one to bid on the Polish flaxseed roller, the combine and the tractor. His brother-in-law, who worked as a mechanic in the Alkotmány Collective, now co-owns these machines with him. They lease these machines to other farmers in the area in exchange for other labor-intensive tasks.

These examples demonstrate that party affiliation did matter to a great degree, but also important was the position that one held in the hierarchy of agricultural production. A mechanic or a tractor or combine driver who “knew his machine as one knew his own child” was often looked upon with some respect by others who only worked with their bare hands,” told me Uncle Pista, who managed to buy the tractor that he used to drive in the collective farm. In this hierarchy of expertise, agricultural workers became dependent on these people who operated large machinery. Their expertise now was expanded by private ownership of these machines by a limited group of people.

In this section, I briefly summarize how the liquidation of the third collective farm took place in Balástya to illustrate that privatization strategies of the three collective farms show general tendencies. The Rákóczi Collective Farm

filed for bankruptcy in 1993 around the same time as the other two. In this year, with the help of its members in a system of leasing, it still carried out some plantation cultivation. The liquidator here was a private company, the *Hunyadi Crisis Management and Service Share Company*. After the auction of its stock supply and other disposable assets the liquidation was supposed to be completed by 2000. However, just like the five-year socialist scientific plan, this plan was not fulfilled either. When I was doing research in Balástya (2001–2003) the “paper bureaucracy” was still at work. Ms Széll, the last chair of the Rákóczi Collective farm, and who had directed the farm since 1993, spoke to me. Her words and strategy of reasoning sounded similar to those of the chairs of the other two collective farms:

The Rákóczi Collective stated self-bankruptcy in 1992 due to its credit stock. Its debt amounted to 7.028.000 forints. Paying this amount off, the liquidation committee sold two of its farmsteads (*major*), Felső-Gajgonya and Egyetertés to private entrepreneurs. In 1993 the collective still operated with 430 members but only 37 people showed up for the public meeting discussing the affairs of the collective. People's disinterest was just unbelievable.

The apathy, as I observed, lay not in the lack of interest on the part of the membership but as it was often claimed “things were already decided for us.” Thus the majority of the agricultural workers had no control over these matters. In most

of the cases, as I observed, this was a valid statement as these ordinary people were left out of the distribution of wealth in general. To demonstrate my point about why people declined to participate at these meetings, I discuss the sale of the Rákóczi Collective's main office building. This example shows the social life of one building that changed hands quickly over a very short period of time in the new market regime. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the new property regime was seen as a component of "theft-capitalism," whose social actors' morality was called into question and subjected to collective criticism.

The main office was located at a central place in the village. Under the administration of János Kiss, who was the second mayor of Balástya (1994-1998) and the chair of one of the collectives in the late 1970s,⁸⁴ this office was claimed as the property of Balástya's self-government. Under his supervision this office was immediately sold to an Italian entrepreneur and his wife, who was from the village. According to village hearsay, the mayor "gave a slant" to this family because he had known them personally. He was the godfather of this couple's daughter. The amount was set very low: only 3.400.00 Hungarian forints. When asked, he explained to the villagers that the price was big money or *zsirra megy* (it is for "lard," meaning big money and necessity). The new owner installed gas heating, renovated the whole place, and turned the space into a lamp store. The store soon went bankrupt. It had been for sale a long time when the local self-government

⁸⁴ János Kiss was the second mayor of Balástya from 1994 to 1998. In the late 1970s he was the chair of Móra Collective. After his term in 1998 he was elected the mayor of Kistelek, which is a larger settlement than Balástya, in Csongrád County.

bought it back for 9.800.000 forints. The social life of this office after the repurchase by the local self-government was complicated by emerging claimants ranging from the Church to the Culture House.

The Culture House used to be the Catholic People's House and was owned by the Church prior to nationalization of land. After the change of regime the Church laid claim to it. There was a debate between Father Lenárd and János Kiss (the second mayor of Balástya) over this property. The wife of the director of the Culture House acted as a mediator, wanting to save the People's House for the village as a Culture House. She tried to make peace between the two parties. Eventually, the self-government offered this ex-Rákóczi Collective's main office to the Church in exchange not only for the People's House but also for the nursery school, the latter belonging to the nuns prior to the nationalization of private and church property. Father Lenárd talked to the bishop who agreed to this deal. As the office now had gas heating they agreed to turn that place into a place for religious gatherings.



Figure 5-3. Művelődési Ház, 2003. The old Culture House now functions as a cinema. (Photograph by the author)

For a short time the house worked as a meeting place for religious teachings but Father Lenárd moved to Kistelek and the priest who replaced him was not interested in running the house as a meeting place. This time it was the local church that rented the office to private entrepreneurs; first a person from Kiskunfélegyháza rented it and ran the *Agro Mill Store* there. A few months later, a storekeeper rented it from the *Agro Malom Store* and opened a grocery store called *Malom Diszkont*. The store's launch was called into serious question by the villagers, who could more or less follow the chain of transactions over the years. They viewed these transactions as a result of speculation and greediness, which came to characterize people's behavior and their individualistic mentality. Pondering the shopkeeper's character and his moral life, his own relatives said, "He is a greedy liar and he even slept with his young wife's mother." A year later,

the store was set on fire and the villagers saw this as a justified act—something that “he deserved.” The sociopolitical life of property, in this case a building shows how people interpreted privatization and condemned speculative capitalism in their own interactions with others. Speculation and profit-making came to be seen by the villagers as something sinful and morally condemnable. It was seen as they put it, “not the fruit of honest work.”

Conclusion

These examples illuminate that the privatization of the former collective farms’ assets, material goods movable and non-movable, and tangible and non-tangible properties—including buildings, machine parks, technologies, farmsteads, lakes and even livestock—was a far cry from a justifiable and just process. These sales were often arranged behind closed doors, where the former chairs, their deputies and sometimes but not always party apparatchiks within the collectives made the first move about requiring or rather grabbing these resources. This kind of speculative opportunism and market competition was highly disrespected by the majority of the villagers. Informal networks and social capital inherited from the socialist era reflected *similar* but *different* access, claims, and entitlements to these resources in the first phase of post-socialism. In Balástya, the villagers who were not “already close to the fire” felt disempowered in this whole process and

claimed that privatization was sometimes as dramatic and destructive as the compulsory collectivization of the late 1960s.

In sum, I argue that the concept of exclusive rights over “things” fails to acknowledge the myriad of ways people came to be related to one another and to these collectively held and/or used “things” prior to 1989. It fails to look at the moral and local features of property or answer questions about what makes property locally legitimate and, as I illustrated in other cases in this chapter, is highly problematic.

FROM GOLDEN CROWNS TO LUCRATIVE CURRENCIES

Messy privatization strategies

In the following chapter, I focus on how collectively held and used land became privatized in Balástya as a result of the Land Privatization Act of 1992. The new property regime as I illustrate it here produced new social actors in the countryside with varied attitudes and mentality to land, labor and money. I emphasize it here again that property—in this case, *land*—is not a “thing” or an object but one form of social relation, which mediates between people and their values. Hence this *relational model of property* contributes to the understanding of how land as property is locally understood and justified, which sheds light on why privatization was so widely resisted in Hungary. This expanded notion of property links, as I suggest, other predicaments of social life together such as the identity, personhood and sociality in this transformational period.

As I described it earlier, the implementation of land privatization in Hungary was a political decision rather than a moral, social or an economic one. The new democratic government initiated the destruction of the cooperative farms and began land privatization in 1992. This land law aimed at the complete destruction of the cooperative farms, the partial restitution of private property and

the abolition of household plot farming. Land restitution in Hungary was characterized as “partial, indirect and uniform and land boundaries were therefore irrelevant. Restitution vouchers were issued uniformly in partial compensation for lost assets of any kind (including land) and these vouchers could be used (among other things) for bidding in land auctions, which the co-operative and state farms were obliged to organize. Restitution thus took the form of a state funded opportunity to acquire land, rather than return of land that had been lost” (Swain 2000: 6-7). Based on my field research I argue that land privatization, the destruction of the 3 cooperative farms and the abolition of household plot farming turned the village of Balástya into a transit center and most of its people impoverished farmers, creating a problematic future for those wishing to make a living in agriculture. In the following section I depict how land distribution took place and what the local responses were to it.

From 1961, official economic activities in Balástya were carried out in three cooperative farms and through household plot production on detached farmsteads. At the beginning of the collectivization period (1947), seven small collectives were formed. In 1961, they were unified into three integrated cooperatives: “Alkotmány,” “Móra” and “Rákóczi.” The settlement’s whole territory is 10,999 hectares, of which 223 hectares comprises the territory of the village and 9,755 is productive land. Most of the land was in the possession of these three cooperatives and ended up in private hands when share proportions and

compensation vouchers were distributed through the Compensation Act that was implemented in 1993.⁸⁵

Compensation Land Base, Share Holders' Base, Allotted Land Base and National Land Reserve Base

The initial land distribution in the early 1990s was managed and controlled by local land distribution committees (*földkiosztó bizottság*). When I was living in Balástya (2001-2003) villagers were still bitterly recalling the work of the land distribution committees and questioning the objective of the whole privatization process. "It was a joke, land made people crazy and the land distribution drove peasants to bankruptcy."

Those people in the land distribution committee were corrupt; they were thieves, *they* stole the peasants' land. They were thieves...(2001).

In Balástya there were three Land Distribution Committees, each responsible for one of the cooperatives' affairs.⁸⁶ Alkotmány and Móra worked with the same land surveyor. The third one, Rákóczi, did not have a land surveyor

⁸⁵ See: 1993. II. Law in regard to the operation of the Land Review and Land Distribution committees.

⁸⁶ According to the 2 par. Law II. 1993. the Land Distribution committee is responsible for the arrangement of the share holders' land base; its members have to be elected by the share holding members and non-members in accordance with their share proportion holding. Only 1/3 shareholders have to be present in order to select the members of the committee. The chair of the land distribution committee is chosen by the committee members.

as 60 to 70 percent of its membership claimed and used the land. The claimants had to pay for the land survey by January 31, 1997, and received maps of their now-private property afterward. These land distribution committees were in charge of generating four types of land base or *földalap*; 1) *compensation land base*, 2) *share holders' land base*, 3) *allotted land base* and 4) *national reserve land base*, which made the land privatization extremely complicated and very difficult to follow. Land base designation was designed according to the following rule: golden crown value should remain and the share holding and compensation could not overlap. The golden crown value is a measure of land quality introduced in 1875 under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and still in use. All land in Hungary has golden crown value per hectare (originally per cadastral yoke).⁸⁷ Most importantly, a person living on the *tanya* (detached farm) had priority to claim to land situated near his farmhouse.

First, in the early phase of the land privatization, those peasants who did not join the cooperatives in the 1960s could claim compensation vouchers (*kárpótlási jegy*), however their privately owned land became “statetized” or “nationalized” by the socialist state. The idea behind the allocation of compensation vouchers was that these people would be able to purchase some of their original land back by having priority at the land auctions. The voucher

⁸⁷ This golden crown value per hectare is periodically related to real unit of currency, the Hungarian forint. For the purpose of the restitution process, the forint equivalent of one golden crown value of land was set at 1.000 forints, and entitlement to these vouchers was calculated on this basis (Swain, “Golden Crowns, lollipops and stamina” 1993).

indicated an amount, which served to compensate for property and non-property damage. The degree of compensation—considering the time passed—was defined by law, which assigned an average value. Additionally, those villagers whose machinery and draft animals were “statetized” during collectivization (taken into the cooperatives for collective use) were also entitled to these vouchers and potentially to the compensation land base (*kárpótlási föld alap*).

Originally, this specific land base was “sacred and inviolable,” and only these two groups could claim these vouchers and consequently have access to this land base. It is interesting to note here that those peasants who refused to give up private farming during forced collectivization but their land was taken away or “statetized” nonetheless, were not eligible for requesting these compensation vouchers. The rationale as to why they could not obtain these vouchers was that they received—from the cooperatives—so-called “exchange land” (*csereföld*) and were paid land fees for “giving in” (*beadni*)⁸⁸ their original plot for collective use. These compensation vouchers now having currency value became a form of optimal capital as they could be cashed or bought from others or exchanged in the future. It meant not only the source of gaining a considerable amount of land but the beginning of major land speculation.

Secondly, those people who joined the cooperative voluntarily or involuntarily and “gave in or brought in” their land for the use of the cooperatives

⁸⁸ Peasants used the same phrase for “giving in” land in 1960s like during the forced food delivery system when they had to “give in” a certain amount of food to the state.

were entitled to have *share proportions* (*üzletrész*) of the “wealth or riches of the cooperatives.” This group was called the “share proportions holders” (*részarány tulajdonosok*). Essentially, it meant that the members of the three cooperatives in Balástya became shareholders. Wealth and/or property appraisal had three modes, according to 1) the amount of investment made,⁸⁹ which was registered in the accounting books, 2) some specific market evaluation based on sale and purchase or the stock market (the value of companies’ shares) and 3) associations who would evaluate the wealth of a formerly state-owned enterprise. Consequently, the cooperative farms’ share-proportions provided an answer to who owned land and how much they owned. In addition, it was also supposed to show how much “clean income” was derived from the land used by the cooperatives. These share proportion books⁹⁰ were kept by the Land Office. The land distribution committees were supposed to distribute these share holdings to the former members, which became an impossible and socially contested project.

Share proportion holders⁹¹ could purchase land from the land base set aside for them only—the *share holders land base*. The share proportion holder had to request his share (land) as an independent real estate by March 23, 1993. Therefore the Land Office was obliged to provide a scale of golden crowns, which was

⁸⁹ However the instruments of investment were kept artificially low as the state made up for it in industrial consumption

⁹⁰ Despite the common belief that the communist state confiscated and appropriated individuals’ land, I need to emphasize that original property rights were always recorded and registered in the land records according to the land’s golden value per *cadastral hold* (one cadastral hold is half a hectare).

⁹¹ Here I wish to note that the statetized land was never in the possession of the cooperatives. The cooperatives legally had use-rights to the land but they never became the property of the cooperatives.

basically the sum of the value of the registered share-proportions' golden crown plus the value of the registered productive land's golden crown used by the cooperatives. If the registered value of the productive land's golden crown was less than the expected share-proportions for distribution, then the compensation process was initiated. If the original owner died, the cooperative redeemed the value; however, the redeemed value was underpriced. In Balástya there were 120.000 share proportion holdings at the beginning of the land privatization, and within 5 years it had decreased to 60.000.

Thirdly, people who did not own land prior to collectivization but joined the cooperatives in the late 1940s were entitled to obtain 30 golden crowns. For instance, one cadastral hold of land was worth 9 golden crowns in this sandy area of the country—lower than the national average. They could purchase no more than 3 hold-s (1.5 hectares) of land from the so-called *allotted land base* (*jutatott föld alap*). This group of people comprised the descendants of former serfs, manorial workers and landless agricultural workers from the pre-socialist era. This group of socially and economically marginalized people again found themselves on the edge of rural poverty. Like their ancestors, they possessed neither land nor the machinery and financial capital to begin independent family farming in the 1990s.

Fourthly, the distributed land could be offered to the Hungarian state, which could become part of the *National Reserve Land Base* (*Nemzeti Földalap*) if one decided to sell the reclaimed land. In this case, the Attorney of Csongrád

County's Land Office devised a plan for a contract, which was sent for value/price appraisal to the Ministry of Land and Regional Development. From there, the papers were sent back to Csongrád County's Land Office. Afterward, the size of the territory was agreed upon in the presence of a notary public. Then the Attorney of the Csongrád County's Land Office countersigned the purchase agreement and sent it back to the Ministry. From the Ministry of Land and Regional Development the files were sent to the Directorship of Treasury and Wealth, which signed the papers and the contract on the behalf of the Hungarian state. When all of that was complete, the Hungarian state paid for the land to the legal persons.

The Land Office's task was to provide data about land registration. After the land distribution decisions were made, the Land Office registered the property rights.⁹² This institutional network of land offices functioned as part of the public administration. In Hungary there were 116 district land offices put in charge of land survey and cadastral functions, classification, qualification and land protection, land registration, record keeping of both land ownership and land use. There were 71 Land Distribution Committees only in Csongrád County, which Balástya belongs to administratively. As Micsik, the head of the Land Offices, explained to me in 2001, "The work of land distribution and land review committees was not included

⁹² According to this law's 5 par. (1), the share proportion holder has to submit his written request within 60 days after the law becomes effective. The location of land property for distribution is defined by this law 9 par. (1), such as, if the holder did not request his demand for getting his share proportion land property within 60 days as the 5 par (1) states, then the land redistribution committee (its legal descendant) will define the basis for his share proportion-land property's security as land share.

in the work of the Land Offices. They joined the work when the necessary data and decisions were made and were submitted by the committees to the land offices that registered the property rights.”

In this section I have demonstrated that land distribution became highly complex and the land laws set forth were non-transparent. I argue that the “allocation of golden crowns” indicating an ambiguous monetary value became a form of lucrative currency during the transformational period, which required an “entrepreneurial approach” to land as a new form of property. Consequently, in the transformation from socialism to capitalism the land distribution or land privatization became an opportunity for a very few to assess the future value of land and of these golden crowns. The four land bases that were set in stone by law became very fluid when actually implemented in Balástya and resulted in future problems, as I explain in the next section.

Who Else Can Have Access to Land and Golden Crowns?

Land distribution consequently became a very intricate and often emotionally disturbing process at the national level but more intensely so at the local one, where it was implemented. But who could take a seat in these land distribution committees and be decision makers in such delicate matters? Who

else could have access to land outside the four designated groups described in the earlier section? How was the process of land distribution locally interpreted and externally legitimized? I argue that along with the transformation of property rights there was a noticeable transformation in rural and non-rural actors' attitudes and ideas about land, labor and money. Here I illustrate some examples of how one could set or speculate claims and hence how land changed hands in the region of Balástya. The first example focuses on the account of the land-distribution committee's chair, and the other one on one of the committee members, who gained considerable amounts of land and capital from the positions they got to know so intimately.

In the early 1990s, the Small Holders Party (*Kisgazda Párt*), which had traditionally promoted middle and wealthy peasants' access to land in the 1940s, gained massive political influence in the new democratic government. The main program for this political party was to restore the land ownership conditions of 1947. The local land distribution committee primarily recruited its members from this revived Small Holders Party. Before the fall of state socialism, various mass organizations were present, such as MSZMP, the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party, KISZ or the Communist Youth Alliance, HN, Women's Committee, and Red Cross. But the role of all these organizations either diminished or completely disappeared after 1989. In the 1990s, the Independent Small Holders' Party was formed, which eventually included a large number of the peasant population. At

the time of its foundation it had 48 members. In this same year, the Hungarian Socialist Party had only 10 members. As Auntie Jolika, the local hair-dresser explained to me:

At that time [1990s] people in the settlement immediately joined the Small Holders Party, which used to have a strong tradition in the country. They were ready to be mobilized. They were not really *kulák's* children. They joined the Small Holders Party and peasants of Balástya wanted to believe in them (2001).

In Balástya, the chair of the three Land Distribution Committees became Sándor Erdődi. He was not only the Chair of the Small Holders Party in Balástya but also became the Deputy Mayor from 1992 to 1994. In addition, he established the so-called *Gazda Kör* (Circle of Small Holders) in 1993, which functioned as a political and economic forum for middle peasants in the settlement. “He became a ‘bloody-mouthed’⁹³ smallholder after the change of the regime,” said one of the members of the Land Distribution Committee (the last chair of the Alkotmány Cooperative), who closely worked with Erdődi.

The members of the land distribution committee were supposed to be elected democratically by the shareholders of each cooperative farm. “Well this

⁹³ Bloody-mouthed is a phrase used to describe true believers of the communist party. The actual phrase was *véresszájú kommunista*.

kind of selection did not work democratically,” remembers József, who was also in one of these committees.

[B]asically because the chair of the committee arbitrarily appointed them by saying that ‘you are going to be on it and you and you and you.’ For example, he needed a clerk, an accountant, so Uncle Sanyi⁹⁴ said, ‘Well my dear Jani, you know how to add numbers then you are going to be the accountant.’ I thought that the ground will open up under me... (2002)

Today Erdődi is 72 years old, retired but still politically active in the village. He and his wife have a family house in the village. They own two farm houses, one of which is by the Öszeszék Lake, where the state gas line (MOL) runs. Their son, who according to the villagers is an alcoholic, has a pig farm with 100 pigs, which is a relatively big business in Balástya. In addition, the family has 70 hectares of land, but prior to collectivization in the pre-socialist era this family owned only 20 hectares. How did it stretch from 20 to 70 hectares? Well, the land distribution seemed to be the arena in which such stretching could be performed.

In the eye of the Smallholders, communist leaders and managers of the local cooperatives were the ones to be blamed for the “injustice and cruelty” of the past 40 years. They were blamed for destroying Hungarian agriculture by carrying

⁹⁴ Sanyi is a nickname for Sándor.

out the Communist Party's directives of the planned economy and the administration of the elimination of private property. In the community, a number of stories emerged about the ill-nature of the land distribution committees, and the one most often heard was about this man Erdődi. "The chair of the land distribution committee had all the power; he had more power than God or the mayor himself today." Erdődi worked in the Alkotmány Cooperative farm until 1981. According to village gossips he was fired. "He was not even a cooperative member as he got fired for a certain reason that I am not going to say..." said József, who also had a place in the committee as someone formerly in charge of the household plot integration project for the cooperative. Erdődi received *földjára* (land fee) from the cooperative farm as he could not take out his original plots. As he was no longer a member of the cooperative farm when it came to be dismantled he was eligible for compensation vouchers himself. Another committee member commented on this with some definite irony in his voice: "If Erdődi said that this parcel and that parcel of land is part of the compensation land base then that was what happened."

So what he did as the chair of the land distribution committee was to select land that was in one piece near his farm house from the compensation land base and claimed that as his. It had a better soil quality. No matter that his family's land used to be in another village... (Ferenc, age of 69, 2002)

The members of the land distribution committee profited from the knowledge about the compensation land base the most. They knew that they would get compensation vouchers one way or another. The committee members among themselves declared where to create compensation land base that they could purchase later when the auction took place. The majority of the villagers spitefully talked about them, describing them as morally weak and corrupt. In some cases, it seemed that there was a nervous voice of historical judgment in the air saying that some people not only escaped collectivization but also benefitted from current political changes. Therefore they became double-winners in the game of history.

One of the members of the land distribution committee who left the collective earlier or he was expelled from our collective worked at the post office for a nice salary. He was laughing at us while we were suffering. Well, this guy used to own a lot of land prior to collectivization and so did his neighbor buddy. They were interestingly the members of the land distribution committee. They both got their 35 hectares of land back in one piece. So I told this guy, 'Hey István, don't bark, you left us in trouble in the collective. While you worked at some post-office tanning in the afternoon sun and you even got paid for it...don't tell us now what to think (2003).

In the case of Ferenc (69), who was also in the Land Distribution committee, his parents were poor in the pre-socialist years therefore he did not have that much currency to speculate with at these land auctions. His family owned less than one hectare of land prior to forced collectivization. But having gained expertise and status as an agronomist in the cooperative sector, he was able to lobby for his own interests in the Land Distribution Committee. His gains were very minimal compared to the other members from the same committee. He did not have the right social connections to have valuable information about a specific future business on the horizon, namely the location of the future state highway. Had he known where the future highway tracks were planned by the Hungarian government, he would not have sold off his sandy plot so easily. Ferenc, although he did not calculate his gains as efficiently as the other committee members, added admittedly:

I also got compensation vouchers for the things that the cooperative took away from me. This allowed me to have some advantages at the land auction. I also got to know people in the land office. Someone asked me there if I wanted to sell my land. He said he would take care of all the fees. It was sandy and nothing grew there. I requested that piece of land with my compensation vouchers. The other committee members did not know why I was asking for that plot.

They were thinking how stupid I may be for asking for this sandy poor land. I did not tell them that I was going to sell it (2002).⁹⁵

Another member from the Land Distribution Committee, who was the last chair of the Alkotmány Cooperative and a member of the Communist Party, told me,

I exactly knew where the future highway would run, so I purchased land exactly on its track with my compensation vouchers. How did I know? Well, a friend of mine, whom I went to college with, told me that the Hungarian state would construct a highway that would run by Balástya (2001).

Today Varga,⁹⁶ in his late 50s, is the co-owner of one of the food depots and an entrepreneur. He, as he said, is a *Green Baron*⁹⁷ who finished his degree at the College of Agriculture in Keszthely, where he specialized in plant protection. He is a plant protection consultant; he markets insecticides and advertises and installs Israeli micro irrigation systems as a private entrepreneur. In 1980, he was working at Alkotmány Cooperative as its chair when he was invited to a professionalization

⁹⁵ That parcel that Ferenc sold so hastily to the man working in the Land Office was on the track of the future highway.

⁹⁶ Varga was the chair of Alkotmany Cooperative from 1978 to 1992.

⁹⁷ The phrase “Green Baron” or *Zöld Báró* came to label a group of people in the post-socialist era. Green Barons, who in the socialist regime worked as managers or agronomist in cooperative farms, were relatively well educated having some sort of college degree specializing in Agriculture. These people had not only the knowledge, skill and experience of how to manage a large-scale farm but also had an area of expertise such as knowledge of crop breeds, pesticides, irrigation, and technology. These people, like Varga, could smoothly transform their cultural and social capital into economic capital in the years of transformation in post-socialist Hungary.

meeting about Israeli micro-irrigation systems. The meeting was held at Bordány, a nearby settlement. At the meeting he was asked by the presenters and his colleagues if he had seen any potential in it. He said, “It is the way of the future.” A few days later, he received a phone call in his office. They asked him to help market the product and he signed the contract. After the initial 5 percent, he decided to begin the path of an entrepreneur. “I had a full-time time job as the chair of Alkotmány and also became an entrepreneur. It was pretty obvious in the mid-1980s that being a chair was not a permanent job.”

He, similar to others who were in some managerial positions in the cooperative farms or even employed as agronomists or branch managers, had the opportunity to transform or deepen their social networking in early post-socialism. Some of them became managers of the new capitalist companies, while others invested in their own private farms’ mechanization. However, as I have shown above, the specific means by which they acquired their new positions varied substantially, depending on a variety of factors significant to this local community and its socialist history. It is relevant to note that Ferenc, Varga, Erdődi, and István all followed different paths under socialism. While Erdődi was doing private farming by leasing his own land from Alkotmány in the 1980s, Ferenc was working as the organizer of a household plot farming project in all three cooperatives. While Erdődi was deeply devoted to the Peasant Party, Varga, who was a member of the Communist Party, was leading the Alkotmány Cooperative in somewhat of

an entrepreneurial spirit, encouraging individual working groups monetarily to achieve productivity.

Grabbing Land from the Outside

However, there were other strategies to buy or claim land, which radically changed not only the land-ownership structure but also land use. People outside Balástya, who had no kinship nor local ties to the land in this region, emerged as new land owners in the years of post-socialist transformation. This group of people was as despised by the villagers as much as the local Land Distribution Committee. Many lawyers outside the village, from Szeged to Budapest, bought up compensation vouchers from older people who were unable to cultivate land. János (age of 62) described this group of “*land grabbers*” in a condescending tone:

They had never seen a hoe in their entire lives. They just wanted to wait for the right time when they could sell the land after its market value increased. They had no intention to cultivate the land. These lawyers did not even know how to use a hoe. Their parcels of land remained fallow and thus uncultivated. In Dunavecse,⁹⁸ the chair of the land distribution committee, who used to be the agronomist of the cooperative, declared that those parcels which were left uncultivated the owner had to be penalized. So ironically, within

⁹⁸ A Hungarian town in the County of Bács-Kiskun.

three years, 80 percent of land went back to the use of cooperative because Mr and Mrs Lawyer realized that he/she could also be penalized (2002).

Indeed, many of these lawyers who were not able to *pass on* the land to others, especially to foreigners as they had speculated, found themselves in trouble with the local autonomy. The local autonomy obliged land owners to keep their parcels mowed. But sometimes this rule did not apply to local large-scale landowners—especially if one happened to be on the Land Review Committee. However, other lawyers had different plans with the land, namely to establish not a land-based community but a religion-based one in the Great Plains. A lawyer from the Transdanubian city of Pécs purchased agricultural and non-agricultural land with his acquired compensation vouchers. He also purchased peasant houses in the area. In total, his territory expanded over forty hectares. Considering the fact that the average plot size was around 2 to 5 hectares in the 1990s, that was a substantial amount.

This territory came to be known as Nandafalva, the birthplace of Vaishayism⁹⁹ in Hungary. The Krishnas' communal center today is located in a remodeled peasant house where the members and visitors together make meals and participate in daily religious activities. In addition the founder of Nandafalva

⁹⁹ Krishna devotees first appeared in Hungary at the end of the 1970s, but only in the second wave of the mission, in the mid 1980s, did a viable community develop. Since 1989 the Community of the Hungarian Krishna conscious devotees (from now on HSKCON or Hare Krishnas) is a registered religion in Hungary. By 1993, half of the Hungarian population had heard of them.

owns six or more farm houses. It recruited a few of its members, not so successfully, from the rural population, but the majority of the people are from the urban areas. The base community consists of four families. They practice to some extent bio or organic gardening; however, their main income comes from outside the agricultural sector. While I was living in Balástya they erected a Hindu church, which was designed and built in the middle of the Great Plains. It was designed by the village architect, who was also a representative in the local autonomy.

The members of the Hindu Vasinava Association built this church for 10.000.000 Hungarian forints. The leaders of Visna God said that they wanted to “have a church built that fit into the Hungarian landscape with Indian features.” It is 50 to 60m² with a capacity of 120 visitors. The altar rotates and an outside church yard can accommodate 4-500 people. Nandafalva can be found thirty kilometers from Ópusztaszer, the National Historic Memorial Park, which is stretched on fifty hectares of land. These two establishments—the Memorial Park celebrating the national history of the Magyars and the Krishna Church celebrating something culturally rather foreign—seem to complement each other. The Memorial Park commemorates the Hungarian Conquest and the settlement of the Magyar Tribes in the Carpathian Basin. According to the national legend and origin myth, Ópusztaszer was the place where Árpád and his chieftains of the Hungarian (*Magyar*) tribes gathered in 896 AD to decide upon the laws and order of their new homeland. Having purchased forty hectares of land—with

compensation vouchers—in the middle of the Great Plains, the Hindu community was able to acquire physical and spiritual space for itself, which altered the lived and mapped landscape of this farming region.

Another example how so-called “outsiders” acquired a relatively large piece of land and other forms of property in the area was the account of a man in his late 50s from nearby Szeged. Some of the villagers referred to him as the “Oil Magnate.” Mr Szalonna purchased over one hundred hectares of land very close to the Hindu church and Krishna community center. He persuaded elderly peasants that it was “better to have cash than nothing” so he could buy their compensation vouchers, which he could use later at the land auctions. In addition to land he was able to purchase five peasant houses, a lake and two forests. He remodeled one of these adobe houses and furnished it comfortably (washing machine, dryer, telephone, TV) for himself and his partner, who was a social worker in Szeged. Being involved in the lucrative businesses of tapping oil lines and prostitution, he needed to set up a form of business for money-laundering. He opened a children’s camp, which also operated as a meeting site for conferences (the last one happened to be the *Szittyá* conference). He hired Romanian migrant workers and a few unemployed men from the area to “get things done.” His workers were paid on a daily basis under the table without any social compensation. Their job was to gather the remains of the former communist youth camps, such as tents, benches,

iron beds, etc., and transport them to the camp. This camp site was to accommodate around two hundred children.¹⁰⁰

His buildings were far better equipped than the neighboring farmers'. He had all the technology and illegal liaisons to "get things done." In order to attract workers to perform cheap labor to maintain the campsite, he opened a pub and let his workers have free drinks after they were done working for the day. He also made a verbal agreement with these laborers about letting them borrow his equipment, such as tractors, digging machines and electric saws, if they worked for him. These workers and some of the peasants in the area become dependent on these kinds of favors from Mr Szalonna. It seemed to be a mutual agreement between the involved parties, but soon the agreement turned into frequent verbal and physical abuse of the workers. According to the people that I talked to, he often hit his workers. (When he got kicked in the head by a horse and taken to the hospital in Szeged, his employees said to me "he deserved it.")

His plan for his new territory was not to practice agriculture but to establish a health resort by remodeling peasant houses in order to attract tourists from Austria and Germany. The resort's restaurant was to provide the visitors with Hungarian folklore, gypsy/*cigány* music accompanied by violins and contrabass, authentic national food such as *gulyás*, chicken *paprikás*, and stuffed cabbage with sour cream and certainly a well of home-made brandy, *pálinka* and wine. After a

¹⁰⁰ When I went back to visit in 2008, the camp was in disarray and the tourist site was pretty much part of the past.

satisfying and filling dinner, tourists and guests had the opportunity to go on a carriage ride, take a stroll in the forest, or fish in the nearby pond. He also hosted political leaders from the city of Szeged at this campsite. He invited them to hunt deer in his forests, followed by informal dinners with some drinking involved. These informal gatherings sometimes became significant spaces for negotiation and decision-making about land use in Balástya.

As these examples show, land and its social meanings changed drastically due to the presence of outsiders in the local community. Land became a market commodity, an optimal capital, and a means of speculation. Diverse social actors, rural entrepreneurs, speculators and opportunists came to this farming region to carve out a big piece for their own future in the chaotic years of land transformation. Many villagers, who in their own lifetime experienced the implementation of three land reforms (1945, 1947-1961, 1992), were aggravated by the land distribution. They did not celebrate nor share the enthusiasm—as was expected—of getting their original parcel back. It was oftentimes stated, “They should have left the damn thing (cooperative farms) as it was. People got used to working in the cooperatives.”

In the above sections, I have shown various ways one could lay hands on land and what ideas the new land owners had about how to use land. One major problem was the non-transparent nature of the land distribution, which provided some with the perfect time to seize the opportunity. Most of the farmers and

peasants openly resent the implementation of the land allocation in Balástya, for it became more and more obvious that return to private ownership led to the deterioration of the agricultural sector. More evidently, the transformation of property relations led to the negative transformation of social relations; it contributed to emergence of rural poverty and social inequality.

Land as Supreme God and Land as Burden

A large segment of the population in Balástya who could have claimed land was pensioners; they had grown old. They had neither the financial capital nor the physical strength to cultivate the land independently. Showing their wrinkled, age-spotted hands to me, they said, “We only need as much land as our plants do.” “Land was God but now it is only burden.” Or as another female informant put it, “The only land I need is *dirt*¹⁰¹ on my grave that is all the land that I want.” In 1961 these men and women, like others in the village, signed up to join one of the three cooperative farms. They did so sometimes as a result of psychological abuse, physical intimidation and political pressure. They had no choice but to join the cooperative in 1961; they lost their land and today they don’t want it back. Why is that? There is no simple answer, but in the cooperative sector, agricultural workers had a more or less steady income and were allowed to cultivate their individually

¹⁰¹ In Hungarian, the word “land” is *föld*, which encapsulates words such as land, earth, and dirt.

held household plots. These household plots ensured them with cash that they could use for buying goods for the house. Along with the destruction of the cooperatives, they lost their employment, social benefits and their entitlement to these household plots. They wished to hold on to their retirement and their health care benefits that they took for granted under socialism. The elderly men more so than women emphasized that they wanted the ancestral land back, something that their great-grandfathers “put their sweat and blood in it.” These elderly men, now in their late 70s, strongly hold onto the past, unlike their grandchildren, who have less sentimental value for the ancestral familial land. Most of the persons and families I talked to between 2001 and 2003 emphasized that they had no desire to have land back in the 1990s. The majority of them lacked the financial capital to begin individual farming and in actuality they claimed that what used to be “God” now meant extreme burden on families.

But I should also add the other aspects of why so many villagers who ended up claiming land with their compensation vouchers became disillusioned and disenchanted with the whole land-privatization procedure. One of these problems regarded the inadequate and inconsistent mapping of surveyed land and the other the power of what Butler (2004) may call the local “petty sovereigns” in Balástya. Oftentimes when someone was successfully amassing the necessary documentation to assert a claim to a specific plot, he found himself in a very challenging conundrum.

Either the same plot was measured to two persons or it was surveyed in such a way that made it impossible to pull it into any agricultural production. In the case of an elderly man who claimed a total of four hectares of plow land back, he was extremely upset with the local surveyor's job. Ambrus, "who was not even from Balástya measured my plot in a triangular shape, which made it unworkable if you wanted to use a tractor, simply you cannot turn around in it. I guess he just did not give horse dung." Or, in Auntie Erzsike's case, who told me sullenly that although she was not a cooperative farm member her mother was, therefore she submitted the paperwork to claim her mother's land. The maternal land was originally situated by the railway station. She even had some connection in the committee to foster her case, but that piece was allocated to some other individual. Auntie Erzsike furiously, who previously worked as an accountant at "Móra" said (2002):

You know, I even had a relative in the damn land distribution committee and I still could not have my mother's land back. It was allocated to someone else, who was working in this committee. I got so tired of the whole damn process and bureaucracy that I gave up.

For the most part, the Land Office did not have too much delay with registration, except it had serious problems with survey maps, as I illustrated above, which again contributed to the confusion. Sometimes the actual territory

and a map of it was not the same; they did not correspond. More often than not, the size of the territory and the golden crown value did not match, which was why some conceptual owners of share proportions received land in the areas of the other cooperatives. Before the privatization of productive land in 1990 there were 3590 parcels of land in the territory of Balástya, and by 2002 that number had increased to 7300 parcels. Or, to explain this by other measures, there were 1756 hectares of 18 183 golden crowns waiting for distribution. This data shows that not only the land ownership but productive land itself became fragmented, which made it almost impossible to make a living out of it.

In addition, some questions revolved around the historical legitimacy of claims. Some were evaluated on a moral basis, others on an economic or political basis, and still others simply on a historical basis. For instance, the people who were landless prior to the Land Distribution of 1945 were considered by the landed peasantry as morally weak, good-for-nothing people and somewhat feeble-minded who did not know how to work the land; therefore they did not deserve any. These landless people, who were manorial laborers on large estates, joined the collective farms first in 1947. During my conversation with Auntie Jolika, I was told (2001):

These good-for-nothing people were the first ones who joined the cooperatives in the late 40s... The whole problem with this land distribution was that these people received 30 golden crowns, whose great-grandparents never had land in their possession. They were the

first ones who could take land out. Yes, they worked in the cooperative but they were not the original landowners.

These descendants of former serfs and manorial workers—for centuries—had been looked down upon by the peasantry. This social prejudice reached but did not pass the 20th century. In 2001, peasants, mostly wealthy peasants talked about this group of people as “good-for-nothing, stupid, lazy and corruptible.” More importantly this group of people was associated not only with landlessness but the lack of knowledge how to properly work the land. Therefore they had very little social standing in this community. There is definitely a social continuity in social stratification between landed and landless groups over decades reaching back to pre-socialist times in Hungary; however, as I have shown, having land became more of a burden for the present rather than a blessing from the past.

Complexity of the Land Distribution

The most difficult problem was resolving the issue of share proportion holdings. As president of the Land Office Zoltán Micsik explained it in 2002, “In the time of collectivization there was a lot more valuable plantation in terms of golden crown value. The branch of cultivation changed over time and plow fields are less valuable today.” This meant simply that the value of certain plots

drastically fell, while others increased. In the case of Balástya, another related problem occurred when some part of the distributable land became the part of the inner territory of the village itself, due to development over the socialist period. It also decreased the amount of distributable land, but at the same time its share proportion value remained.

In the Balástya region, if there was no land in any of the former cooperatives for distribution, in that case the Land Office promised that those people who possessed golden crowns would be compensated. According to this amended law, these people were entitled to be the recipients of 4000 Hungarian forints/golden crown. Many times on many occasions, when I visited people in their homes they pulled out paperwork from a wrinkled envelope to show me that even though they had golden crowns they never received any money. Or as Aunite Jolika told me while laughing loudly, “They call me a king and I don’t even have a crown.” A lot people found themselves in similar situations; it was either that they did not request land, simply because they could not cultivate it without any machinery and they were too old to establish independent family farming, or in some situations (as described above) the land became too elastic, while in others it was too tight.

Other factors also contributed to the confusion about the allocation of land to former owners. One, as I noted earlier, was that many former landowners did not claim land, as they had already retired. The other was that some of the former

owners had already passed away. Dániel Józsa, the other land surveyor who took over the files from the Land Review Committee, said, “We need to do a lot of research. There is a lot of undistributed land, there are many deceased people and the inheritors did not take care of the land, either” (2002). Some successors however did claim the ancestral land for sentimental reasons or for the sake of social justice. But these inheritors, living in urban areas for the most part, had no intention of settling down in the rural area and cultivating the land. They left the claimed land fallow, which raised a lot of verbal criticism from the people whose land abutted that of the new neighbors’. Consequently, there were a lot of unresolved and contested land issues in Balástya.¹⁰²

To resolve the chaos lingering around land distribution, the Ministry of Land and Regional Development appointed Gábor Tasnádi the new leader of Csongrád County's Land Office in June 25, 2001. At the age of 28, he had worked for the Csongrád County's Department of Agriculture as a senior official in 1976. Later he became the deputy of the Land Office's leader in 1990 and remained in this position until 1995. Villagers said that “he knows the county parcel by parcel,” and he started working with the village economists¹⁰³ on how to remedy the situation revolving around the work of the land distribution committees. In accordance with the 1993 II. Par. 5, the closure of share proportion holdings was

¹⁰² According to the Ministry of Land and Regional Development regarding the settlement of Balástya, the following could be stated in 2002: In the case of the Alkotmány Coop there were 579 hectares of undistributed land. In the case of the Móra Coop there were 347 hectares of undistributed land, and in the case of Rákóczi Coop there were 433 hectares of undistributed land recorded in the land registry.

¹⁰³ A village economist, *falugazdász* was employed to manage land registration and land-base assistance.

the job of the Land and Regional Development Ministry's Agricultural Office, in which the Land Office also participated.

Chaos was mounting and complaints took the form of legal action in the courts. There were 250 appeals and 27 legal cases in the Balástya region alone. (Dense farm areas with wells on sandy soil proved to be some of the most complicated cases.) These appeals were made to the second type of committee, called the Land Review Committee or *Földkiosztó Bizottság*. The Land Distribution Committees' work came under review by these established Land Review Committees in the fall of 1993. While the land distribution committees were mostly in charge of land compensation, the land review committee's task was to deal with the share holders' claims. "This is when the abuse of power led to major corruptions and the establishment of the land review committee became oil on fire," as Jóska angrily remembers. István Vincze, the Representative of Csongrád County, echoes this sentiment. He was highly critical of the work of the Land Distribution Committees working in Balástya as well as in the entire county and expressed his criticism at various political and social platforms. He explained in his report for Newspaper of Csongrád County (2002):

Land committees working in 1992-95 were incompetent and not good-willed. At the beginning of the 1990s, I had 3590 issues related

to land disputes, altogether 11.000 hectares. Now 7.000 hectares of land are left and .1000 hectares are waiting to be distributed.¹⁰⁴

In Balástya there were five men on the Land Review Committee, but after a few months of operation two of its members quit, realizing the unjust and corruptive measurements that the committee took under its authority. Jóska, who also served in one of the Land Distribution Committees, told me in a fury:

Imre and Ördögh were good people; when they saw what was going on, they left the committee. The Land Distribution and the Land Review Committees at this point legally had the right to swap land bases (shareholding and compensation land basis). And this is when the big *biznisz* began for real—gigantic ones.

As I described earlier in detail, two foundational land bases were key to the distribution and allocation of land in the 1990s. One was called the compensation land base and the other one was the share holders' land base. These were strictly defined by law in terms of who could claim land from which land base and how much. However, the Land Review Committees and the Land Distribution Committees now secured by the law could “legally” exchange land bases. So what happened? Earlier, if the Land Distribution Committee designated any land as part of the compensation land base then that was sacred and inviolable. This compensation land base was set aside for those individuals whose property and

¹⁰⁴ This is a county-based assessment. The data refers to Csongrád County including the region of Balástya.

non-property had been statetized by the socialist state. It included peasants' land and other assets like machinery. Originally, these people who received compensation vouchers had the priority at land auctions to bid on a certain piece of land. One of the Land Distribution Committee members explained this to me (2002):

Earlier, if we [Land Distribution Committee] defined a plot as part of the compensation base then that was sacred and inviolable. These two committees, however, began swapping land bases and gained ownership over valuable land. For example, one of the members of the Land Review Committee acquired 110 hectares of land and forest by being able to manipulate the land bases that were identified earlier as 'compensation' and 'share holding' land base. The other member in this very same committee, 'who married into a serious economy,' came from a well-to-do peasant family, his father and Uncle Sanyi were buddies...he gained a 70 hectares of land.

These stories were going around in the village as villagers continually told me how dissatisfied and angry they were with both committees' ethical conduct. The degree of responses to the unfair and corrupt arrangement of land distribution and land review committee varied from family to family; however, the majority of the people repeatedly emphasized that people in the committees benefited the most. Boros, one of the three members of this Land Review Committee and who acquired 110 hectares, was badly beaten in two neighboring villages—which was

also reported in the Csongrád County newspaper—“by two men wearing black masks.” The other two Land Review Committee members’ hoop-houses were severely damaged when someone sliced the vinyl sheets of the hoop-houses with a sharp knife. A few villagers openly conveyed to me “this kind of men deserves such retribution.” It was widely known that committee members, whether Small-holder Party members, former Communist leaders, or former cooperatives managers, were able to purchase and/or manipulate these compensation vouchers to add to their own private holdings. In this respect they were in a stronger position to become entrepreneurs or family farmers to initiate their future private enterprises as they seized the opportunity to grab assets. These assets, as I have shown in this section, included compensation vouchers, which became a lucrative currency in this transformational period.

In sum, in this section I showed the myriad of tribulations that occurred during land distribution in Balástya. They included some of the following social, moral, political and economic problems: the non-transparency of the four types of land base, the extensive power of the local “petty sovereigns” in the committees, the inconsistency of mapping, conflicting moral and historical land claims, the change of the golden crown value over time, the complex nature of land auction and bidding with compensation vouchers, and the “meanings of land.” Policy-makers and macro-economists did not pay attention to the micro-politics of everyday life and how the implementation of the Land Privatization Act of 1992

would unfold regionally and locally. Its materialization further destabilized the state sector's previous achievements and called into question the future of post-socialist agriculture.

Conclusion

The rapid process of liquidation of the three cooperative farms and the abolition of household plot farming showed that the “politicization of agriculture” resulted in the decline of agricultural production, growth in rural unemployment and poverty, and uncertainty in the everyday lives of the rural population of Balástya. This *fuzzy condition* of the transformation created, as I showed in this chapter, a hybrid state of affairs at a variety of levels from the structure of land ownership to the social relations of production. Although I found a strong desire among the villagers to re-establish private ownership rights, and they agreed that morally the original land owners' claims should have been satisfied, most of the villagers I talked to emphasized that the destruction of the cooperative farms was bad party politics.

The initial euphoria about the end of socialism and the great expectations of capitalism swiftly faded away when post-socialist citizens of Balástya lost their wide range of guaranteed benefits such as rights to employment, housing, education, health care, and to the household plot—all these had been key

elements of the “cursed regime” (*átkos rendszer*). In post-socialist Balástya, the villagers felt greatly disappointed in the change of regime and deeply disempowered by the process. Or as Uncle Peti, a small-scale farmer put it, “Yes, *this is capitalism for few, but for most of us, it is the worst communist regime.*” The “fuzzy”¹⁰⁵ shift and/or anxious transformation from market socialism to market capitalism had an apparent devastating impact on the majority of villagers’ livelihood, whose response to the uncertainty of the altered market relations was the revitalization of hoop-household economy and peasant economy.

¹⁰⁵ Here, I refer to Verdery’s description of property relations in Transylvania during decollectivization, which she labels as “fuzzy property.” I maintain that the shift/ing from a hybrid mode of production to an altered, but still hybrid mode of production today is as murky as property rights in the case of Hungary. See also Verdery’s discussion “Fuzzy Property: Rights, Power, and Identity in Transylvania’s Decollectivization” (1999) in *Uncertain Transitions: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*, 53-83.

CONCLUSION

The future transformation of the hoop-house economy

The Hungarian peasant is not needed in the EU. The EU will step on our toes and tell us what to grow. You know, the EU is like when a young couple gets together—independence will disappear. In socialism we had the *tovarishis* (the soviet cadres) who told us what to grow; now the EU will (Aunti Csöpi, age 58, 2002).

Aunti Csöpi's perceptive insights suggest various interrelated themes found in the conclusion of this dissertation: the ways in which rural people negotiate their future lives in a constant dialogue with the socialist past. My focus here is on the predicament and the future of the hoop-house in the political economy of the European Union. I concentrate on a few arenas in which the projection and negotiation of the future occur, including local, national, and transnational discourses of Europeanization.

My aim here is to examine the interplay among the local, national, and transnational economies; I propose that the hoop-house economy, which emerged in market-socialism on the socialist household plots as a local mode of production (1960s–1980s)—and endured in the first phase of post-socialism as a part of both

the formal and informal economy (1989–2003)—may be threatened in the current processes of European Unionization (2004–today). Through the analysis of the hoop-house economic model I suggested that the shifting meanings of the hoop-house economy mirror the anxious transformation from socialism to capitalism, all the way up to the creation of the European Union.

Having listened to the anxious voices of the villagers and participated in multiple conversations with many of Balástya’s inhabitants in their homes or on their farm, I argue that the EU’s future agrarian restrictions and regulations on agricultural production may put a large percentage of the hoop-house economies at risk and push them into the margin of the larger European and global economy. Having evaluated past and present political processes and agrarian policies, I claim that the social and cultural consequences of these top-down decisions are much more complex and multifold than they are often theorized in political and economic discourses.

The Socialist Hoop-House Economy

As I demonstrated in this dissertation, the hoop-house economy that emerged on the *socialist household plots* in the years of forced collectivization became the very core of the rural informal economy as well as the pillar of the national socialist economy. The symbiotic relationship between large-scale

socialist (collective) and hoop-house (family) farming was systematically pursued, and as a result a dual or contradictory economy occurred. This market-oriented economy was relatively flexible and decentralized, which allowed the Hungarian agriculture to prosper and expand internationally. Therefore, at the national level, the outcome of this economic symbiosis was considered phenomenal and the Hungarian agricultural production was viewed as a “miracle” in the Eastern Block.

At the local level, the symbiotic relationship between the formal and informal economy provided room for innovation that benefited the rural population engaged in the informal economy. The design of the hoop-house was a local innovation that shaped a new mode of production in response to Balástya region’s poor soil quality and extreme climate. It was not only a niche “technology” but also the “tactics of resistance” performed by the peasants of Balástya in opposition to the “strategies of power” (de Certeau 1984) held by the socialist state coercing collective ownership and farming. In addition, I suggested that the active involvement in the hoop-house economy also reflected local people’s commitment to land and their knowledge of it.

The hoop-house economic practice and technology were copied and mastered by other members of the community and became a widely employed mode of vegetable production by the late 1970s. The active participation in this *labor- and innovation-intensive economy* contributed to the relative wealth of the villagers; this is the time period when two-story houses were built and modern

appliances and furniture were purchased to embellish the interior of the family house and display its wealth. Villagers recalled this time period with enthusiasm, “Everyone got ahead little by little.” “We could start building a house and buy a used car.” Or, to use the socialist language of the time, the informal economy allowed rural folks “to improve their lives and increase their standard of living,” for they could supplement their very nominal wages earned in the collective sector.

Therefore the hoop-house economy produced not only for household consumption to “maintain,” “support,” and “hold up” the base but also created surplus to “increase” and “augment” it. Thus it engaged in two socioeconomic movements or circuits: Base→Base’ and/or Base→Money→Base’. As I pointed out, “profit on the small” was also accumulated by a few entrepreneurial-minded producers, which allowed them to turn their hoop-house economies into *liminal* ones after the fall of state-socialism (1989). A very few of these liminal economies—as I presented—were even able to produce “profit on the large” and transformed their economies into *maximal* ones in the first phase of post-socialism (1989-2003).

The Post-Socialist Hoop-house Economy

The collapse of state-socialism in Hungary (1989) indicated not only the beginning of a new political and “property regime” (Verdery 1996) but also the collapse of the agrarian sector. The Hungarian Democratic Party (*Magyar Demokrata Party*) began the process of decollectivization; the Antall government issued the Land Privatization Act in 1992. Its implementation became very complex and extremely corrupt both at the local and the national level. The “politicization of agriculture” created a myriad of property rights and introduced new bureaucratic measures. An examination of the Sapard Program reveals the following ownership structures and ways of agricultural production in different parts of Hungary after 1992: 1) the complete destruction of former collective farms and their assets; 2) collective farms remained and functioned as “holding co-operatives;” 3) establishment of medium- and large-scale successor farms run by former collectives’ managers, known as the “Green Barons”; 4) formation of new-type agricultural associations; 5) restructuring of socialist collective and state farms; and 6) persistence of small-scale and/or subsistence-oriented farms with less than 2 hectares of land (Sapard Plan 2000).

In Balástya, land privatization and the destruction of the three collective farms began in 1993 when the “Alkotmány,” “Rákóczi,” and Móra” collective farms’ land and assets were up for grabs. Certain people—especially those “who were close to the fire,” as the villagers told me—took advantage of the initial chaos and got hold of significant resources. The majority of the villagers expressed that land

privatization was almost as disruptive and dramatic as collectivization of the 1960s was. Less than fifty years after the 1945 Land Reform, peasants and agricultural workers again found themselves without the adequate machinery and appropriate forces of production to farm their land independently. *Hence history seemed to repeat itself once again.* But that was not all.

In 1993, with a variety of legal measurements, the Hungarian Democratic Forum also dismantled the institution of the household plot farming. As a consequence, the members of the former collective farms lost their use-right to the household plots they had farmed for twenty-five years. Consequently, this had a tremendous effect on the hoop-house economy, for the hoop-houses were erected on these household plots. Most importantly, what got destroyed with the abolishment of the household plot farming institution and the destruction of the collective sector was the four imperative aspects of the Hungarian dual or hybrid economy: 1) access to the collective farms' machinery; 2) supply of seeds, fertilizers and chemicals; 3) access to the socialist market, and 4) access to employment. As I pointed it out earlier, collective farms organized not only the collection of products raised in the household plot economy but also the sale via the socialist sector. After the change of the regime in Hungary these venues vanished almost instantly, and private producers—with more land that they could farm—found themselves without support. In the context of the hoop-house agricultural production, producers faced the challenges of the free market, which was

unregulated and strictly competitive or as they described this new economic situation—it was “wild capitalism, where the laws of wild wolves rule.”¹⁰⁶

Therefore, after 1993, due to the fragmented ownership of land and the destruction of the collective sector, two things emerged in the context of the hoop-house economy in Balástya: 1) a few hoop-house economies moved from the informal sector and became integrated into the formal agricultural sector (either as part of the liminal or maximal hoop-house economy), and 2) most of the hoop-houses remained on the margin of the post-socialist economy (as part of the minimal hoop-house economy). In the latter case, the hoop-house economy functioned as a mere rural survival strategy to combat the uncertainties of the market system and “wild capitalism.” The transformation from market-socialism to market-capitalism, which began with land privatization and continued with the capitalization of the Hungarian agrarian sector, proved to be highly problematic and full of contradictions. The imposition of the neo-liberal model of private land ownership that was supposed to promote economic efficiency and high productivity led to the dramatic decrease in agricultural production and created a wide spectrum of “losers” and a minute fragment of “winners,” which explains why land privatization was so much resisted in rural Hungary. Consequently, when viewed in the larger context, the year of 1993 came to symbolize the “black year” in

¹⁰⁶ It was “wild capitalism, where the laws of wild wolves rule.” In Hungarian, “ez vad kapitalizmus, ahol a piac farkas törvényei uralkodnak.” The Hungarian sentence refers to the rules of the market, which is uncontrollable and untamable.

the history of the Hungarian countryside (Csíste & Kovách 2002). In my opinion, it marked the social and economic *remarginalization* of the rural population.

Hungary's Pre-Accession to the European Union

Primary producers and agricultural entrepreneurs participating in all three forms of the hoop-house economy (minimal, liminal, and maximal) but especially in the minimal and liminal hoop-house economy—I reemphasize it—already struggled with the consequences of privatization and the loss of state subsidies, yet had to face another challenge, namely to “get the Hungarian agriculture prepared for the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy.” This process, what I call the “Europeanized Unionization,” presented another slim possibility to some Hungarians to be part of the imagined West and capitalism, but yet again the reality was filled with great disappointment and anxiety at various levels.

In the last section of my dissertation I focus on Hungary’s pre-accession into the EU and outline some, but certainly not all, of the predicaments of the European Unionization process in the light of the national and the local hoop-house economy. These themes are grouped into the following themes: 1) the EU’s Sapard Plan and local corruption; 2) Western-type family farming and local particularities; 3) the EU’s bureaucratic institution and local interpretations; 4) de-

or re-peasantization of rural Hungary and local improvisations; and 5) the rise of a new Iron Curtain and the marginalization of Central and Eastern Europe.

First, I discuss the period of Hungary's pre-accession to the EU, which came to be known as the restructuration stage of the Hungarian agriculture. This stage was to be achieved with the EU-sponsored SAPARD Plan¹⁰⁷ (Special Accession Program for Agriculture and Rural Development) to prepare the Hungarian agrarian sector for the EU's CAP (Common Agricultural Policy). Second, I show how one young entrepreneur in Balástya was selected to be the first token EU "family farmer" in Csongrád County—a legal category used by CAP and introduced by the Hungarian *Alliance of Young Democrats & Civic Party* (FIDESZ) during the political campaign in 2002. Third, I present how the people of Balástya interpreted the supra-structure of the bureaucratic order of the coming EU and how they negotiated their own future in a constant dialogue with the socialist past. Fourth, I show how small-scale and primary producers became further marginalized in the pre-accession period, in which they gained neither financial nor social capital. Finally, I propose that the EU policies and its globalizing tendencies will discriminate against former socialist countries' national economies and consequently will redraw the "Iron Curtain"—once dismantled in 1989 between the

¹⁰⁷ The EU's PHARE program was designed for the development of the region's infrastructure in the context of EU integration. ISPA was designed for environmental programs, while SAPARD was for the regional distribution of agricultural monies. One of the regions in the South Plains where I did my research had three counties belonging to one region; these are Csongrád, Bács-Kiskun, and Békés.

West and the *Othered East Europe*—twenty years later in 2009 (cf Bunzl 2000; Grant 1995; Parman ed. 1998; Ries 2000; Wolfe 2000b).

The Sapard Plan¹⁰⁸ and Local Corruption

In the eyes of the founding members of the EU, the former socialist agriculture was viewed as primitive, pre-modern, irrational, and disorganized, and therefore it desperately needed to be restructured. According to the criteria used in the European Union, a decisive proportion of Hungary's total area (96.1%) qualifies as rural area, inhabited by almost three quarters of the population (73.6%). This amount of land and that many people's livelihood had to be reconfigured and hence *updated* to EU norms. Therefore the EU issued the agricultural pre-accession Sapard Plan to implement CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) in Hungary with the guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ In accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1268/1999 of 21 June 1999 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 2759/1999 of 22 December 1999 laying down detailed rules for its application – and other legislation referred to in these – the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development of Hungary has prepared and submits the SAPARD Plan of Hungary (SAPARD Plan 2000: 1).

¹⁰⁹ The proportion of fundamentally rural areas in Hungary (61.5%) is substantially above the Union's figure (47%) and their share from the total population is 3.5 times higher than the ratio of the EU member states. The proportion of the population living in fundamentally and typically rural areas is altogether 34% higher in Hungary than the Union's average, which is due to the typical Hungarian settlement structure.

This document intends to present the elements of agriculture and rural development which, considering the capabilities and the commitments of the country, determine the objectives and the means connected to the objectives *in order to enable Hungary to qualify for the use of the assistance provided in the pre-accession SAPARD programme by accepting and applying the relevant norms of the EU* (SAPARD 2000: 1)

The assistance from the EU—via the Sapard program and the Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development—was to assist Hungarian producers in modernizing their farms to ensure future market efficiency and productivity. A number of Sapard offices opened up in the Csongrád County like the one in Kistelek, whose leader (Regional Development Manager) I interviewed in 2002. This office was opened in the main building of the Local Autonomy in October of 1999. When I spoke to Mr Bakács, the office had two employees, who had access to the Internet for their main source of information about the Sapard Program’s regional grants. These employees, along with the leader of the office, received their training in the Netherlands. Mr Bakács told me, “You see, Sapard is not political. Advising about the EU is free for everyone; however, writing project proposals to get a Sapard grant is not, one must pay for it.” He continued with noticeable irony in his voice:

Mostly, mid-entrepreneurs come here to the Sapard office for advice but these people already have some capital. A peasant who is in his 60s will not renew his methods of farming. He has, let's say, two hectares. He is not going to change his farming technology. And there are too many of these little ones (small-scale and primary producers) working with one or two hectares of plots in Hungary. I would say, 80 percent of these people will be redundant in the EU (August 2002).

Both of his predictions sadly turned out to be accurate and experienced by many producers first-hand in Balástya. To be a recipient of the Sapard program's grant, one needed to present a written proposal detailing what the money is needed for and what it would be used for in the applicant's existing economy. Who could write these proposals and where were these grants publicized? At the local level, the allocation of grant monies became a lucrative business for those who had access to the information regarding the Sapard pre-accession program. Mr Bakács, the Regional Manager of the Sapard program, openly told me that he not only writes these proposals but is also on the committee with the mayor of Kistelek, and participates in making the final decision about which applicant receives what grant. His "paycheck" was based on a 25 percent share of the granted money.¹¹⁰

In September 2002, I visited the main Sapard office in Szeged and talked to the employees there. I concluded that the story that I was told by the Sapard

¹¹⁰ In 2002, the amount of investment aid was 50 million Hungarian forints (source: Gazdaprogram: az agrárium jövője, FVM Sapard Hivatal, 2002).

Regional Manager of Kistelek was not an atypical. When I asked one of the younger employees if she ever had an older peasant come into the office wanting to apply for a grant to rebuild the pigsty for his 15 pigs, she laughed at me. In general, grant monies were granted to those who had already some “seed money,” “initial capital,” or “social connections” to apply for this program. Countrywide, it became a corrupt practice and EU grants like the Sapard ones got into the hands of those who were educated young entrepreneurs or had some cash to manipulate these grants by bribery. In sum, due to the misinformation that was presented to producers, millions of Euros were lost and this potential source for capital investment in agriculture became wasted by 2002.

Western-type Family Farming and Local Particularities

Now let me turn to the second problem that occurred in the pre-accession period that equally concerned millions of those whose livelihoods primarily depended on agriculture and whose very lifestyle became an obstacle to “progress” and “modernization.” By 2002, the future fate of the Hungarian agriculture in the EU came highly politicized. The Alliance of Young Democrats & Civic Party (FIDESZ), who partially lost its supporters in the countryside in the mid-1990s introduced a new agricultural category to appeal to Hungarian producers and rural entrepreneurs. In addition to the already existing categories of the small-scale

producer, primary producer, and agricultural entrepreneur, it introduced a category also used in the documents of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. It was the category of the "family farmer and family economy" (*családi gazdálkodó* and *családi gazdaság*). What did it entail and who could qualify for being a family farmer in Hungary? The category itself seemed opaque as millions of producers were farming their land in a family unit.

However, in accordance with the Land Law (1994. LV.tv.) a "family economy" is an economic unit in which most family members work (such as a spouse, partner, children, parents, or grandparents) but at least one person has to do farming full-time. In order to register your farm as a "family economy" at the Land Ministry you needed: 1) a statement indicating that family farming is a life-time activity for you as of January 1st, 2005; 2) at least a high-school level training in agriculture, or at least three years experience working in agricultural; 3) a registration card for being either a registered primary producer or an agricultural entrepreneur; 4) a statement in which you demonstrated that the center of your family economy was in the settlement where your permanent address was for at least the past 3 years; 5) a statement about the amount of land you owned or used and its data had to coincide with the one you had on your registration card; and 6) the recommendation letter from the Small-holders' Circle.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Source: Gazdaprogram: az agrárium jövője. 2002. Ministry of Land and Regional Development, Ministry of Finance and the Hungarian Investment Bank

Becoming a “family economy” resonated with many producers’ ideal way of farming, but more importantly it seemed a good opportunity to gain more assistance and loans for future land purchase and agrarian investment. Consequently, a “family farmer” could take advantage of the state subsidies and tax deductions.¹¹² However, in practice, in order to be a *Hungarian family farmer* you needed other things, such as social connections, some capital, and at least 30 hectares of land on which you had already established a well-functioning farm.

In Csongrád County, Zoltán Kocsis, who lived in Balástya, had these entire official and non-official credentials became the first “family farmer.” Although he did not get the recommendation letter from the local Small-holders’ Circle of Balástya, he found an informal channel through which he was able to obtain one for his nomination. Zoltán was friends with someone in the Land Office in Szeged, who was good friends with someone else in the Land Office in Kistelek; this person not only gave the tip to Zoltán about the opportunity of the “family farmer” but also wrote the nomination letter for him. Zoltán said:

¹¹² 1) In case of investment the family economy received + 10 % of the nominal. It was broken down to the following: 1a) for purchasing machinery, 25% + 10%, 1b) for investing in a new building, 25% + 10%, and 1c) settling a new plantation, 50% + 10%. 2) Supplementary assistance was granted if 2a) 1–10 hectares for fruits and grapes, + 8.000 forints; 2b) 10.01–300 hectares for protein plants, + 12.000 forints; and 2c) 10.01–300 hectares for grains and sunflower seeds, + 8.000 forints. In addition, the state offered 3) a favorable credit construction for operating and maintain a family economy such as: 3a) to purchase land, 100%; 3b) to buy a depot or renovate one, or establish one, 50%; 3c) to settle a plantation, 50%; 3d) to buy a new machine, 50%; and 3e) for rotating funds, 75% (source: *Gazdaprogram: az agrárium jövője*. 2002. Ministry of Land and Regional Development, Ministry of Finance and the Hungarian Investment Bank).

I had only an hour to decide if I wanted to do it. I was so nervous. But I didn't see anything wrong with it, so I said "yes." But I needed the recommendation letter from the Circle of Small-Holders' from Balástya, but their president didn't sign the papers so I had to call a friend of mine fast, who was actually the president of Csongrád County's Small Holders' Circle and he wrote it (2003).

Recollecting the ceremony of his official registration as a family farmer, he said while smiling:

It was a well-orchestrated ceremony televised in Hungary to support the voters' base of the Young Democrats & Civic Party. You see all the big wigs of the Csongrád County and the Ministry were there to highlight this event's importance. I received a certificate of merit from András Vonza (dr.) the Minister of Land and Regional Development. I also received the first family farmer's registration certificate in the Csongád County from Sándor Farkas and the chair of the Agricultural House's Committee. László Vincze, the Parliament representative of Csongád Contry, Gábor Tasnádi, the director of the Ministry of Land and Regional Developoment of Csongrád County's Land Office, Sándor Nagy, the mayor of Kistelek, László Ujvári, the mayor of Balástya, László Tóth, the chair of the county's Small Holders' Circle, and Sándor Szigeti (dr), the director of Animal Health Station were all present at the ceremony. It was all for show, you know... (2003).

I went to this ceremony myself to observe the political rhetoric during the ceremony. He spoke slowly and with seriousness to dramatize the significance of this event that would “strengthen and transform the Hungarian agriculture once and for all.” Gábor Tasnádi, in his ceremonial introduction, said:

In Balástya, the existence of family economies is a tradition. Upon the ministry’s decision, in each county, the registration certificate would be handed to people at official ceremonies because with establishing family economies a long-term process begins, which would influence rural people in the future. Forming family economies will provide greater possibilities for those who work in the EU’s agricultural system. Many people had already registered and they are eligible for the special assistance program (2003).

After Tasnádi, Sándor Nagy, the mayor of Kistelek gave a short speech introducing Csongrád County’s first family farmer:

Zoltán Kocsis is 33 years old and married. He has two children. He is from Balástya. He finished High School in Kistelek and afterwards he started working on his parents’ family farm. Since 1993 he had been an independent entrepreneur. Now he studies at the College of Agriculture of Hódmezővásárhely to be an agricultural engineer (2003).

Therefore Zoltán became the token EU “family farmer”—young, agile, educated, ambitious, and with strong family values. He was selected for a political agenda to promote the Alliance of Young Democrats & Civic Party’s (FIDESZ) and increase its neo-liberal voters’ base, which supported Hungary’s accession to the EU. This political platform pledged that future family economies would be able to compete with western family farmers in the integrated European Union. It failed to mention, however, that Hungary needed three thousand to five thousand family farmers and their farms would not even be compatible with each other in the long run. But what would happen to at least 1 million Hungarian producers whose livelihoods depended on agricultural production?

Zoltán and his parents farm 35 hectares of land. They have a very sophisticated and well-equipped farm that I put in the category of the maximal hoop-house economy, for it has a mechanized irrigation and computerized heating system. He has 10.000 m² of land covered with heated hoop-houses, and 15.000 m² of land covered with cold hoop-houses, which is a significantly large area for hoop-house production. They raise potatoes on 5.000 m² and, cauliflower and peppers on 5.000 m² (all in the heated hoop-houses), and they produce potatoes on three hectares in the open fields. The rest of their land is forested or left for grass. When I was talking to Zoltán in January 2003 he was thinking about developing the farm by building a new hoop-house on 4.000 m² with the assistance and agrarian credit set aside only for “family farmers.” He was also planning to build a packaging area

and a cooling storage area. His investment project plan was also written by a grant writer, to whom Zoltán paid a huge percentage when his project was awarded, but as he said: “It was a fair deal, and it was worth all the money. I got the grant.” He established a capital-intensive hoop-house economy in Balástya, but not everyone could take advantage of this politically fueled ad hoc opportunity.¹¹³ Only three other entrepreneurs applied and got registered as family farmers in Balástya when I was living there.

Although most policy makers in Europe agree that the EU wants to promote “family economies” and smaller-scale production, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in fact rewards larger producers, for the CAP has traditionally rewarded farmers who produce more: larger farms have benefited much more from subsidies than smaller farms. For example, a farm with 1000 hectares earning one hundred extra euros per hectare makes 100,000 extra euro, while a 10-hectare farm would only make an extra 1000 euro. As a result most CAP subsidies have made their way to large scale farmers. So while subsidies allow small farms to exist, they funnel most profits to larger scale operations. In the case of Balástya, the average size of a plot is very small: 1–3 hectares. In Denmark, for instance, the average size is 70 hectares; in Hungary it is 3.

¹¹³ The purchase of vinyl for the hoop-house belonged to the category of investment, only if the hoop-house was a permanent (cemented) and not mobile one. However, only rural entrepreneurs and family farmers could apply for these investment grants not primary producers.

EU's Bureaucracy and Local Interpretations

Hungary submitted a membership application to the EU on 31 March 1994, and at a summit in Copenhagen in December 2002 Hungary was one of ten countries invited to join the EU in 2004. The 2003 Hungarian European Union referendum was scheduled to take place on 12 April 2003 to decide whether Hungary should join the European Union. The questions that I am raising are then: Who benefits from establishing a European Market by integrating Eastern European countries? What will happen to millions of Hungarian small-scale and primary producers who barely survived the first phase of post-socialist transformation? And what will be the future of the hoop-house economy in the EU? These questions lead my discussion to its third topic, which is how the people of Balástya negotiated the coming accession of the EU in a constant dialogue with the socialist past. I demonstrate that in the years of Hungary's pre-accession to the EU, the top-down policies came to symbolize "irrationality," and "exploitation" to the local people of Balástya. It was often associated with "danger," "disease," "infection," "colonization," and "destiny." The omnipotence and omnipresence of the EU generated new meanings about power relations and inequalities, and often the EU was portrayed as the socialist state. In the eyes of the villagers the EU was the filthy and contagious enemy that was going to spread its disease in Hungary. As one of the younger gardeners said:

There is already overproduction here and the import of western produce flooded our markets. These westerners bring their produce to Hungary. I am telling you, Hungary will become the garbage disposal of the EU. Not only [do] they bring their stuff here but also all the insects and diseases come from the West. For instance, we got Dutch potatoes along with the flies that also infected the flowers. The infected chickens came from Belgium and the mad cow disease came from England. That is EU infection (2003).

When the question of Hungary's EU integration was approached, people apparently felt apprehensive and a typical response was, "Hungary is such a small country; it had always been occupied by the Turks, the Habsburgs, the Germans, the Soviets, and now the EU." Implied in this statement and many like it was the idea that Hungary was doomed to be part of a more powerful entity and consequently subjugated to it throughout its history—as if it was Hungary's bad fortune, inevitable and predictable. There was a latent social unrest, a fear of uncertainty and confusion about the EU's coming to Hungary. People in the village kept asking me: "What is the EU?" "Does it mean that we are going to get as much subsidies as Western farmers?" People picked up minuscule pieces of information by watching TV and listening to the radio and did not really understand the logic of the market, which seemed irrational and ridiculous. The information that was spread by the grapevine encompassed everything from the placement of manure

and animal hygiene to pig slaughtering and poppy seed production. As János, a young entrepreneur put it very comically when he condemned the notion of “catching up with the EU.”

The EU wants us to put ceramic tiles on the walls of the pigsties and it wants us to provide a toy for the pig to play with? And the pig also needs a slaughter-house passport and a plastic and steel ENAR code or whatever punched in the ears...? What the hell is that? I don't get it. The only tiles you can see in my house are on my bathroom wall. And I don't have a passport but a pig should? This is utterly ridiculous (2003).

Together with the EU's looming presence, stories and rumors were a process through which people began evaluating their socialist past. A woman in her sixties who used to work at one of the collective farms expressed her fear of the Western market in an apocalyptic way. She vigorously emphasized the importance of reestablishing trade relations with the Eastern European market and especially with the former Soviet Union:

We have no machinery, we have old technology, we have no leadership; we cannot compete with western farmers like the Dutch and the Spaniards, who are well supported by the EU. We are already having difficulties with overproduction. We cannot sell our produce at the local and wholesale market. I am telling you. It was a huge mistake to break ties with the former Soviet Union. It was the best

market for us. They ate everything, even rotten cabbages and potatoes, and in exchange for foodstuff, we got oil and gas from them. If there is no market for us than we might as well hang ourselves (2002).

The young entrepreneur's sarcastic and the elder woman's resentful statements reflect the fear of the powerful unknown, which seemed to be larger than them, its ways inconceivable. Expressions of bitterness and anxiety were thus part of everyday conversations in Balástya. Jóska, a primary producer at the local meeting of the socialist party, criticized FIDESZ and its leadership, and said angrily (2003):

Viktor our Father¹¹⁴ will make us join the EU just like he made us join NATO. Why does not he tell us that the EU will affect one million people's jobs and lives? The EU won't need this many primary producers. We won't have jobs. We will become wage-laborers on Western Europeans' farms.

The producers not only expressed anxiety and anger but also great pride in Hungarian products when asked about the EU's expectations regarding "quality products." They argued vehemently against Western products, instantly making comparisons and pFering Hungarian vegetables and fruits at a higher rank in taste

¹¹⁴ Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary between 1998 and 2002.

and flavor—and thus higher “quality.” One woman said that the only reason why Western apples look so nice was because they were dipped in wax to make them look shiny, but as she commented, “The Hungarian peasant could do miracles. He produces beautiful vegetables and fruits without waxing them. The flavor of a Hungarian pepper and tomato cannot be compared to the Spanish one, which is bitter and bland.”

On many occasions during conversations with the villagers of Balástya, the EU took on the character of the “enemy” that they could not fight, similar to the socialist state of 30 years ago. The EU came to be identical with the West, which was no longer an ideological enemy, as it was under socialism, but an actual foe threatening Hungarians’ livelihoods.

De- or Re-peasantization of Rural Hungary and Local Improvisations

In Balástya, there was an attempt to ally primary producers with entrepreneurs to circumvent the overpowering presence of Western vegetables and fruits, and ensure sales in the future. Following the suggestion of the mayor, who was running again for office, a few producers and entrepreneurs, formed the “Balástya New Type of Co-op” or *Balástya Új Tipusú Szövetkezet* (UTSZ). At the meeting on 17 January 2002, the future members accepted the co-op’s founding document and stated the value of their shares, which was 80.000 Hungarian

forints. This was a fee for joining the co-op but not so many people were willing to risk it. On one hand they did not have 80.000 Hungarian forints and on the other they were all well aware of a former co-op's severe failure in a nearby village, whose president collected all the entrance fees and then after fled abroad.

The co-op's objective was to buy fruits and vegetables from individual producers and sell those as homogenous quality in one large quantity. Thus the co-op was to function as a depot, storage, and trading spot. When I interviewed the UTSZ's president, Zsolt Halász, he was fairly optimistic:

The significance of the co-op will increase when Hungary joins the EU in 2004. The EU will regulate the quality and quantity of the products. You can no longer put the rotten potatoes on the bottom of the sacks. We must learn how to adjust to the market conditions. Small-scale producers will disappear from the market as hypermarkets take over, small ones won't be able to compete. We will try to be the transporter of a big store. For a larger store, the expectation is more or less homogenous quality and large quantity. The chief goods that need to be sold in large quantity are the seasonal potatoes and fall hoop-house peppers. In the winter time producers could participate at trainings where they will be educated about the ways of homogenous production technology. For our first step we would like to achieve a 5 to 10 percent discount on purchasing fertilizers, vinyl, and chemicals (December 11, 2001).

In Balástya, eighty-six people joined the co-op with low hopes, but as the members said: “If we don’t have anything to believe in then what is there left for us...?”¹¹⁵ While some people tried to build alliances and extend their social networks via the new co-operative, others tried to go through the Sapard program–sponsored trainings. Balástya producers were encouraged to perform region–specific, organic fruit and vegetable production, therefore bio-gardening training was held at nearby Kistelek, where producers could attend classes on ecology, bio-gardening, bio-beekeeping, herbal plant production, safe composting, soil cleansing, bio-product processing, etc. In Hungary, organic gardening came to be known as *bio-gardening*.

Some tried other things on their plots of land that might be compatible with the EU. One family, the Veszekas, began raising emus on their farm, which is definitely not an authentic Hungarian bird. They bought a couple of emus in the fall of 2000. The couple said:

An emu lays eggs every two or four days. We take 16 eggs every 10 days to Budaörs, where the eggs are hatched at the temperature of 36 Celsius. The emu chickens come to the world within 52 to 54 days. They have a mixed diet of grits, apples, cabbages, and potatoes. Their meat is cholesterol free and the oil extracted from the eggs is used in

¹¹⁵ When I visited Balástya in the summer of 2003, the membership had already decreased and the co-op was facing major challenges with its sales. Not only did it have difficulties selling products, but also members did not trust the president, and small interest fractions emerged within the membership. The president also criticized the membership for holding on to old ways of doing business at the market.

cosmetic industry. And that is something we could do in the EU (2002).

Others were less optimistic and gave up vegetable production and began to be involved in village tourism. Some even reinvented regional history: a family began raising “Hungarian Grey Cattle,” which is a type of cattle that is authentically Hungarian and is associated with the landscape of the Hungarian Great Plains.

While some succeeded, others failed in their attempts to become *hungaricum*¹¹⁶ oriented and *EU conform*.¹¹⁷ However, the people who suffered the most in the pre-accession period were those who had already gone through a lot in their lifetime “feeling the dirty game of politics on their own skin.” These are the small peasants. Let me reiterate the first sentence of this chapter, quoted from Auntie Csöpi: “The Hungarian peasant is not needed in the EU.” Who is this group of people and what will happen to them in the EU? These people were the serfs, agricultural workers, manorial estate servants, landless peasants or *zsellér* of pre-socialism and the primary producers and small-scale producers of post-socialism. In this sense there is a definite social continuum from pre-socialism to post-

¹¹⁶ *Hungaricum* is a phrase used in CAP regional planning documents that specifies what is typical or authentically Hungarian that could be marketable in the EU market. The Hungarian Grey Cattle is one of these *hungaricum*-s, as the gray cattle was brought into the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarian founding tribal leaders in AD 895.

¹¹⁷ *EU conform* is another phrase that slipped into the Hungarian vocabulary in the pre-accession period, meaning that something is up to EU standards.

socialism. These people are from the older generation, now in their 70s and 80s. They don't have the political, financial, or social capital to fight any regime, even if it seems to be a democratic one. They experienced firsthand the Land Distribution in 1945, two phases of the Socialist Collectivization in 1947–1953 and 1958–1961, the Privatization Act in 1992, and now the challenges of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

The dominating political economy interrupted their everyday lives and practices many times over history, and “dirty games of politics” destroyed the Hungarian mapped and lived landscape for them; the land, which once was the “supreme God,” grew to be the “painful curse and burden.” The EU's modern bureaucratic system and its institution thus reached the villagers of Balástya in 2003. However, this older generation will change neither its *peasant mentality* nor its former *socialist lived habitus* (Bourdieu 1972) and cultural practices, which—as they are constantly told—are “primitive,” “pre-modern,” “backwards,” and “stupid” and consequently viewed as not *EU conform*. In national and transnational political discourses alike the peasantry is often portrayed as an obstacle in the way of “progress” and “modernity.” I strongly disagree with these statements that describe a form of living and being as “primitive” and suggest that—without being a nativist and idealizing peasant life—subsistence economy is an enduring adaptive strategy and as such it is a means of generating livelihood that co-exists with the presence of the market. The clash between subsistence and market

economy is paved with painful tension when the market claims superiority over any other forms of living and being. In Balástya, as I described in the dissertation, the older people practice minimal hoop-house and/or plow field cultivation, both coupled with animal husbandry.

When living in Balástya, I spent many hours in the office of the Village Economists, who handled the registration and land-based assistance questions of primary producers, entrepreneurs, and “family farmers.” I always got to the office, which was located in the local autonomy’s main building, early in the morning, took a chair in the crowded little room’s corner, and stayed there all day. The office opened every day at 8:00 a.m., but one hot summer morning people were already waiting in front of the office, a long line forming like a snake on the main street. While waiting, people were discussing the price of pork, which had decreased from 300 to 270 Hungarian forints/kilo, regardless of the fact that they had contracted with Galbacs, a local trader, who said that Pick, the salami factory in Szeged, would not buy that much pork. Others were talking about the decreasing wholesale price of potatoes. Everyone was agitated and everyone was impatient.

I entered the tiny office cautiously. The office was always busy, so the two village economists, Éva and Anikó hardly ever took a lunch break. The village economists in Balástya and elsewhere in the country were overburdened with paperwork. Since they did not have a computer, they administered everything by

hand—from registrations to land assistance claims. The two women, Éva and Anikó, were wiping their foreheads with their handkerchiefs. It was 32 C degrees in the office. There was a lingering smell of pig manure spreading in the air. The first man who came in was wearing his Sunday best and black, thick-rimmed SZTK glasses¹¹⁸. He was 64, and used to drive the tractor of the “Alkotmány” collective but now raised 12 pigs in his household economy. He politely tipped his hat and said good morning. He sat down slowly, putting his hat in his lap. He started murmuring, “It is not good to be a peasant. Galbacs does not take the pigs that I raised for sale and I had a contract with him. Two of those pigs already died because of the heat. What am I going to do now? I can’t keep them forever.” He was holding a TESCO shopping bag¹¹⁹ full of papers. He was waiting for some kind words from the two women but those words were not coming. Then he asked about the land-based assistance. Éva, who showed some sympathy toward the older man, asked him to show his land registration sheet, identification number, receipts, primary producer’s certificate, and other documents. As he was slowly and obediently reaching for those in his TESCO bag with his trembling hands, all the papers fell out of the bag and scattered on the dirty office floor. He started swearing, “God damn, all these papers, they want to confuse the peasant with all

¹¹⁸ SZTK is an acronym that stands for *Szakszervezetek Társadalombiztosítási Központja*. Or Trade Union’s Social Insurance Center. In socialist Hungary, public clinics were called SZTK and the famous eyewear of the socialist era was called SZTK FRAME. From young to old, everyone had the same shape and color frame for his/her glasses (black, thick-rimmed frames).

¹¹⁹ TESCO is a UK-based international grocery and general merchandising retail chain in Szeged where people shop instead of going to small grocery stores.

this paperwork so we would not understand what is happening.” Éva helped him gather the wrinkled and stained papers and try to organize them and said, “You can have land assistance for 4 hectares of land, on which you grow cabbages and potatoes, but not for rye (5.1 hectares). For rye, there is no assistance, I am sorry. Show me your receipts for the cabbage seeds you bought. All right that is fine then.” The old man seemed very upset and continued:

The problem is that we are small and poor. I had 5.000 early cabbages, no one wanted them. I could not sell them. I thought I would go insane, I could not sleep at night but I got over it. Hegedűs (the food depot manager) did not take any of those cabbages, because they did not fall into the right period, and the cabbages all got cracked within two weeks. The Hungarian government imported cabbages here, why? Small people don't know what the offices arrange...The potatoes went for 40 forints/kg and that is nothing. It is a lot worse this year than it was last year (2002).

This older man's story is one of many I witnessed, and his story is significant. First, it shows how agricultural assistance became overadministered and, with Hungary's pre-accession to the EU, the agrarian sector became even more bureaucratized. Second, his story also demonstrates how misinformed and vulnerable old peasants became in the new regime. This old man, wearing his best clothes to show his respect for the “authority,” felt completely powerless. To be eligible for the minimal land-based assistance he needed to show his tax id,

personal id, registration property sheet, primary producer's certificate, and a proof of address. And that was not all. Many times I witnessed the village economist forging signatures for old people who could not sign all these forms themselves. The village economists also filled out the forms for them, as they could not follow the instructions. Éva's husband, who became the president of the UTSZ (New Type of Association), commented, "These people are so afraid of papers, when they see papers and forms they think it is their death sentence."

The Rise of a New Iron Curtain and Marginalization of Eastern Europe

When I briefly visited Balástya again in the summer of 2004, I asked Éva what had changed since I left. She put it simply: "Administrative work is lot more than before because of the EU. It is insane the amount of work we have to do. Today you also need a 'block map,' on which you have to identify your land and property. It was an ad hoc decision. I had 10 days to see who was registered and then I had to send all the maps to Budapest. Half the maps got lost." These stories show that Hungary's pre-accession and integration to the EU further complicated paperwork requirements and increased the power of the local authorities. This bureaucratic system was described by villagers like this: "We thought that in socialism we had a huge bureaucracy but that is nothing compared to the EU's crazy bureaucracy."

Most importantly, however, subsidies to local small-scale primary producers are very minimal, and the strict regulation on food production in hoop-houses may push this local economic practice to the margin of the national and European agricultural production. Moreover, the minimal support is restricted as part of a wider package of spending cuts and the abandonment of social programs. My study shows that the land privatization of the 1990s and the pre-accession requirements contributed to declining agricultural production, rising rural poverty and unemployment, and social and economic inequality, necessitating rather than mitigating the need for new survival strategies. The tensions surrounding hoop-house strategies pointed to these very limits and contradictions of European integration and global market-capitalism.

In the context of the hoop-house economy, I argue that the minimal hoop-house economy will persist in the political economy of the EU, for it is an enduring base of the rural household in Balástya. It will remain a subsistence and survival strategy regenerated by and encompassed within the EU's market. The economic practices of the liminal hoop-house economy will be very much threatened by the EU's CAP, for the gardeners of Balástya won't be able to compete with western farmers, who are already better supported by the EU. I emphasize here again that these hoop-house gardeners have small plots of land in comparison to western farmers, who farm 70 hectares of land. Consequently, the land base assistance for them is an insignificant amount. The fate of the liminal hoop-house economy, as

my early findings suggest, may take two forms: 1) the return to minimal hoop-house cultivation for subsistence household production, or 2) the abandonment of agriculture and the countryside in search for a job either in the city or abroad. The maximal hoop-house economy, which achieved a profit-producing status by strengthening its economic position in the first phase of post-socialism, may also face significant difficulties, for these entrepreneurs will have to compete with the Dutch flower and potato producers. One of the four families engaged in maximal hoop-house economy has already given up flower production entirely and returned to vegetable production—and must now compete with gardeners participating in the liminal hoop-house economy. Another well-to-do commercial flower producer decided to try both vegetable and flower production in a 50/50 ratio.

I view the hoop-house economy as an enduring mode of production of the rural household, which may be severely weakened by EU regulations and moved toward the realm of the informal economy once again; however, because it is the base of the rural household and the “infrapolitics of the weak”(Scott 1985), it resists the future political economy of the EU: hoop-house economy endures whether the larger economic frame is feudalist, socialist, or capitalist. No matter the system of production in place, it persists throughout various economic conditions. Present rural household economies that revitalized themselves in the first decade of post-socialism as a response to market forces are undergoing another deconstructive

transformation wherein rural Hungarians, now EU citizens, feel expelled and excluded from an imagined world of capitalism.

Finally, I propose that the EU today is a creature of globalization based on a model of “trade” and “competition” in which member states are locked into various social and economic mechanisms that force national governments to diminish domestic economy in favor of corporate and multinational interests.

Commercially, the small-sized plots are regressive in that mechanized technique cannot be used profitably on them. This conclusion suggests that in the era of capitalism and globalization, the political and economic Iron Curtain between the West and the East (Europe) will be redrawn. So will be a social and cultural one.

I finally suggested that the EU’s CAP that was designed by policy-makers to 1) improve agricultural holdings, 2) guarantee the safety and quality of foodstuff, 3) ensure stable incomes for farmers, 4) and slow the depopulation of rural areas may result in just the opposite. While the EU presents itself as an instrument of humanitarian intervention, instead it acts as a transnational force promoting large-scale farming and a free-market economy. I propose that CAP is a lopsided policy, poorly adapted to the Hungarian agricultural structure because it disregarded regional and local land use and economic practices. Macro perspectives took a limited perspective of the consequences of local socialist history, social relations, and social processes. In fact, the EU has contributed to the West’s “(...) shaping its relations to the east, the EU has placed the burden of adjustment on the CEE

countries, obliging them to open up their markets to the west, while EU markets remain protected from competition from the east” (Fella 2002: 5).¹²⁰

The questions I am raising here are as follows: Will these negative processes continue with Hungary’s accession to the European Union? Will the agricultural production in Hungary fall even further due to the agricultural restructuring agenda of the EU’s CAP, or will it fortify the national and local economies? What will be the advantages and disadvantages of joining the EU politically and economically? What will be the social and cultural implications of the integration? How is a unified European community imagined, perceived, and realized by the rural citizens of Hungary; will Hungarian citizens identify themselves more with Western Europe or de-identify with it? If the integration process ends, will it redraw the Iron Curtain between the European West and the *othered* European East?

My findings on the pre-accession period suggest that the restraints and strict regulations on agricultural production will consequently decrease rural folks’ livelihood, increase rural unemployment, and create a greater gap between the

¹²⁰ On the eve of the Hungarian Referendum on joining the European Union, held 12 April 2003, a poster saying “it is OK to say No” was banned and its authors were arrested. The poster shows three arms extended for shaking hands; the top bearing the swastika, the middle a red star, and the third the EU logo (Zsuzsa Gille, public lecture given at the University of Minnesota, 2004). In this referendum the question regarding EU membership, nearly 85 percent voted in favor of membership, with a little over 15 percent against. However, with an overall voter turnout of only 45 percent, the referendum cannot be considered a total success. Some studies point to the fact that the vote for EU membership was similar to the one held for NATO membership. In fact, the statistics for the latter were a bit better. Then, 40 percent of all eligible voters had pushed Hungary into joining the military alliance, whereas only 38 percent confirmed Hungary’s membership to the EU. Most would agree that the referendum was a historic vote, and that a new age has begun for Hungary, as well as other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but the question is, at whose expense?

countryside and the city. It will induce a sharper social stratification in Balástya, whose citizens may choose to migrate to the city and western EU countries for wage-labor. Rural marginalization is an imminent problem; it encompasses economic, socio-cultural and environmental issues, which are interwoven and exert various implications on regions and local people. In light of all these changing dynamics, there is an increasing concern about the process of marginalization of agriculture. Under EU regulations and control, lived landscapes are shrinking and transformed into uninhabited tourist-interest areas. EU regulations, as I propose, contribute to the commodification of the rural landscape, transforming it into sites of eco-tourism, agro-tourism, heritage-tourism and disaster-tourism. Finally, this continued transformation may eradicate the peasantry as a class and change the Hungarian rural lived and mapped landscape forever.

Post-Socialist Europe: Thinking Beyond the Wall

Twenty years ago, on November 9, 1989 the “Iron Curtain” and the “Berlin Wall” separating *East* and *West* fell. The walls had come to symbolize the spatial and ideological division between the East and the West, or socialism and capitalism. The collapse of state-socialism in Hungary (1989), and the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (1991) was a decisive turning point in

modern history. This “critical event” marked the end of the Cold War, one-party dictatorships, planned economies, collective property regimes, and “actually existing socialisms,” and at the same time signaled the beginning of more pluralistic, sometimes democratic systems, private property regimes, and decentralized free market-economy. Internationally, the geo-political significance of the “Leninist extinction” (Jovitt 1992) meant the beginning of “new world order.” Consequently, after the revolutions of 1989 there was universal exhilaration and a hopeful euphoria about the change in the political and economic climate of the former Eastern Bloc countries.

Political discourses about the transition that were produced after 1989 depicted the collapse of the former Soviet Union and state-socialism in Central Eastern Europe as the failure of socialism in general and argued that the end of the Cold War proved the triumphalism of capitalism and the free market. The neo-liberal, post-Cold War discussions and partisans of modernity aimed at the systematic discreditation of any alternative system to capitalism, assuming that market capitalism and liberal democracy demarcate the victorious *end of history*.¹²¹ However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, as I demonstrated in this dissertation, former socialist or communist societies have undergone the most turbulent political, economic, social, and cultural transformations of any states in the last two decades. In the years of post-socialist

¹²¹ See: Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

transformation, I argued that in fact socialist goals of a classless society, the absence of exploitation, solidarity, egalitarianism, stable employment, nationalized health care, free education, and granted social entitlements brought these values back into the focus of local, national, and global conversations. Therefore I propose that the predicaments of the past twenty years should be the exclamation points in every narrative to remind us to evaluate both socialism and capitalism, totalitarianism and democracy and to critically investigate the *obsession with modernity and the addiction to progress*.

The political and economic “shock treatment” or “capitalism by design” of the former Eastern Bloc contributed to various problems in post-socialist countries. As a result, contemporary issues that are critical to investigate in the region are: the aftermath of the ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia, the “gypsy question” across Eastern Europe, Minority Nationalist movements like that of the Transylvanian Hungarians in Romania, the problems of organized crime and western sex-tourism in the Balkans, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. Other issues include the impacts of the economic crisis in the Baltic States, the issues regarding monetary unification within the European Union for newly accepted members, the current “frozen conflicts” in Transnistria, the Crimean peninsula, and the artificially created and internationally dependent states of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. And, as always in the history of Eastern Europe, the question of Russia’s influence in the region looms large, as exemplified by the 2009 winter’s gas dispute

between Russia and Ukraine. These issues will open up a plethora of future research questions about the post-socialist “ways of life” that need urgent anthropological attention.

Through the text of my ethnography of an “*actually existing post-socialist village of Balástya*” I demonstrated the analytical connections I drew between “the imponderabilia of actual life” (Malinowski 1984) or “what had been lived through” (Turner 1986) by the “active selves” (Bruner 1986) and the larger political economic schemas in which they are embedded. My work challenges generalizations and broad assumptions about the transformation from market-socialism to market-capitalism, and the success of the EU’s Eastern Enlargement Project. By examining transformations through the complexities of local practices and ordinary life, my dissertation extends but also complicates macro-level analyses, illuminating the linkages between changing political and economic institutions and the micro-level of everyday existence. My task as anthropologist was to pay attention to the “revelatory” and “mere” incidents that carried meanings for the people *in the years of the anxious post-socialist transformation*. I investigated the micro-politics of everyday life, which was filled with richness of details demonstrating how people reacted to the changes that were either internal or external to them. I showed how the former power relations were revisited and reinterpreted under the new circumstances that the changes brought about. This ethnography showed how the local is embedded in the extralocal and global processes of change that created

friction and confusion for some and new opportunities for others. My ethnographic account of the post-socialist transformation is therefore an attempt to understand the human condition of critical historical moments like the one that we are experiencing today. The village of Balástya offered a special vantage point for grasping the demise of collectivization and privatization and the resistance to the current transformation promoted by the European Union. Certainly, there is nothing new here from the standpoint of classical social theory. Max Weber's skepticism about modernity, Adorno's and Horkheimer's notion of the dialectic of enlightenment, and Marx's critique of capitalism resonate more than ever in this particular historical moment, which calls for a critical consciousness to open up our vision for alternatives.

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Appendices
Appendix 1.

Interviews

Section 1.

I. A következő kérdések a mezőgazdaságra, gazdálkodásra, és a föld privatizációjára vonatkoznak. Kérem válaszoljon a következő kérdésekre.

1. Volt-e TSZ tag, s ha igen, melyikben, és hány évig? Jól működtek ezek a TSZ-ek Balástyán?
2. Mikor kezdődött Balástyán a TSZ-ek felszámolása? Sikeres (volt) e ez a folyamat? Elégedett a földosztással Balástyán? Miért nem fejeződött be a földosztás Ön szerint?
3. Ön vagy családja birtokolt-e földet a TSZ-ek megalapítása előtt, és ha igen mennyi volt a birtokukban? Mennyi földet kapott vissza a privatizáció során és ezek a földek hol vannak jelenleg?
4. Most mezőgazdasággal foglalkozik? Mit termel és mennyi területen? Milyen technikával (szabadföldes, fóliás, stb.)?
5. Miért, vagy miért nem előnyös a fóliás termelés? Mennyi fóliája van?
6. Mennyi az éves kiadása, ha mezőgazdaság a fő jövedelme? Mire, mennyit költ? (szántás, fólia, gépek, szállítás, vetőmag, stb.)
7. Hogyan műveli a földet? A család dolgozik rajta, vagy alkalmaz-e külső segítséget?
8. Mit gondol a Kisgazda Párt politikai és gazdasági elképzeléséről?
9. Mi a probléma Ön szerint a magyar mezőgazdasággal? Ön mire osztaná szét a meglévő erőforrásokat?
10. Hogyan határozná meg a mai politikai rendszert (szocialista, feudalista, kapitalista, stb), indokolja meg a válaszát.
11. Mit gondol, előnyös-e, Magyarországnak az Európai Unióba való belépése? Hogyan fogja az EU érinteni a kis és nagy gazdákat? Miért?
12. Mit gondol a zsebszerződésről és a külföldiek föld vásárlásáról itt Magyarországon?
13. Jobb volt-e a Kádár-féle szocialista rendszer? Ha igen, miért? Ha nem, miért nem?
14. Mit gondol az Új Típusú Termelőszövetkezetéről? Sikeres lehet-e?
15. Ki számít Ön szerint sikeres embernek Balástyán, és miért?
16. Mik a tervei a jövőre vonatkozóan?

Appendix 2.
Definitions

Section 2.

II. Kérem határozza meg egy vagy két mondatban az alábbi szavakat. Mit jelentenek Önnek ezek a szavak? Példával szemléltesse a meghatározásait.

1. munka
2. -dolog
3. szabadidő
4. főnök
5. magamura
6. szocialista
7. kapitalista
8. posztszocialista
9. háztáji gazdálkodás
10. föld
11. magántulajdon
12. TSZ
13. kommunista
14. paraszt
15. vállalkozó
16. kertész
17. gazda

Appendix 3.
Survey

Section 3.

III. Hasonlítsa össze ezeket a fogalmakat és határozza meg őket, vagy példával szemléltesse őket.

1. munkás – paraszt
2. főnök – beosztott
3. kisgazda – nagygazda
4. őstermelő – mezőgazdasági vállalkozó
5. paraszt – őstermelő
6. szocialista – kapitalista
7. TSZ – családi parasztgazdaság

Appendix 4.
Demographic background

Section 4.

IV. Kérem karikázza be a megfelelő információt.

1. Neme:

Chapter 8 Férfi

Nő

2. Életkora:

16-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-felett

3. Állampolgársága:

Chapter 9 Magyar Román

Szerb

Horvát

Egyéb

4. Családi állapota:

Chapter 10 Nőtlen/Hajadon

Házas

Elvált

Özvegy

5. Gyermekeinek száma:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 – vagy, annál több

6. Egy háztartásban lakók száma:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 – vagy, annál több

7. Foglalkozása:

Mezőgazdasági vállalkozó
feje Vállalkozó Paraszt
Nyugdíjas Egyéb

Östermelő Családi gazdaság
Munkanélküli

8. Iskolai végzettsége:

Általános iskola

Szakközép

Gimnázium

Főiskola/Egyetem

9. Lakhelye:

Balástya (falu)

Balástya-Gajgonya

Balástya-Tanya

Balástya-Öszeszék

Balástya-Fehértó

Kistelek

Szeged

10. Az egy háztartásban élők éves összjövedelme:

250 ezer alatt 251 ezer-500 ezer 510 ezer-1 millió
 1.1 millió-3 millió 3.1 millió-6 millió 6.1 millió felett

11. Hány hektár földön gazdálkodik Ön vagy a családja? (a megfelelő helyre X jelet tegyen!)

	Igen	Nem
Nincs földem, és nem a mezőgazdaságból élek		
Van egy kis földem, de nem ez a fő jövedelmem forrásom		
Nyugdíjas vagyok és csak a konyhára termelek		
1-10 hektár		
10-30		
30-50		
50-100		
100-200		
200-felett		

Appendix 5.
Survey on Hungary's Pre-integration to the EU

Section 5.

V. Az 1989-es rendszerváltás azt jelenti Önnek, hogy (a megfelelő helyre X jelet tegyen!)

	igen	nem
Több anyagi gondom van		
Csökcent az életszinvonalam		
Csalódottságot		
Bizonytalanságot		
Kihívást		
Jobban érzem magam most, mint a régi rendszerben		
Több lehetőségem van a boldogulásra		
Semmit sem jelent		
Vége lett a szocializmusnak és elkezdődött a vad kapitalizmus		

-egyéb:

2. Volt-e TSZ tag Balástyán?

Igen	Nem
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3. Ön szerint jó döntés volt-e a TSZ-ek felszámolása?

	Igen	Nem
Jó, mert az emberek visszakapták a földjeiket.		
Ha már egyszer működtek, akkor már meg kellett volna hagyni azokat.		
Veszteségek voltak ezek a TSZ-ek, ezért jó, hogy megszűntek.		
Nekem mindegy, TSZ előtt se volt földem, most sincs.		
A TSZ tagság biztonságot jelentett: munkát, fix fizetést, nyugdíjat, stb.		

4. A föld magántulajdona azt jelenti Önnek, hogy (a megfelelő helyre X jelet tegyen!)

	igen	nem
Birtolási viszonyt		
Kapcsolatot az ősi családi birtokkal		
Megélhetést		
Önmegvalósítást		
Hatalmat		

5. A közös tulajdon mit jelent Önnek?

	igen	nem
Nem látok semmit a közösben.		
Közös lónak túrós a háta.		
Elviekben jó, de gyakorlatban nem működött.		
Felőlem maradhatott volna, nem látok semmi rosszat benne.		
Igazságosabb volt, mint a mostani magántulajdon rendszer.		

6. Mi a véleménye a kárpótlásról?

	igen	nem
Túl későn volt.		
Igazságos volt.		
Jogtalan volt, mert csak azoknak sikerült elintézni a föld ügyeiket, akik közel voltak a tűzhöz.		
Jó ötlet volt csak azt volt a baj, hogy eladhatóak voltak a kárpótlási jegyek.		
Az jobb lett volna, ha mindenki az eredeti földjét kapta volna vissza.		
Politikai fogás volt csupán.		
Gazdaságilag átgondolt intézkedés volt.		

7. Milyen jellegű gazdálkodással foglalkozik?

	Igen	Nem
Csak állattartással		
Csak növénytermesztéssel		
Mindkettővel		
Egyikkel sem		

8. Ha foglalkozik mezőgazdasággal, abban az esetben biztosítja-e a család megélhetését a létező gazdaság?

- igen nem részben csak saját használatra termelünk, nem eladásra

9. Ha saját használatra termel: Mi a fő megélhetési lehetősége?

- munkahelyen dolgozom
- bér munkát vállalok
- napszámot vállalok
- alkalmi munkát vállalok
- más vállalkozásom is van
- nyugdíjas vagyok

10. Kénytelen volt-e már felszámolni valamilyen mezôgazdasági tevékenységet?

igen nem

11. a. Ha igen, melyiket?

- sertéshízlalást
- szarvasmarhatartást
- baromfitartást
- növénytermesztést
- egyéb:

11. b. Ha igen, a felszámolás oka volt:

- a felvásárlás bizonytalansága
- a felvásárlás alacsony ára
- az eladott termékért nem fizettek
- a termék minôsége miatt
- egyéb:

(Tervezi-e a jövôben a disznótartást eladásra, vagy saját részre?)

Igen Nem

14. Ha igen: milyen lehetőség van a fejlesztésre?

	Igen	Nem
Agrár támogatás		
Hitel		
Kölcsön		
Önerő		
Pályázat		

15. Az EU-csatlakozás Ön szerint azt jelenti, hogy (a megfelelő helyre X jelet tegyen):

	Igen	Nem
Szabad utazást Európában		
Magasabb fizetést és jobb megélhetést mindenkinek		
Annyi fizetést kapunk, mint a nyugat európaiak		
Megnövekedik a külföldiek száma Magyarországon		
Növekszik a társadalmi ellátások és szolgáltatások mértéke		
Megnövekedik a nemzetbiztonság		
A magyar nemzeti tudat csökkeni fog		
Megerősödik a magyar gazdaság		
Elhatárolódást a volt Szovjetuniótól és annak gazdaságától		
Magyarország termékei a világ piacon is megjelennek		
Magyarországot bekebelezik a nyugati országok		
Stabilizálódik a politikai közélet itthon		
Megerősödik a közbiztonság		
Az EU nyomására a magyar termékek jobb minőségűek lesznek		
Megnő a külföldi befektetések száma		
A környezetvédelmi előírások megszigorodnak		
A magyar nyelv fokozatosan eltűnik		
A magyar kultúra elsorvad, a nyugati kultúra és értékek betörnek		
Az EURO, mint közös valuta használatát, a nemzeti valuta használatának eltörlését		
Nehézségeket a kis vállalatok gazdasági életében		
Multinacionális vállalatok térhódítását Magyarországon		
Magyarország önnállóságának megszűnését		
Több külföldi árucikk behozatalát		
Rengeteg változtatást, amit majd nehezen lehet jogilag követni		
Visszaéléseket és további korrupciót		
A diszkrimináció és a rasszizmus növekedését		
Jogharmonizációt		

16. Az EU-csatlakozás Ön szerint magával hozza a mezőgazdaságban a/z:

	igen	nem
Új piacot és egyszerűbb értékesítést		
Még nehezebb lesz eladni a termékünket		
Modernizálni és nagyban gépesíteni fogja a mezőgazdaságot		
A csak egy-két hektár földdel rendelkezők kénytelenek lesznek eladni a földjüket és más szektorban elhelyezkedni		
Sokan fogják elhagyni a magyar mezőgazdaságot és külföldön keresnek majd munkát		
A kis és nagy földbirtokosok egyaránt boldogulni fognak		
Külföldiek fogják felvásárolni a földet is		
Új támogatási lehetőségeket mindenkinek		
A családi gazdaságok száma és támogatottsága emelkedni fog		
Csak azok tudnak a mezőgazdaságból megélni akiknek már most van tőkéjük		
A mezőgazdasági termékek szakosodása fog megvalósulni		
Többféle mezőgazdági termék fog megjelenni a piacon		
Magyarországon is megjelenhetnek a Nyugat Európában már ismert növény és állatbetegségek		
Az emberek el fognak költözni a tanyákról a városokba		
A nagyüzemű mezőgazdasági termelés kiszorítja az őstermelőket és a családi gazdaságokat		
A mezőgazdasági szövetkezetek létrehozásának szükségessége megnövekszik		
A föld tulajdonjogok rendezése befejeződik		
Meg fognak szünni az önellátó háztáji-kis gazdaságok		
Túlszabályozása bizonyos magyar termékeknek megnő, mint pl. mák		
A fóliás, primőr árút mindig el lehet adni, így az EU-ban is		

A balástyaiaknak csak még előnyösebb lehet az EU csatlakozás, mert már eleve kedvezőbb lehetőségekkel rendelkeznek, mint a más régiókban élő mezőgazdaságból élők		
Nagy birtokok fogják létrejönni Magyarországon		

17. Honnan szerez Ön információt az EU-csatlakozással kapcsolatban?

	Igen	Nem
TV-ből		
Újságokból		
Az Önkormányzat falugazdászaitól		
Ismerősöktől és szomszédoktól		
Rádióból		
Utcai hirdetésekben		
Választási beszélgetésekből		
Interneten		
Tempomban		
Gyűléseken		

18. Lesz-e Ön szerint népszavazás az EU-csatlakozással kapcsolatban Magyarországon?

Igen

Nem

19. Ön szerint mikorra várható Magyarország EU-csatlakozása? (karikázza be a megfelelőt)

- 2003
- 2004
- 2007
- nem tudom

20. Ön szerint melyik politikai párt rendelkezik megfelelő gazdasági programmal a mezőgazdaság átszervezésére?

	Igen	Nem
Fidesz-MDF		
MSZP		
Fkgp		
Munkáspárt		
Új Baloldal		
Miép		
Centrum		

21. Azt kívánom a gyermekeinknek/unokáinknak, hogy:

- a mezőgazdaságból tisztességesen meg tudjanak élni
- ne próbálkozzanak a mezőgazdaságból megélni
- csak fix állás mellett gazdálkodjanak
- szeretném, ha gazdaságomat: fiam, lányom , unokám vinné tovább

22. Mit gondol a jövőről?

	Igen	nem
<i>Kilátástalannak látom a jövőt</i>		
Talán az unokáinknak jobb lesz majd		
Lépésről, lépesre jobb lesz a életünk		
Semmit sem fog változni		
Csak legyen mit ennünk		
Csak ne legyen egy harmadik világháború		