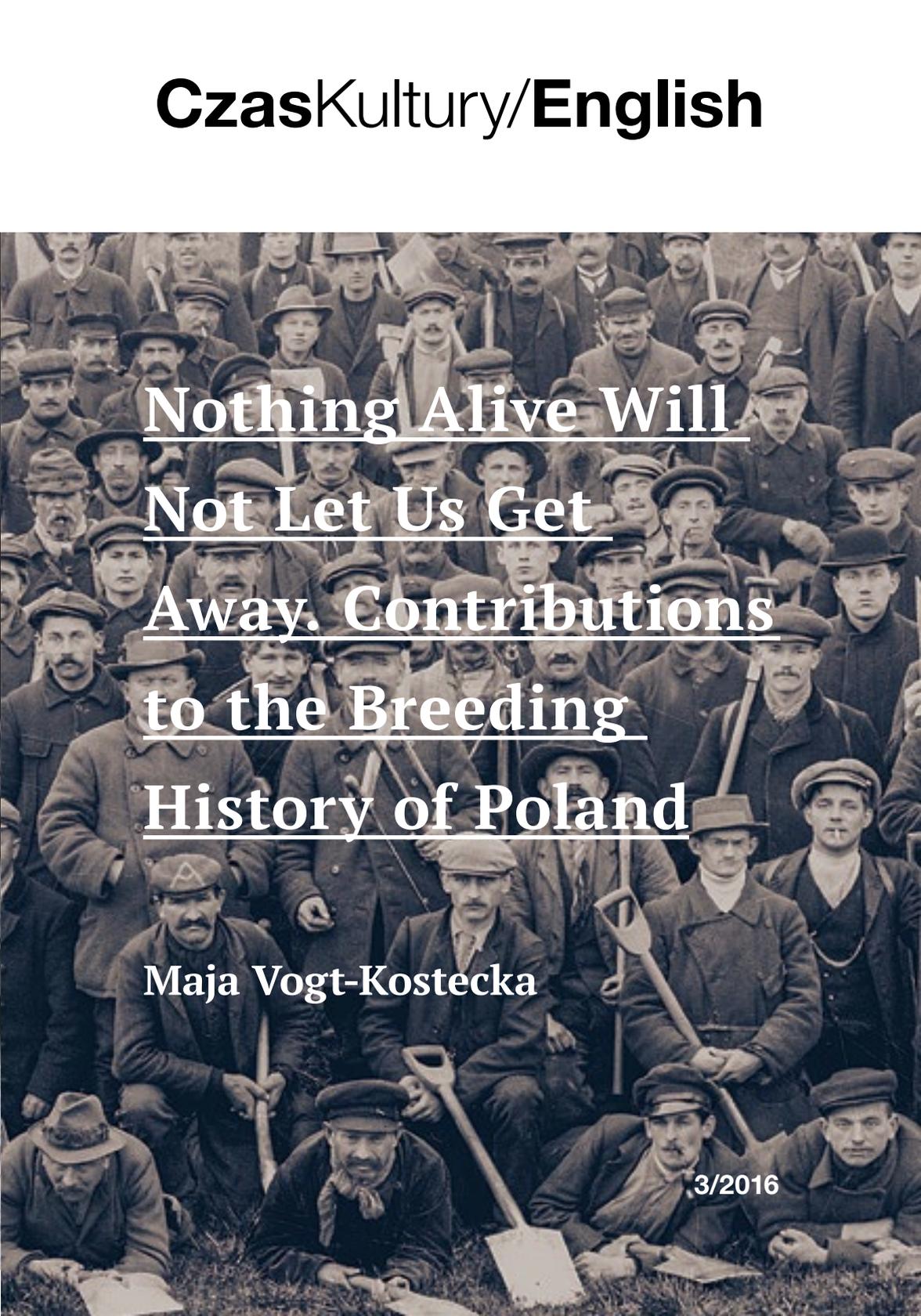


CzasKultury/English



Nothing Alive Will
Not Let Us Get
Away. Contributions
to the Breeding
History of Poland

Maja Vogt-Kostecka

3/2016

Nothing Alive Will Not Let Us Get Away. Contributions to the Breeding History of Poland

Maja Vogt-Kostecka

*“Despite numerous similarities and common features
of animals and plants*

They do significantly differ from one another.

*The life of plants involves utilizing heat for gathering
living elements*

*In living so that they form bodies of plants and are
able to give power to life and growth of animals.*

The life of animals is distribution of living

Generating independent movements, individuals

And their awareness of existence.”¹

“Only history tells man what he is.”²

1 *Gospodarna hodowla zwierząt rolniczych przez Starego Rolnika*, Warsaw 1885, p. 36, accessible in Digital Repository of Scientific Institutes: http://rcin.org.pl/Content/19454/WA058_35065_K14363_Gospodarna-hodowla.pdf (2.05.2016).

2 E. Paczkowska-Łagowska, *Człowiek jako istota dziejowa. O wątkach Diltheyowskich we „Władzy i naturze ludzkiej” Helmutha Plessnera*, [in:] J. Rolewski, S. Czerniak (edited), *Studia z filozofii niemieckiej*, v. 4, Toruń 2004, p. 221–237.

To Go Beyond³

Science puts Human in the animal kingdom (*Animalia*). Human belonging to taxonomy of the lower rank is described as follows: phylum Chordata (*Chordata*), subphylum Vertebrata (*Vertebrata*), classis Mammals (*Mammalia*), subdivision Placentalia (*Placentalia*), order Primates (*Primates*), suborder Haplorhini (*Haplorrhini*), infraorder Anthroidea (*Anthroidea*), family Hominidae (*Hominidae*), type genus Homo (*Homo*), species Homo Sapiens (*Homo sapiens*).⁴ Life of this animal, similarly to all heterotrophic organisms is cutting and boning of living and it requires annihilating other forms of life in order to create one's own.

For centuries in the history of mankind, heterotrophic characteristics of the human would occur in the form of omnivorousness that culture development specialists which being called hoarding and hunting. Over time man learnt how to domesticate animals and plants. He provided care in exchange for the possibility to make use of their bodies, products and abilities in the form of: fruit, seeds, stems and roots, muscle power, meat, milk, eggs, honey,

3 Michel Foucault wrote: "In a language, the function of the verb is universal and empty since it takes into account only the most general form of a sentence, inside which names will develop their own system of articulation" (M. Foucault, *Słowa i rzeczy*, translation by T. Komendant, Gdańsk 2005, p. 211). For this reason some paragraphs were given the headings below. And here the meaning is clarified: "to go beyond – to cross, to violate, to breach, to break," after: <https://www.synonimy.pl> (2.05.2016).

4 Taxonomy is a branch of science that is changing rapidly (especially since the popularization of genetic research). Taxonomies can be more or less detailed depending on the goal which particular researchers create them wish to achieve. The one presented here does not claim the right to be significant for a biologist; it has been written for a humanist who is supposed to feel a part of the incalculable number of animals living on Earth, if only for a moment.

wax, silk fiber and other, increasingly difficult to obtain commodities in the form of chemical substances, new ideas suggested by animal behavior and the construction of plants and animals. Breeding, agriculture and supporting technologies were developing.

To feed⁵

The social group which in the society of the developed division of labor deals with agriculture and cultivation, i.e. producing food through agriculture and cultivation in contemporary Poland are farmers, called more and more frequently agricultural entrepreneurs who used to be called peasants and rural folk. A village is, in accordance with the definition by Maria Kiełczewska-Zaleska, a settlement where folk deals with plant cultivation and keeping animals.⁶

It is cultivation and agriculture, the possibility and necessity to keep animals and grow plants that throughout the centuries have distinguished rural from urban areas. A peasant, a farmer, a modern agricultural entrepreneur, contrary to a city dweller who might be a very keen allotment gardener, an urban beekeeper or a balcony gardener, works primarily with living organisms and thanks to them make a living.

Throughout the centuries ensuring food safety in the country agriculture played an exception role, even though

5 "To feed – to give nourishment, to provide for, to supply"; more: <https://www.thesaurus.com> (10.11.2016).

6 M. Kiełczewska-Zaleska, *Geografia osadnictwa*, Warsaw 1972, p. 6.

with economic development its significance weakened. However, even today, thanks to farmers' labor, food is produced for use of all social groups. It is animals, plants and mushrooms that make a peasant a peasant.

That is why an analysis of the folk history of Poland shall begin with an analysis of the peasant-farmer-agricultural entrepreneur relation and the plants, mushrooms and animals kept/cultivated and produced by the farmer. In the changes undergoing these relations we might notice changes taking place in the culture throughout Poland and hence we should pose a question regarding the relationship between them. Is the method of breeding and agriculture primary or secondary with regard to the changes taking place in the society? How do rural and urban areas influence and inspire one another?

Throughout the centuries the methods of farming and caring for animals have been undergoing slow change. At the beginning of the 1990s, large and affluent private farms still had only a dozen, or a few dozen, hectares of land and/or a few dozen livestock. Actually, every farm had its own livestock and produced a large variety of plant species. Currently, farms and villages specialize in breeding one particular animal or plant species. In numerous villages we can no longer see one cow, goat or even a hen, even though "animal production" there takes place on a massive scale. Development is what the Polish state expects from Polish peasants and their plants and animals. This expectation is stressed in the name of the central

office for the rural issues which changed once again in 1999 and is now known as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

To Pray⁷

In the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century cows that were kept by Polish peasants looked totally different from those we can sometimes spot in the meadows today. They also served different purposes. Over half of the cows then were oxen.⁸ Today only Poles interested in history or agriculture know this term whereas the majority is convinced that an ox is yet another name for a cow.⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century in Poland oxen (i.e. castrated bulls, male cows¹⁰) were commonly used as working animals and, let me repeat it, in the villages there were more of them than dairy cows. However, since not every farmer could afford to keep an ox, dairy cows were also used as working animals to pull carriages and agricultural machinery. Another significant function of cows was the production of fertilizer. It was an extremely valuable product facilitating plant cultivation in the fields. Without fertilizing the soil, it would deplete very quickly while the three-field system, or the method of resting, required a temporary halt in cultivating the farm field. Cow

7 "To pray – to plead, ask, beseech, appeal" more: <https://www.thesaurus.com> (10.11.2016).

8 K. Pudło, "Tradycje używania bydła rogatego do prac pociągowych w gospodarstwach chłopskich w Polsce z końcem XIX w. i w pierwszej połowie XX w.," *Lud*, v. 47, 1961, p. 415–438.

9 Z. Litwińczuk, T. Szulc (edited), *Hodowla i użytkowanie bydła*, Warsaw 2005, p. 4.

10 Correctly, in accordance with zootechnical and biological terminology, cows belong to cattle. Compare *ibidem*, p. 2.

manure is one of the highest quality fertilizers that can be achieved from livestock. That might be also why horses, whose droppings are utilized on a smaller scale, for a long time were not very popular in villages.¹¹ In those times dairy cows were much more valuable than currently: “Breeding simultaneously a couple of oxen and one good cow from one’s own calves immediately transforms a poor owner of a small farm into a wealthy farmer.”¹²

Milk and its products would feed one peasant family and surplus dairy products could be sold while securing an insignificant, yet regular sum, of money every day. A cow would also have a calf that could later be sold or grown into another cow or ox. The economic value translated directly into the emotional, social and ritual value of these animals. Cows would be commonly called bread-winners and there was a high number of beliefs related to the treatment of cows so that they could give milk and have calves. Kazimierz Moszczyński in his “Folk Culture of Slavs” stressed “the respect folk people show their cattle” and wrote about “equal treatment of cattle and horses and people” and an unusual similarity in rituals regarding cattle and people, for instance cleaning a cow and a woman after giving birth, sharing the holy wafer on Christmas

11 Reasons given when justifying the strong popularity of oxen in the past is as follows: increased economic effectiveness of oxen, better work of oxen during ploughing and transport in swampy terrain, common seizure of horses for the army. At the same time, oxen were perceived as non-representative animals, characteristic for poor regions of Europe. Yet, this view was inaccurate. The most important reason for putting an end to the use of oxen as working animals was “the fact that large numbers of folk people became snobbish.” See B. Baranowski, “Zanik użytkowania wołów jako siły pociągowej w Polsce i w krajach sąsiednich,” *Lud*, v. 50, 1964-1965, p. 410–430.

12 *Gospodarna hodowla...*, p. 45.

Eve and Easter bread with cattle, the burial of dead cows, calling working oxen “angels.”¹³

At that time, the responsibility for any failure in breeding animals or cultivation of plants was attributed to God (to whom they prayed individually and collectively ‘with greater power’ for prosperity in farming), fate, witchcraft and the root of all the above in the form of human envy. A peasant would often lose in the unequal struggle with the weather, diseases of plants and animals, yet he rarely blamed himself for any failure (and if he did it must have been for errors in the magical rather than agricultural art). The technique of cultivation and keeping animals was based on the wisdom and responsibility of folk tradition, being so willingly and broadly described by Polish ethnographers who perceived it as a permanent lifestyle that created a strong identity. This opinion has been questioned on numerous occasions by researchers who perceived changeability as a fundamental feature of culture. At the same time, for peasants, common beliefs and lifestyle were features most definitely expected from others and only at a later stage expected from oneself. “Unified and homogenous” should be the unconscious motto of the traditional rural community.¹⁴

On a daily basis, a dairy cow needs approximately 40 kilos of grass and 20 kilos of dry food. It is a large amount and not easy to provide. At the same time, cows are happy to feed on and digest food that is totally useless for humans

13 K. Moszyński, *Folk Culture of Slavs*, Kraków 1934, p. 563–564.

14 L. Stomma, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.*, Warsaw 1986, p. 206–207.

and many other animals. Cows and oxen mainly fed on fresh grass in pastures where they would spend the whole day from early morning till dusk. During field work, oxen would work for half a day while the other half they would spend grazing, which differed in the case of horses which would be exploited more severely. In the wintertime cows would mostly feed on low value straw. A cow's ability to digest straw was regarded by the then scientists as an extraordinary and praiseworthy feature of these animals. Today we know that cows are only able to digest half of the consumed straw. Hence the 19th-century cows must have suffered because of poor nutrition and can't have given large amounts of milk. At that time, the milk yield of a cow not working in the field is assessed at the level of 1,500 liters of milk annually, whereas today's cows produce on average 6,000 liters of milk with the record-holders producing 20,000.

To Survive¹⁵

In 1986 my parents took up breeding chickens for slaughtering. At that time this business activity yielded very high profits. Meat supply shortfalls in shops led to a situation where any number of bred birds could be immediately sold at a profit. My parents bought one dilapidated chicken coop that was several hundred square meters. At that time there was a gigantic flock of rats living there. In those times even this type of investment secured a steady income. Until today, Polish farmers fondly remember that

¹⁵ "To Survive – to continue to live, to endure, to exist, get through, remain, ride out;" more: <https://www.thesaurus.com> (10.11.2016).

time when the one with a “supply” of broiler chickens¹⁶ could buy a new car. The sole aim of the activity, and its only difficulty, was to keep alive the chicks one had “managed” to purchase. There existed no defined or even silent rules regarding the norms or successes of the breeding. Animals were to be provided with shelter, had to be fed and protected from serious diseases. Keepers paid little attention to their productivity, a constant increase of production, a profitable weight ratio that the chick eventually achieved to the amount of fodder consumed. At that time it was crucial for the chicks to be there and survive. The weight of the bred animals at the moment of sale was approximately 1.5 kilograms and the amount of fodder necessary for the bird to reach this weight remained unknown since “fattened” chicks would frequently starve – it was not always possible to buy them the food they needed. One breeding cycle, i.e. the time from placing chicks into the coop until the time of their sale lasted approximately 12 weeks.¹⁷

In the wintertime, especially when chicks were still young, the coops needed permanent heating, which accounted for consumption of coal and getting hold of coal was not always possible. Therefore, the birds would get cold as often as they would get hungry. In the summertime power cuts caused that ventilation was not working and because of that the birds suffered and often even died.

16 *Gospodarna hodowla...*, p. 2.

17 “Currently, after many years of work on new crossbreeds and appropriate feeding, we have obtained a broiler chicken weighing two kilos within six to seven weeks.” Compare the Agricultural Market Agency, *Biuletyn Informacyjny* 2/2015, p. 3.

When a flock went down with a disease it was not always possible to “get a hold of” the necessary medication. Buying any equipment necessary for breeding would make the keeper happy for many days. No one would bother to check the parameters, the brand and the value for money and whether or not it was possible for them to be granted any domestic or European support in their purchase.

Overcoming all these obstacles meant a sale of chickens at a huge profit but the final outcome of the breeding activity and its difficulties meant that this activity meant a lot of pressure on the keeper. Their efforts must have drastically exceeded the breeding practices described in Polish and foreign textbooks. They required that informal local alliances be made among keepers since there was always “someone” who “could” borrow “something” or would know (in the times of the People’s Republic of Poland knowledge was a commodity with a very high value) and, thanks to this, the feeling of being vulnerable to the objective difficulties would shrink.

At that time instability of breeding conditions (of “animal production” – the term was already used in the 1980s) led to a situation in which the sense of responsibility for the work and its results was becoming an emotional load hindering effective work. No one was able to predict where and when to buy the necessary food for the animals; when and how long a power cut would last in the village; how the purchase prices of poultry livestock would fluctuate depending on the political decisions and galloping

inflation, but, first and foremost, what would be the effect of fattening birds as a result of all these unpredictable factors. Agricultural universities in the People's Republic of Poland taught how to properly cultivate plants and breed animals, yet the attempts to apply their plans and estimates ended up as a failure upon the first conflict of the scientific principles and the communist reality. The feeling of importance of the undertaken measures was supported by public statements that meat is a staple food and its shortage is one of the key social problems in the country.¹⁸ This was also evidenced by the strikes taking place in the periods of no supply of meat and sausages in shops as well as price increases for these products. This rule also found confirmation in high profitability of food production. The rivalry for the best results in breeding and cultivation, so typical for the current agriculture, was replaced with the rivalry for access to the rationed goods needed for production of any food. Living could only serve man thanks to political decisions and a system of incidental events; the responsibility for those was pushed away from the rural folk looking after it every day.

To Make It on Time¹⁹

In 2015, 27% of the field area in Poland was taken up by wheat. This plant was domesticated by humans approximately 9,000 BC in the Middle East. The initial varieties would produce only a few seeds per one ear; their stems were tall and very fragile. The current varieties of wheat

18 A.L. Sowa, *Historia polityczna Polski 1944–1991*, Kraków 2011.

19 "Be on time – according to schedule, make it on time, dependable, not delayed, not late, prompt, punctual, reliable;" more: <https://www.thesaurus.com> (10.11.2016)

must have the highest productivity, that is good enough value (according to specialists assessing the crops) for the money (here meaning the cost of keeping the crops). One ear of contemporary varieties has 45-50 seeds; its stems are strong and much shorter than 20 years ago for instance.²⁰ When the collected crops are purchased, their quality is evaluated in terms of, among others, grain density, protein content, gluten content and quality and the value of sedimentation, i.e. “a number to define the value of sediment that occurs in specific conditions as a result of suspension of the flour in a milk acid solution for the presence of bromophenol blue expressed in milliliters.”²¹

In order for the sown crops to generate the expected yield, the farmer must be well acquainted with climate and soil requirements of a particular variety as well as the quality and type of soil in the fields; he should also select the appropriate pre-crop, pre-sowing cultivation, the type and method of fertilizer, the method of sowing, pest management, weed control systems and protection against diseases, as well as treat the plants with spraying. All incidents and unpredictable factors in cultivating wheat seem to be attributed to a farmer's negligence. Specialized press reviews demonstrate that for all possible “misfortunes” that may distress the peasant and his crops, science and technology have already developed effective preventive measures or treatment. A failure must then be the result

20 W. Kościelniak, M. Dreczka, *Nowoczesna uprawa zbóż*, Poznań 2009, p. 68, 149.

21 T. Knapowski, M. Ralcewicz, “Ocena wskaźników jakościowych ziarna i mąki pszenicy ozimej w zależności od zróżnicowanego nawożenia azotem,” *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska* 2/2004, p. 961.

of individual negligence. At the same time, a lack of funding is no excuse since the whole society knows that farmers are supported both by the state²² and the European Union.

Profitability of wheat cultivation is increasing per arable land where it was sown. More and more often farms specialize in the cultivation of one precise plant species over a large area up to hundreds of hectares. Such farms must have a high number of modern machinery necessary for farming. This machinery is very expensive and requires qualified employees for its operation. Polish farmers (“agricultural entrepreneurs”) receive subsidies from the Polish state or the European Union for new tractors costing several hundred thousand (and more) Polish zlotys. The subsidies are motivated by a need of rural areas to modernize and develop. A farmer should be acquainted with the rules for granting subsidies. In the Polish media, “Polish agriculture” is regularly criticized for not taking advantage of this “opportunity to develop” given by the EU. Other economic sectors are much less criticized.²³

22 “A question arises whether this important, I won’t hesitate to use the word strategic, sector of the national economy – requires support and care of the Polish government, President and the state. I have no doubts that the answer should be positive” President Andrzej Duda during a meeting of the National Development Council 5.04.2016. Cited after: “Prezydent Duda zapowiada wsparcie dla wsi: ‘Rolnictwo powinno znajdować się pod opieką państwa’”, *Wpolityce.pl*, 6.04.2016, <http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/287785-prezydent-duda-zapowiada-wsparcie-dla-wsi-rolnictwo-powinno-znajdowac-sie-pod-opieka-panstwa> (5.05.2016).

23 A review of articles in biggest newspapers from a 2-month period presents such articles as: Mk, PAP, KRD: “Rolnictwo coraz bardziej zadłużone,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19.04.2016; aleksa, PAP, “Do końca marca rolnicy mogą się starać o dofinansowanie na inwestycje,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30.03.2016; P. Błaziak, E. Szot, “Pod względem wydajności pracy w rolnictwie Polska jest w ogonie UE,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 23.02.2016, “KE rozdaje pieniądze rolnikom bez żadnej kontroli? Biedni i bogaci dostają taką samą pomoc,” *Gazeta Prawna*, 7.04.2016.

A pressure on effectiveness of “plant production” is the fundamental problem of a Polish farmer cultivating land in the 21st century. The responsibility for this activity lies on his shoulders. Cultivation is no longer accompanied by either rituals to ensure yield or beliefs, thanks to which he could share the responsibility with good or evil forces. Even the most irritating accidental supply or delivery shortages cannot absolve him from the feeling of responsibility. The farmer’s responsibility concerns living creatures which, contrary to agricultural textbooks, magazines or advertisements still have the characteristics that are unknown to man and make it impossible for the technology to master. Any attempts to completely tame and use of “the livestock” lead to merciless and unethical exploitation by “agricultural entrepreneurs.” Agriculture nowadays finds itself in an odd, ambiguous or even schizophrenic situation: it is both necessary and unnecessary, close to nature and eternally opposing it, innovative and lagging behind, creative and destructive.

“The characteristics of the economic function place agriculture among the innovative sectors. The products marketed include those related to new plant varieties, animal breeds, etc. On the other hand, due to the specifics of the generational replacement in farming families, it is in numerous cases perceived as traditional, and resistant to new solutions. If we refer to the term of food security, agriculture belongs to the crucial and strategic sectors of the economy. At the same time, if we take into account the steadily declining share of agriculture in generating GDP

and its current share at approximately 3%, it might be noticed that it is not necessarily a declining sector but one of an increasingly marginal importance.”²⁴ When reading articles about Polish rural areas one is under the impression that the peasant’s obligation has been feeding the town. The more demanding this function has been getting the greater have been consumers’ appetites only to finally reach an industrial size. This obligation creates an informal pressure to work for others that stands contrary to the freedom of choice with regard to one’s own path of life. This pressure influences the town to a significantly lesser extent as it has no obligation to support the countryside. It might be because the town produces less basic goods without which the countryside was (unfortunately – for many researchers and politicians)²⁵ able to function.

“At the end of the 19th century on Polish soil (in rural areas) the consumption of foodstuffs of animal origin by average per person was as follows: 135 liters of milk, 50 eggs and six kilograms of meat. Currently, in case of milk it is almost doubled (220l), in case of eggs four times higher (approximately 200) and in case of meat as many as over 10 times higher: 65 kilograms. This was achieved thanks to a significant improvement in the genetic value

24 A. Rosner, M. Stanny, *Monitoring rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Etap I. Przestrzenne zróżnicowanie poziomu rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego w 2010*, Warsaw 2014, p. 72.

25 “A post-collective farming village nearby Połczyn-Zdrój had the telecommunications line installed and boxes with a telephone cable mounted, but because of a fee for an individual connection, only one household used the service. Yet, soon mobile phone services became common” (A. Rosner, M. Stanny, *Monitoring rozwoju...*, p. 33). In accordance with this report, folk people have too few and unconscious needs, aspirations, ambitions and aims which should emerge, be implemented and grow constantly.

and an introduction of new technologies regarding animal breeding and feeding, which was remarkably impacted by the achievements of zootechnics, widely used in practice (mainly in the past 50 years).²⁶ These dynamic processes on a gigantic scale mean a shift in expectations and demands placed on agriculture, a change in the rules governing breeding animals and cultivating plants and, as a consequence, a change in the way nature and society are perceived, a different economy of individual farms and the economy of the whole country as well as a high number of changes in the cultural spheres which are less explicitly related to agriculture.

It was already in 1913 that Stefan Moszczeński, a Polish researcher, pointed out when publishing his paper entitled *Gdzie są granice intensywności* [Where are the boundaries of intensity],²⁷ in which he identified a process that had been ongoing since that moment. It is a process of transformation in farming. Previously this topic of the principles of functioning of a farm, whose indispensable element was breeding animals and plant cultivation, was the main topic of interest of Polish ethnographers and ethnologists. In their works one can find not only detailed descriptions of beliefs related to plants and animals but also detailed analyses of the methods of cultivation and breeding as well as all necessary equipment. The transformation process involved first of all adding the scientific element to the farming activity previously relying on tradition and

26 A. Litwińczuk, Z. Litwińczuk, J. Barłowska, M. Florek, *Surowce zwierzęce – ocena i wykorzystanie*, Warsaw 2004.

27 S. Moszczeński, *Gdzie są granice intensywności?*, Warsaw 1913.

common knowledge. Adding this element was supposed to improve its efficiency and ensure the possibility of conscious and controlled development through describing and accounting for the phenomena occurring when farming. It also required a change in relations between farmers and living creatures, the breeding of which they dealt with every day. Another transformation concerned everyday efforts, responsibility and feelings related to work in the farmstead and in the field. It is of particular importance that this development leap was mostly motivated by science, guidance and pressure originating from the outside world. The Ministries of Agriculture demanded reforms, development and rational food industry,²⁸ whereas agricultural sciences required application of the results of their achievements, economists and education specialists wanted engagement in developing new needs and aspirations of the folk, and ethnographers wanted authentic, local exotic culture...

Internal peasant motivation, their personal aims, ideas and concepts have been ignored. When social classes were being conceived, village dwellers were regarded as masses that require constant supervision and care and motivation for changes in the direction strictly defined by the supervisor. For this reason the Polish people, always described as a collective subject unfit as a partner for discussion, did not see their own history. If the meaning of the word “animals” in the quotation below is replaced, in accordance with the idea behind this article, with “hu-

²⁸ These terms are present in subsequent names for the Ministry of Agriculture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

mans,” we are presented with a metaphor of the town attitude towards the village: ”Farming animals are supposed to receive a part of their mothers’ milk and grain but only the necessary amount so that they might turn excellent nutritious things that humans find inedible into their edible produce.”²⁹

translated by Justyna Chada

²⁹ *Gospodarna hodowla...*, p. 165.



