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Time, Values and Social Roles in a South Slovakian Village

Abstract

This paper introduces an important element in the way trust shapes interpersonal relations and their change over time: the moral dimension. Value orientations are examined as bases which provide justification and contextualise the scope of social action. Rejecting the approach that analyses values as cultural constructions of certain social (or cultural) groups distinct from others, the author analyses values as temporally constructed and socially specific moral entities. People refer to certain sets of values in their social interaction with others. These values are configured on the basis of different factors: a person's social evaluation, family descent, his/her deeds and commitment to community life and personal qualities. Since each of these features is subject to change, the outcome is that there may be ambiguity in the way individuals are evaluated and esteemed in the community. This is because when trusting people, the individual chooses from among a range of features which make social confrontation desirable and fruitful. Thus, trusting becomes an action with profound moral and instrumental implications, which lead people to choose the optimal solution and avoid the risk of disappointment.

Keywords: values, social change, trust, history, central East European peasantries.

Introduction

In the classical sociological approach, values are defined as: 'conception[s...] of the desirable which influence the selection from available modes, means and ends of action' (Parsons and Shils, 1951: 395). In other words, values determine behaviour by definition.

Values are important for three reasons. Firstly, they express the expectations, the representations and the meanings that people attribute to particular social roles, functions, processes or phenomena (Kluckhohn, 1951). Therefore, values are shaped by the features of individuals or groups sharing them; values are 'socially specific,' i.e. they reflect the actors who use them, this explains why there is no such thing as a single value system within

a social context (see Campbell, 1964). Secondly, values undergo change in a different manner, than for example, practices and institutions do. Certain values, especially those expressing general life views, may need more time to change, whereas others may adapt comparatively faster to mutated external conditions. Because of this feature, the consideration of values in rapidly changing societies constitutes a useful approach to map trajectories of transformation and resistance to innovation. Thirdly, because values are constructed at two cognitive levels, the individual and the social group, they contain the classical tension between these two levels of action. Therefore, dealing with values and exploring the manner in which these justify (or are contradicted by) action is another way of relating the individual to the collective sphere of analysis.

In post-socialist societies the analysis of values and their change over time can constitute a useful approach for understanding the way in which perceptions of everyday social reality affect people's decisions and strategies. The values which are the subject of this paper are those related to social roles: prestige, sociability, public action, resourcefulness and thriftiness. My argument is that these values are profoundly characterised by gender connotations and the use that people make of them must be interpreted within the cognitive approach of villagers to historical change. History becomes an important element in understanding the present because it is in its constant interplay with present conditions that actors make sense of their practices and ideas (Hann, 2001: 7).

The approach proposed here concerns the introduction of values in Central Eastern European rural societies and their change from the pre-socialist to the post-socialist period. The second half of the paper deals with the village under examination and considers the relationship between social change and some values underpinning gender roles in village society.¹

Values and Change in Central East European Peasantry

Jávor's account of changing values in the Hungarian peasantry in the period between 1930 and 1970 provides a very useful starting approach to the problem (1983). In the attempt to map the value system of Varsány, she departs from the definition of values as 'all the socially defined goals, material or psychological, the realisation of which is attempted by members of a given community' (1983: 275). On the one hand, she ranks concepts which refer mainly to community levels social relations; these include: material success, behaviour vis-à-vis the family, behaviour vis-à-vis the village. On

¹ The field research on which this paper is based was carried out between May 2000 and September 2001 as part of my PhD research project sponsored by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle.

the other hand, there are more general moral judgements which appear to be context-specific and different if applied to male or female community members.

Jávor identifies a 'two-fold value and cognitive orientation' in the village before 1945 and after the socialist transformation which she designates as 'peasant' and 'transitional between peasant and worker.' This perception is extremely close to the account that Bell provides of another Hungarian village (1983, same volume). Bell indicates two spheres within which values are constructed and mutate: prestige-authority and personal attribution. Within each sphere Bell notices that particular values have the tendency to evolve towards others, whereas some of them prove rather resistant to change.

1. Prestige. Power, which in Hungarian villages was traditionally condensed into one dimension, i.e. land ownership, acquired diversified bases with socialist collectivisation. Increased work mobility and changes in the social hierarchy of villages produced important innovations that modified the traditional scale measures on which social status was constructed.² Men built their prestige mainly through work, respect and leadership (as in the case of cooperative brigades). On the other hand, women's prestige still seemed to be based on their husbands' position (1983: 156).

2. Human qualities. Bell points out that with the diminishing importance of land as the social marker *par excellence* under socialism human qualities acquired greater importance. However, much of these qualities did not seem to diverge from the traditional values system that Fél and Hofer illustrated in their study of Hungarian peasantry (1969). In the case of men, laziness was rejected whereas industry was conceived as the most precious human quality. Women were expected to be thrifty since they controlled the household's cash, and to avoid talking 'a great deal or loudly.' Men were also liked when they had a sociable character (which was not expected from women), but there was a tendency, as in the past, to prefer quiet to gossipy people. Moreover, concerning general evaluations of human qualities, since men have spent longer periods working in collective conditions than women, they tend to evaluate others on the basis of their human characteristics rather than on innate family positions, as women do (Jávor, 1983: 283).

Accounts of social change and its implications for value systems in rural communities in Slovakia provided somewhat similar, but not identical find-

² Szent-Györgyi argues that in two Hungarian villages the expressions of rank are differently linked to pre-socialist social status (land ownership) and the legal status as affected by the socialist change. According to her findings, in the village where there was a stronger status differentiation due to the presence of large landowners and nobles the ranking categories are distributed in plural and relatively more complex models. On the other hand, the village which presented a smaller degree of stratification was more unified in adopting ranking categories based on economic status (1983: 181-210; 1993).

ings to those indicated for rural Hungary. In Slovakia, the high degree of regional differences in the modernisation process accounted for the variability of outcomes not only before the advent of socialism, but also after collectivisation. In the northern, agriculturally poor, Tatra and sub-Tatra regions industrialisation took place as early as the mid-1930s bringing about the classical dilemmas that the introduction of urban life styles and the 'de-peasantisation' of villages have produced in the entire European continent. Therefore, between 1880 and 1940 in these regions out-migration (mainly to North America) constituted one of the most frequented escape-ways to poverty. It was not until after 1945, with socialist modernisation that the opportunity of employment in industry and the tourist sector, after its boom in the early 1960s, started a gradual yet steady process of development and social change. In some cases it was the accurate balancing between tradition and innovation that resulted to be the recipe for the modernisation of these communities (Podoba, 1999). In other cases, however, because of the permanence of traditional features such as attachment to land, prevailing orientations towards self-sufficiency, the comparatively higher degree of social stratification and labour division and the concern for family rather than collective interests, socialist modernisation proceeded at a far slower pace (Skalník, 1979; 1993).

The modernisation process brought about a comparatively dissimilar outcome in the historically more fertile and predominantly agricultural regions of southern and western Slovakia, where the village studied here is situated. The industrialisation of these regions was achieved mainly during socialism and the few locally based industries, which were started mainly due to the entrepreneurial activity of Jews, Germans or Hungarians, in most cases did not survive the post-war transformation. On the other hand, however, the Hungarian villages of the south were traditionally wealthier than those in the northern part of Slovakia because of the higher level of agricultural production and presented many more similarities to the communities described by Jávora and Szent-Györgyi. Therefore, in the beginning of the 20th century modernisation in these regions was a 'process from below,' geared by the accumulation of capital and the investment by local farmers in agriculture. This explains why the dramatic and painful changes introduced by collectivisation and the creation of industrial and urban centres in the 1960–1970s had a heavier impact here than in the northern Slovakian regions. Danglová (1999) points out that the collectivisation process marked for many of these communities a 'step-back' towards modernisation as villagers were to learn that it was mainly through the accurate use of networks, personal and family ties rather than through competition in a market economy that social and economic advancement had to be pursued. Values became increasingly polarised between private and collective, emotional

and instrumental, formal and informal. The degree and nature of variations that these categories acquired became a strict function of the communities' pace of modernisation and within them of actors' skills and moral orientations.

The Village

The village of Királyfa (Kráľová nad Váhom)³ is situated in south-western Slovakia, about 50 km from Bratislava and 140 km from Budapest. Due to its position in the fertile region of the Danubian Lowland, agriculture was the main economic activity of villagers until the 1960s. Afterwards, forced collectivisation and the development of an industrial centre in the neighbouring town of Šala deeply changed the social and economic relations that had dominated the village for centuries.

On the one hand, urbanisation and industrialisation processes diversified the village's occupational structure (the agricultural employment rate decreased from 85% in 1950 to 27% in 1970) and increased the outflow of young villagers towards urban centres.⁴ The village gradually lost its 'agrarian' character while increases in the education level, improvement of infrastructure and working mobility produced a rather dynamic picture of social relations both inside and outside the community.

On the other hand, the creation of the village's agricultural cooperative profoundly changed the power relations that had been dominant until the 1950s. Collectivisation was undertaken in the community through a slow and painful process characterised by fierce opposition by the peasant families who did not accept being deprived of their resources. It was not until the early 1960s that the cooperative achieved its first positive results due to high state subsidies, the enlargement and diversification of the production sphere (including for instance tobacco growing and vegetable gardening), the cooperative's social (a pension and benefits scheme was introduced in 1962), and cultural (it sponsored a large number of cultural and sports events) role in the community.

However, this situation changed abruptly in 1973 following the decision to unify the cooperative with four other institutions from three villages and the town, which became the management centre. The village cooperative ceased to exist and its social and cultural role in the village clearly diminished.

³ The village is inhabited by 1531 people, 723 of whom are economically active. The population is 83.1 per cent ethnic Hungarian, 15.5 per cent Slovak and 1.4 per cent of other ethnic composition (Census, 2001).

⁴ Some villagers explained this phenomenon through the reluctance of the local administration to issue building permits in the village. Young inhabitants were then forced to leave the village for the town and became used to different lifestyles often making a u-turn impossible.

As in all post-socialist countries, the events that followed 1989 had their impact in subsequent waves on the community. On the one hand, the restitution of property rights did not have the outcome of restoring and developing the private farming sector and the transformed cooperative remained the most important economic agent in agriculture. On the other hand, those who held power before socialism were not in a position to come back and re-establish elites (Namerová, 1997; Giordano and Kostová, 2001) because of ageing and the lack of contacts with local institutions such as the cooperative, the local and regional administration (Torsello, 2002b).

Changing Values in Királyfa

Királyfa exemplifies the way in which early modern value orientations intertwined with the socialist ones and converged in shaping the cognitive approach of villagers to the post-socialist transformation. The village was never characterised by the presence of a large stratum of a rich landed peasantry, nonetheless, its geopolitical conditions and the proximity to local and international market ways favoured the development of a 'semi-kulak' identification among the few large landholders. This brought about the consolidation of strong inter-family ties between the wealthy peasants and quasi-patronage ties between this and other social groups (Torsello, 2002b). On the other hand, the presence of a vast stratum of landless peasants and craftsmen kept villagers in constant search of employment opportunities. These were more or less at hand until the end of the 2nd World War, as confirmed by the absence of emigration to Northern America. Here villagers often did not go farther than Budapest or Bohemia to find work. Hence villagers were required to establish networks outside their community. They did so mainly following the lines dictated by personal knowledge and connections within the village. However, once working experiences outside the community had been established, the scope of villagers' networks could easily go beyond village boundaries. Therefore, the assertion that modernisation was not disruptive for Királyfa's social life can be related to the reality that its members had already experienced to seek outside what was not available within the community.

The socialist transformation severely affected social relations in the village wiping away the power of the wealthy peasants and introducing forced collectivisation. After a decade of slow and dramatic process, all land was collectivised and the subsequent good performance of the village cooperative successfully smoothed the contrast between private and collective life experiences. As in Varsány and in the older of the two villages described by Skalník,⁵ the collectivisation of agriculture and the industriali-

⁵ Skalník (1986, 1993) describes the different modernisation processes of two villages

sation of local towns left space to the permanence of 'peasant' value orientations. These became manifest after the post-socialist transformation rather than during socialism, when the issue of family descent was rather silenced by villagers for avoiding conflicts.⁶

Because the re-establishment of property rights did not bring about a 'return of the kulaks' in the village and pre-socialist elites, it is difficult to speak about class-related values or an expression of determinate social groups. However, this does not mean that present value orientations are not characterised by the influence of different historical periods. The next section analyses some of the values which are still characterised by two social connotations: gender roles and human qualities.

Gendered Values

The profound social and economic transformations that characterised the historical course of the community since the end of feudalism shaped significantly the manner in which social status and prestige were considered in the village. The common assumption that in the (pre-socialist) past a man meant nothing without land or animals was indeed part of the villagers' common sense as is demonstrated by frequent narratives of rich peasant families nowadays. Not only were power relations constructed on the size of the farmstead, the ownership of animals, tools and farm machines, but the ownership ideology created a wider distinction between the landed and the landless. This explains why, as in the case of Kispalád described by Szent-Györgyi (1983, 1993) being from a 'peasant family' (*paraszt familia* or *család*) was considered a matter of pride. This attribute proved resistant to change as nowadays some villagers still use the term 'peasant' (*paraszt*), or 'son of peasants' (*paraszt gyerek*) when addressing villagers with a respectable descent, i.e. whose ancestors owned land and worked hard on it.

One of the outcomes of socialist collectivisation for the values that classify people according to prestige and power is that, nowadays, some villagers tend to distinguish between 'being a peasant,' which now constitutes a positive attribute, and being a 'proletarian' (*proletár*, or even worse *lum-*

in the Tatra mountain area of northern Slovakia. His two communities, one historically older than the other have different strategies of adaptation to change. The younger community was more open to change and adapted faster to socialism because of its comparatively higher economic disadvantages. On the other hand, the older village proved more resistant to change due to the power of local wealthy peasant families who resisted collectivisation.

⁶ Villagers recall that during the 1950–1960s there were several instances of open conflict and quarrels between the advocates of socialist ideology and those who, less manifestly, were not in favour of the regime. In those cases, the former proudly called themselves 'partisans,' whereas the latter were attributed with the epithet 'sons of peasants,' which was, however, rarely pronounced in public.

pen proletár). This does not mean that socialism made all people 'proletarians,' but that those families who did not own land in pre-socialist times are now designated today using an epithet which originates from the socialist period.

The insistence on building social evaluation by means of polarising between peasants and proletarians finds its most eloquent expression in the delineation of the socialist period. One metaphor used to express the socialist transformation in the village was that of dirty water. One respondent said: 'Do you know what happens if you have a bucket full of dirty water? If the bucket is immobile, the dirt deposits at the bottom. It is there, you can't do anything with it; all you need to do is keep it there and it won't come to the top. But once you shake the water all you get is the dirt which comes up and the water is simply turbid. This is what happened after the end of the war' (László). In his words, the 'dirt' constituted the lowest group of the village (*a falu alja*) and the socialist revolution, the water shaking. In these words, what was before socialism is characterised as a status of 'semi-harmony' and 'justice,' while the socialist change brought to the top all the negative aspects of society which were still dormant.

Prestige, Sociability and Public Action

Male social prestige is constructed on two levels. One level expresses the collective features of one kind of life-style or mode of production (e.g. the peasantry). Another level is more impressively featured through a person's individual qualities, skills, deeds and attributions of the person. This section considers two value orientations that underpin male social evaluation in the community: sociability and the degree of involvement in public action. In order to consider the relevance of these two values I will compare three village male figures and the manner in which these are evaluated by the villagers today.

JENŐ

Jenő is the youngest son of one of the wealthiest *gazda* (rich peasant) in the village. He is 75 and, apart from one sister, he is the only descendant of his family to reside in the village. His family is remembered by people as one of the most prominent *gazda* families not only for their wealth ('he had so many animals in the courtyard that it was impossible to sleep in his neighbourhood for the noise') but also for the quality of his father's farming work ('his land was always the greenest and most ordered of the village'). Moreover, Jenő is married to one of the daughters of another rich village peasant, one who owned all the houses along the entire village road, which is still remembered with his name. This further elevated his social status especially since he, differently from most of the other *gazda*-s, mar-

ried for love and not by family agreement. Jenő's social status was enhanced because in 1954 his father was forced to sign up the cooperative and become a factory worker, without however becoming a 'proletarian.' Jenő worked for the railways and was never particularly active in the cooperative or in other official village functions during socialism. After 1989, he claimed back a portion of land, but after some years he was forced to lease it to the cooperative for lack of workforce and now he peacefully enjoys working in his big garden with the help of his wife.

Jenő lives in a house distinctly bigger than his neighbours' and he is known for possessing old farming utensils from the last century as well as for collecting old village documents compiled by his ancestors which date back to the 18th century. In spite of his solid family reputation, however, none of his human qualities seem to be highly valued and enhance his personal reputation. Jenő is of a rather bashful nature, with little propensity to talk and his social life is literally managed by his wife who has a strong predisposition towards company and is extremely talkative.

JÓZSEF

He is a retired 72 year-old villager. József comes from a landless family, his father worked at a level crossing and his mother was a sewer. He made a quick and brilliant career during socialism due to his firm political ideology, which has not yet left him and became one of the cooperative accountants in 1959. Since then he took an active part in all cooperative meetings, social and cultural events, as he is proud of showing the many pictures portraying him side by side with old district and town party leaders. József was also responsible for legal disputes within the cooperative and this, as he pointed out 'made some people's ideas about him grow bitter.'

Unlike Jenő, he has two children and four grandchildren living in the village and their families often help in his garden. In the village he seems to be tied mainly to people who once occupied leading positions within the cooperative, whereas he maintains very active contacts with other cooperative members who live in the town and still work in the cooperative. Because of his openly socialist ideology, József is not beloved by a number of villagers, who see in his views the stigmatisation of past practices and abuses.

József's wife is still very active in the village, since she works part-time in the noodle factory and has an extensive network of female community members due, also, to her coming from one of the several miller families who lived in the village until the 1930s. In his case, the proposition that the female part of social networking is dedicated to the village or inter-household sphere and the male to the external (town and cooperative) finds confirmation. However, what is more significant is that his reputation is not built through his past family status, but rather through his work during so-

cialism. József does not have low esteem in the community, he is rather kept at a distance by those who now judge the previous regime negatively. On the other hand, however, many demonstrate a distant respect towards him, seen as one of the actors of the collectivisation period and close to the old local and district cadres. József is a sociable person; his reputation for having a vast knowledge of European history and loving reading makes him an emblematic figure combining personal talent with the 'mistakes' of the past. On the other hand, some villagers feel uneasy with him maintaining that his pedantry often hampers any possibilities of a good and enjoyable chat.

AMBRUS

Ambrus is 76. He worked for the cooperative in the 1960–70s and afterwards as an accountant in the village municipal office. He is married to a village woman who during socialism worked in a town factory and has three children, one of whom still lives with him. Ambrus belongs to the old generation of those who did much to improve the village's living conditions, as he was very active in the cooperative and he appeared less as a 'career-seeker,' as in the case of József, than an active community member. He played an active role in many campaigns for the improvement of village infrastructures (the creation of the sidewalk, the park and the football stadium), and still takes part in some of the events sponsored by local clubs such as the sport organisation, the Hungarian cultural association and the Hunters Club. He is a rather jovial man and enjoys drinking in company.

Ambrus's prestige in the village is based not only on his personal character and achievements for the community but also on his family reputation. He comes from a small peasant family, which was, as others, severely hit by collectivisation. Although his father did not enter the cooperative, he divided the land between his sons and let Ambrus join the institution. Ambrus was trained as an accountant and this proved a precious capital at a time when, in the early 1960s, the village cooperative was in urgent need of finding educated and skilled personnel. However, when the cooperative was unified Ambrus lost his privileged position there and was ready to accept an offer at the village municipal office. In this way, although he had been involved in the cooperative, he was relieved from doing the 'dirty job' that József did, but in the meanwhile he showed active involvement in the modernisation of the village infrastructure. Because of his life trajectory, Ambrus is now one of the most respected old village members and his still active relationship with the cooperative is regarded by many as an incentive for keeping up with him.

People now base their judgements and values that determine the social positions of individuals on the sum of their descent, human qualities and actions. The weight of the rapid transformations that characterised the last century is felt in the manner in which these evaluations are adapted to each

personality. However, as the three above cases suggest, it is difficult to detect a common set of values that originated or characterised singularly the historical periods under examination. Values change adapting to the different socio-economic conditions of the times and ways in which people make use of them reflect their varied significance. For example, if one had to judge who among the three figures now enjoys the highest esteem in the village the task would not be easy. On the ground of values that characterised prestige and power in the pre-socialist period (family origin, land and status) Jenő would undoubtedly be the winner. However, he is not an extraordinarily sociable person and many would argue that he does not own any particular human quality that makes of him a popular personality apart from his family background. Ambrus is surely the winner in terms of human qualities and his commitment to community activities. Moreover, the kind of values that now delineate his position in the community go beyond his involvement in public life and his personal qualities: Ambrus is the son of peasants, even though not a *gazda*. József is probably the most problematic figure. He is respected for values such as scholarship, assiduity in work and his extensive social network outside the village. However, because of his family origin (he is a 'proletarian' as he himself is proud of underlining) and past working experience, he is not loved by some of the villagers.

RESOURCEFULNESS AND THRIFTINESS

Moving to the female sphere, Jávör underlined a number of values that were related mainly to women and whose prevalence shaped the way in which social evaluation and prestige of women were constructed in rural communities (Jávör, 1983: 279). Among them, I would like to identify thriftiness and resourcefulness.

In the village, male and family prestige historically drew significantly on the social role of female members. Unlike Mediterranean societies, where women incorporated the concept of honour which was translated into the economic, social and political sphere through the behaviour of their husbands, in the Central East European peasantry the role of the woman is characterised individually by her two main functions: economic and social. Women actively contributed to the household economy and their labour was a precious value in situations of scarcity. Moreover, in the Hungarian and Slovakian peasantry, female members played a strong social role in tying households and spreading the web of village-level networks.

Királyfa had a high rate of female employment since early modern times. The scarcity of land and animals and the relative proximity of large estates that provided a potential work opportunity especially to female members and younger sons contributed to siphon off most of the surplus population throughout the end of the 19th and the first three decades of the 20th century.

Women from landless or small peasant families often commuted daily to such estates or to some local factories in order to complement the meagre income that the family land or crafts could bring home. In this manner, resourcefulness was a fundamental attribute of female family members, who often built important links not only within the community, but also to the outside, extra-village world. One elderly respondent, who preferred not to be named, remembers how her mother used to wake up at four in the morning, give water and food to the animals, prepare breakfast, a snack for her and leave around five to reach, on foot, the Onyi estate which is situated 11 km from the village. She came back every evening after dark and this throughout the farming season. After her mother found that employment, thanks to the recommendation of a female cousin who worked as a servant on that estate, she was eventually also able to find work for her younger sister. She could not bear the hard work and eventually fled to Budapest to work as a servant in a middle-class family. This happened in the 1920s.

After socialist collectivisation Jávör underlines that in Vársany many women became increasingly detached from their family life because of the new employment opportunities that added burden to the care of the house (Jávör, 1983: 292). This was also the case in Királyfa, where, however, except for the *gazda* families, village women were already accustomed to working outside the house and build important personal relations.

Socialism did not mean a dramatic change in gender roles, but it stressed the idea that both men and women were to contribute equally to the household economy. Virtually no village woman could allow herself to stay at home and take care of the house alone, it was part of the socialist ideology, but also a matter of family needs. In some cases husband and wife were fortunate enough to find employment in local factories (Galanta or Šala), but in other instances they were separated by large distances. Ibolya, for example, worked in Šala whereas István had to commute everyday to Bratislava. He usually worked morning shifts, whereas she could even work late at night and thus their children spent much of their time with the neighbours.

In the early 1990s, after the restructuring and closure of many local industries many village women lost their jobs and had few possibilities of replacing them in the rapidly developing commercial and industrial centres of the capital. In the first instance, the majority of those women turned to housework and the care of gardens and family plots. In the late 1990s, when local employment opportunities started increasing due to the country's improved economic situation and the general optimism in its new government, new opportunities appeared. Nowadays, the majority of employed women work as clerks in small factories, in the services sector or as school

teachers.⁷ Their economic contribution is significant to the household economy⁸ not only in terms of income supply but also considering the role played by female labour in gardens and family plots.

In the light of these recent changes in women's employment opportunities, their role as precious ties both to the community and to outside institutions is enforced. There is a strong degree of continuity in female social evaluation built on resourcefulness and this is certainly a product of the historical course of the village.

Because a large number of women worked in town factories during socialism, whereas many men commuted to Bratislava, the role of networks built on the female line is often more important than that constructed by male workers. Not only do village women resort to personal connections established during the late socialist period for private purposes, but through this they also enforce their reputation and their social role in the community. This happens with greater frequency in the case of elderly women who were very active during the 1980s or before, whereas younger women often depend on these elder members to achieve involvement in the working circuit.

Vióla, who is 68 years old, first worked in a clothes factory for several years and then in the town state bakery. During her first job she was able to provide employment to one of her sisters-in-law; during the second appointment, and before retiring, she introduced her daughter-in-law to one of her old employers (the bakery was not privatised until 1997). After some months, her daughter in law was hired in the retailing sector. Vióla owes part of her reputation in the village to her ability to manage personal knowledge of the bakery's former directors for the sake of her kin, but also to her willingness to provide information on some services of the factory. Once a week, at a special time, the bakery sells part of the week's unsold bread at one fifth of its price. This bread constitutes an important supplement for animal breeding, especially to those families who do not own enough land to produce their own fodder. Moreover, this being the only large bakery in the district, it is not surprising that old bread is quickly sold out. Vióla still knows when the bread is on the market (the scheduled days are not always respected) and she is not reluctant to communicate this to interested villagers.

⁷ Among 100 households 55 wives are employed and 17 retired. The employed women do mainly intellectual (15), factory (14) and other skilled work (11). No one claimed to be employed in agriculture.

⁸ Apart from the employment of wives there are different female categories to be taken into account when dealing with the household economy. The survey indicated that in 23 per cent of the target households there are income-receiving women. These include mothers (1), mothers-in-law (2), cousins (1), daughters (13) and daughters-in-law (6) (Source: author's household survey).

In line with the findings of Jávör and Szent-Györgyi the different roles that men and women play in the social and economic life of the village are emphasised by determinate sets of values which draw on the various historical experiences of the actors. Men's prestige tends to be a sum of the family descent, involvement in community activity and personal qualities. On the other hand, women are highly evaluated on their capacity to support the household economy and they constitute, as in socialist and pre-socialist times, precious threads to the outside world.

Conclusion

Understanding the transformation of values constitutes an important approach for mapping social change. Values constitute the cognitive basis on which people build their decisions in terms of action and social interaction and as such must be treated in the light of the overall transformation. In Királyfa, people's judgements about human qualities and the roles relating to gender are profoundly influenced by the changes of commonly shared values and orientations towards them. Due to the rapidity of the post-socialist transformation it is increasingly difficult to identify stable norms of behaviour and the moral precepts underpinning human action. This seems to contradict the vision that values constitute some of the features of a society which are slow to adapt to mutating conditions. The vision proposed by this paper is that values acquire significance in the daily interaction between individuals and hence reflect the weight of historical changes as they are constantly mediated by actors in their decisions. This idea is best expressed by one respondent's words: 'It's hard to say how people feel and behave today. What was important before may not be an issue today, but it could come back tomorrow' (Ferenc).

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