

Gifts and Favors

Social Networks and Reciprocal Exchange in Poland

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Focusing on general patterns revealed in everyday experiences, the paper examines reciprocal exchange in Poland, and considers the continuities and changes in the uses of gifts, favors, and recommendations as state socialism is replaced by market capitalism. I show how, on one hand, particularistic relationships have utilitarian and moral value, and provide individuals with some degree of control over their lives. On the other hand, continued reliance on connections helps to increase material and social inequalities in Poland, especially when used in conjunction with market reforms. The paper emphasizes the centrality of social networks in market economies generally while also highlighting the particular historic forces that shape reciprocal exchange networks in contemporary Poland.

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In popular discourse, it is usually assumed that capitalism is an economic system based on rational principles, and as such, personal relationships fade in significance relative to skills, ingenuity and market demand. Similarly, a classic distinction in economic anthropology contrasts economic systems based on reciprocity that are characteristic of uncentralized societies and market-based economies in centralized societies.¹ Whereas reciprocity involves personalized exchanges that are often categorized as gifts, market economies involve impersonal exchanges of commodities (Gregory 1982). The relationship between giver and receiver is central in the former, while bonds between exchange partners in market economies (a cashier and a customer at Wal-Mart, for instance) end as soon as money is exchanged for the items purchased. Nevertheless, ethnographic studies that view exchange patterns “on the ground,” from the perspective of individuals living and working within such systems, usually reveal that reciprocity among social connections continues to function within market economies (Basch *et al.* 1994; Day 1982; di Leonardo 1984;

Halperin 1990; Lomnitz 1977; Rapp 1978; Singerman 1995; Stack 1974; Yanagisako 1977).² As Lomnitz contends:

“The enduring importance of social connections and influence peddling in societies as different as Mexico, the US and the Soviet Union attests to the fact that reciprocity as an economic force is today very much alive. Moreover, the practice of reciprocity is found alongside market exchange in all strata of urban society, from the very poor to the very rich” (1977:4).

I examine these processes in a very particular context – in postcommunist³ Poland as state socialist structures were replaced by market-based structures throughout the 1990s. My purpose is fourfold – first to examine individuals’ “ways of using” networks within the context of larger institutional structures.⁴ To do so, I focus on everyday exchanges of gifts, favors, and recommendations, and identify the patterns that emerge in a variety of social actors’ choices. Second, I consider the continuities and changes in the tactics individuals use as market capi-

talism replaces state socialism. In particular, I examine the varied tactics of urban and rural residents that reflect their relative access to opportunity within the emerging market economy. Third, I show that networks are likely to remain integral to economic exchanges in that they provide a means of access to opportunities, and they tend to provide some guarantee of trustworthiness between exchange partners. Thus, I explore the instrumental, affective, and ethical dimensions of networkbased exchanges. Finally, I consider how continued reliance on social networks is shaping post-communist Polish society, and in particular, contributes to material and social inequalities in Poland.

Consequently, the data presented here contribute to the understanding of a number of theoretical issues. First, the transition from state socialism to capitalism in Eastern and Central Europe provides a vivid context in which to view the ways that people adapt to social change. I view institutional reforms from the perspective of everyday lives: how Poles adapt long-standing cultural patterns to new circumstances, and how they reshape these patterns so that new meanings emerge. Second, I show that networks of intimates and reciprocal exchange are often not displaced by market economies in state societies, but rather remain an integral component of these centralized structures. Third, I consider ways of using social connections within market economies. In particular, I view the ways in which manipulation of social networks becomes a means by which social inequality is produced and reproduced in market economies. Although manipulation of social networks remains the primary means by which groups on the margins, in this case the rural underemployed, gain entrance into the market economy, people who are "better connected" tend to gain greater profit from their connections, thus contributing to an increase in income disparities (Boissevain 1974; Lomnitz 1977; Singerman 1995; Watson 1994).⁵

I focus on what Michel de Certeau calls "tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong" (1984:xvii). Tactics are not institutional, conventional, or "proper." Nor are they intellec-

tualized ideas about appropriate courses of action. Rather, they are the spontaneous actions taken by those without recourse to official avenues of power. Tactics involve the weighing of a whole range of factors as they come together in a given moment.⁶ Reciprocity among social networks encompasses a variety of tactics that help to provide security and some degree of personal control in unsure circumstances. Thus, social networks comprise an important social arena for the exercise of personal agency.

My study adds to a growing body of scholarship that views state and even global political and economic structures as they shape and are shaped by "on the ground" experiences of individual citizens. Studies based on fieldwork conducted in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union before 1989 include Borneman (1992), Hann (1985), Haraszti (1978), Ries (1997), and Wedel (1986); studies based on more recent fieldwork include Berdahl (1999), Berdahl *et al.* (2000), Ledeneva (1998), and Pesman (2000). The life stories I describe here are based primarily on fieldwork conducted during the summers of 1999 and 2000 in the form of interviews and informal discussions with Poles who were in high school during my original fieldwork in 1992–93, and who were in their mid-twenties and just beginning their working lives in 1999 and 2000. At this age, they were particularly in need of the things that networks help people acquire: employment, education, and housing. Because of my focus on everyday practices, I also documented the manipulations of networks that I observed, even if the subjects of these exchanges were individuals outside of my primary research group. These observations suggest that my claim about the continued significance of networks applies to more than the generation at the center of my study. I work with urban residents of the thriving cultural and academic center of Krakow, and rural residents from the economically depressed southeastern region of the Bieszczady Mountains. As Pine (1995) points out, differences in regional histories and local economies contribute to varied responses to socialism and post-socialism in Poland. My fieldwork in two regions allowed me to witness the sharp distinction between urban and rural residents' access to

educational and employment opportunities, whether by means of formal pathways or through social networks.

A number of studies have documented the significance of social networks in state socialist countries (see Gilliland [1986] on Yugoslavia; Ledeneva [1998] on Russia; Lampland [1995] on Hungary; Platz [1999] on Armenia; Sampson [1985–86] for an overview of the informal sector in Eastern Europe; and Wedel [1986, 1990] on Poland). They have tended to attribute dependence on social networks to specific features of state socialism, such as the ineffectiveness of the distribution system that made it necessary for individuals to gain access to scarce goods through informal means (see also Haraszti 1978). Watson stresses that particularistic relations posed an important challenge to state hegemony “where a friend of a friend might offer a better chance of getting what was needed than reliance on the channels of central distribution” (1994:4). Janine Wedel’s (1986) study of Poland describes such innovative schemes as line committees, in which people who wanted consumer items that were only sporadically available, such as refrigerators, organized their own waiting lists for them. Everyone on the list was required to wait in line for specified periods. The items would be sold to the people who were next on the list, regardless of who was on line when the delivery actually came. This tactic, controlled by consumers themselves, was a way of introducing a little more security during a period in which it was never known when deliveries would come, or how much would be delivered. Wedel also explains how “favors” were periodically exchanged among acquaintances – someone who worked in a factory might “acquire” some left over paint and then sell it or give it to an acquaintance. Later, he might ask that acquaintance if she could help him acquire a rug, or imported food, or medical advice.

My study shows that Poles continue to depend on connections despite the fall of communism and the introduction of market driven forces. On numerous occasions, when I asked whether networks continue to be important in Poland, I was told “*wszystko zależy od znajomości*” (everything depends on connections).⁷ Re-

spondents elaborated with stories about such varied practices as arranging their children’s enrollment in good schools, sharing answers on exams, recommending friends for jobs, getting gifts from relatives abroad, helping friends establish themselves abroad, sharing childcare duties with family members, getting good hospital care, and taking over the rights to cooperative apartments from grandparents. These stories reveal that networks are not used for access to scarce goods nearly as often as they were under state socialism, but they continue to be used to gain access to scarce opportunities. This is especially true for services that were formerly provided by the state, such as employment and medical care.⁸

Under state socialism, the state was the primary employer and essentially guaranteed employment for all citizens. Indeed, the full employment policy together with the inefficiencies of the distribution system made it illegal to be unemployed. In effect, industries operated with a surplus of labor to insure rapid production when supplies were available, but this also meant that employees sat idle when critical supplies were lacking (see, for example Verdery 1996). Many spent their free time while at work making up for the failures of the system; while a coworker covered for them, they went shopping, or they used materials and equipment from their place of employment to do freelance jobs. Many viewed their official jobs as the place where they gained access to materials and connections that they could use to their advantage in the unofficial economy. By contrast, efforts to establish a self-regulating market economy in the early 1990s led to the closing or restructuring of unprofitable businesses, and the reintroduction of unemployment in Poland for the first time in forty years. At the heart of reforms was a radical shift in the ideology that governed the state’s responsibility to its citizens. No longer was the state the paternal caregiver – indeed, the heavy-handed policies of the state socialist system were perceived to have crippled the Polish economy. Instead, trust was placed in the free market, and unemployment tended to be regarded as an unfortunate, but necessary, price to pay.

Surveys conducted by the Polish Center for

Public Opinion Research (CBOS) reveal that already by the early 1990s, youths accepted that employment should not be guaranteed, but they also expressed greater concern about unemployment than any other social problem (Czarnocka *et al.* 1992). Similarly, while still in school, most of my respondents said they worry about unemployment. Although for many, their concerns were not borne out by their or their parents' experiences, the registered unemployed increased from 11% to 16% of the working population between 1991 and 1993, with percentages considerably higher in rural areas. Employment rates decreased to less than 10% by 1997, but by 2000 they were back up around 14%, and continued to climb to 18% in 2002. Generally, only 5% of urban residents collect unemployment compensation, in contrast to 20 or more percent in rural areas. These percentages are only rough indicators of actual unemployment rates, however, because they measure the registered unemployed. On one hand, the percentages are artificially high because many find unofficial intermittent or seasonal work. On the other, the figures fail to include the chronically unemployed, the thousands who collect disability pensions from the state, women who have stepped out of a job market that increasingly favors men, and people who are officially categorized as farmers even though they can not earn enough from their farming to live. Thus, it was in this climate of concern about employment that Poles turned to their social connections for help acquiring the information, skills, and training needed to find or maintain jobs within the market economy.

The movement toward a more monetized and commoditized economy, I contend, does not mean that social connections decrease in importance. Rather, particularly in the case of postsocialist economies, efforts that were formerly made to relieve the problems of distribution endemic to state socialism have been replaced by efforts to gain access to sources of reliable income such as a good job. It is through personal social connections that Poles help to insure access to opportunities and services that were formerly provided by the state.⁹ Below, I focus on three intersecting "ways of using" social networks that I observed in

1999 and 2000 – exchanges of gifts, recommendations, and favors. All were significant under state socialism, but Poles today are using them to make a place for themselves within the new system. Indeed, differences in the ways in which Poles call upon social connections before and since 1989 help to reveal the varied sets of challenges individuals face as the state redefines its responsibility toward citizens. The following case reveals particular changes in the realms of education and work.

The Graduation Trip

While in the Bieszczady Mountains in 2000, I accepted Pani Kasia's invitation to take a drive with her as a welcome break from my writing. By good fortune, the drive gave me the opportunity to observe some of the exchange patterns that I was seeking to make sense of in my field notes. Pani Kasia explained that she was taking some coworkers to pick up their high school equivalency diplomas. These women work at a high school in the small town of Lesko, the locus of my ethnographic research since 1992. When we met after lunch, Magda and Ewa were visibly excited. They were dressed in skirts, jackets, and high heels, and their hair was specially done up for the occasion. Pani Kasia wore a fancy outfit herself. She was picking up her sister's diploma, she explained to me, and there was going to be a small graduation ceremony. It became even clearer that I had stumbled into a special event when, as we departed, the principal of the school where the women work stopped us to offer his congratulations and to make sure the graduates got flowers for the principal of the school that was issuing their diplomas. Magda assured him that we were on our way to the florist, and that she already had a big box of Bon Ami chocolates, a bottle of Żuborówka vodka (an herb flavored Polish specialty), and a carton of apple juice (the traditional mixer for the Żuborówka).

As we drove, the ladies decided that they definitely needed flowers not only for the principal, but also for the school secretary, and two of their teachers. After a little debate, they agreed to give a gift to their *wychowawcza* (like an advisor or home room teacher), even though

they had never met him. In the end they got six bouquets, including an extra one for anyone they might be forgetting. While the florist arranged the flowers with colorful ribbons and shiny paper, Ewa bought five more large boxes of chocolates at a nearby shop. All this occurred in an exuberant flurry of activity, their gifts becoming more and more extravagant as they talked. In total, the three of them spent close to three hundred zloty (\$75) on gifts, roughly the equivalent of one third of a monthly salary. Their generosity even extended to me (much to my embarrassment). While the elaborate bouquets were made, I admired the plants, flowers, and planters in the shop. Pani Kasia complimented some tiny carved planters, and when I agreed, she offered to buy me one. I told her it was entirely unnecessary. But Magda overheard our conversation and joined in, insisting that I choose the one I like best. I continued to refuse, but before leaving, they chose one and gave it to me. Pani Kasia said to me, "When you are back home, you will look at this and remember us."

When we finally reached the school, it turned out that the graduation ceremony was on the following day – Pani Kasia had been told the wrong date when she had called. The principal was quite impressed by all the flowers and gifts, though, and suggested they be stored in the basement until the ceremony. Spirits remained high despite the error. Only Magda expressed some regret that she would not be able to show off her diploma to her coworkers on the following day. She joked, "they are going to think I lied about graduating, and that I just wanted to take the afternoon off." Pani Kasia assured them that she would drive up again the next day and pick up the diplomas for them (neither Magda nor Ewa own a car).

Over the course of the afternoon, I learned that the women getting diplomas had all attended the school where Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia now work, but had for one reason or another failed to take their final exams (*matura*). Now, nearly twenty years later, they all felt the need for a high school diploma because of changes in the job market. For over a year, Magda had been working as a secretary in the principal's office, a job that usually requires a secondary school education. Because Magda had been a

trustworthy employee in the school cafeteria for a number of years, the principal asked her to take over when the former secretary was caught stealing from the students' health insurance fund. At first, the move from cook to office worker was overwhelming for Magda, but she adjusted quickly, and has enjoyed learning how to use computers. Still, she felt as though she needed to finish her degree if she wanted to keep her job. Similarly, Ewa hoped to move from cleaning lady to a more responsible position, and Jola wanted to go to college so that she could get a job as an accountant.

Pani Kasia also told me that because of education reforms, the three women would lose the opportunity to ever earn a high school diploma unless they enrolled in a program right away. The high school they originally attended (and where Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia now work) does not have what is called a *zaoczny* program, for working people who typically attend classes one or two weekends per month, and it was not financially feasible for the school to organize a program for just three students. Thus, the women enrolled in a program at another agricultural high school that was an hour away by bus (it took just a half hour by car). Though I was not told explicitly, Pani Kasia made some comments that suggested that their boss pulled some strings to get Magda, Ewa, and Jola in the program. Also, although the ladies talked about doing some assignments for their teachers, they do not seem to have attended any classes.

The way that Magda, Ewa, and Jola got their high school diplomas reveals a functioning system of informal rules about reciprocal exchange, even in negotiations with a state institution. The women made use of a number of network-based tactics to gain access to opportunities – via gifts, favors, and recommendations. None of these tactics are new, but they are being used in new ways, to obtain the credentials that are necessary to remain viable workers in an economy where employment is no longer guaranteed by the state. Below, I describe in more detail the particular tactics used in this and related cases.

Gifts or Bribes?

One challenge for studies of exchange networks is the question of categorization. What occurs in the realm of practice rarely maps neatly onto conceptual categories, even in cases where conceptual categories are clearly differentiated. Specifically, whereas Poles make unambiguous distinctions between gifts (*prezenty*) and bribes (*łapówki*) as abstract concepts, it is much harder to draw the line between them when examining everyday situations. The graduation trip exemplifies this difficulty. Do the items given to the school officials constitute gifts or bribes?¹⁰

Hospitality is one of the few positive traits that young Poles associate with their nation (Galbraith 1997).¹¹ People feel pressure to reciprocate favors and gifts as an essential way of expressing hospitality, marking personal relationships, and strengthening social networks. Patterns of reciprocity described in the seminal work of Marcel Mauss (1967) help to explain the processes associated with gift exchange in Poland. Mauss emphasized that the bond between exchange partners is perpetuated by a mutual obligation to repay gifts, and he recognized the economic selfinterest that underlies the maintenance of these relationships. However, as Bourdieu (1977a, 1990) points out, uncovering the underlying structure of gift exchange does not necessarily help to explain the phenomenon very well. Instead, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of timing in gift exchanges—the delay in return is essential for establishing social relations and for determining the power dynamics of the relationships established. Another danger of studies that focus on the instrumentality of reciprocal exchange is that they all too easily disregard or underemphasize the affective and moral dimensions of gift giving. Being well connected contributes to positive self and social identities, and as such tends to be intrinsically valued. As Kipnis (1997) explains in relation to *gaunxi* exchanges in China, the formation of relationships is simultaneously the means and the ends of reciprocal exchange. Similarly, in her analysis of Russian *blat*, Ledeneva (1998) points to the “web of gratitude” that binds exchange partners together (see also Simmel 1950).

In contrast to gifts, bribes (*łapówki*) usually lack the positive moral, affective, social dimension, and tend to be regarded as purely instrumental.¹² Such exchanges tend to be viewed as evidence of the corruption that plagued state socialism and continues within the capitalist system.¹³ Discourse on bribery, whether reported in the news or discussed by respondents, usually involves *afery* (scandals) in which wealthy or politically influential people manipulate their connections in ways that are deemed illegal. These individuals use their privileged position to gain even more money and power. Extrapolating from Bourdieu, the timing of bribes is such that instrumentality is made obvious, thus canceling out any relationship that might be formed by the exchange. Specifically, bribes typically precede the granting of service, and there is little delay between the initial exchange and the item given in return. For the Poles I know, bribery remains conceptually clear but experientially distant. They usually told me about the experiences of someone they know, or described hypothetical cases, and the few respondents who admitted to taking part in such exchanges were ambiguous about whether the exchange constituted a gift or a bribe. Similarly, while 68% of those surveyed by CBOS said they know of a friend or relative who arranged something by means of bribery, only 19–20% admitted to doing so themselves in the past four years (Falkowska 1999, 2000). In addition, over half of those who said they do not give bribes agreed with the statement, “A present from someone for services provided is only a token of their esteem and good will.”

When my respondents talked about bribes in more immediate contexts, they described efforts to gain permits, passports, or other official documentation from state officials. The flowers and chocolates that were given to the school officials during the graduation trip, by contrast, seem to fall somewhere between gifts and bribes. They were talked about as gifts, and even more significantly, their timing marked them as gifts—they followed rather than preceded the favors that were granted. However, they might be considered bribes in that they were given to people in administrative and professional positions and it is unlikely that the association

between parties will extend beyond this particular favor. For the graduates, the flowers and chocolates cancel out their obligation to school officials. Other connections are reinforced by the exchange, however. The graduates' obligation toward Pani Kasia and their boss, the people who made the arrangements with the other school, remain part of a more longterm web of exchange that extends beyond the graduation trip. Additionally, concern shown by the graduates' boss that gifts be brought to the graduation suggests that he felt obliged to the principal of the other school; this obligation is probably not cancelled out by the gifts, but rather might need to be reciprocated by some favor in the future. It is also important to note that the school officials bent the rules to help these women gain access to high school diplomas, something that should be attainable through clear institutional pathways. This points to a factor specific to state socialism and its legacy – all too often, the state does not provide what it claims it should. Such cases lend a kind of moral expediency to those who have to finagle to get what they need, even if it involves something that is usually prohibited, such as bribery.¹⁴ Exchanges such as those given by the graduates, intermediate between gifts and bribes, remain a tactic for greasing the wheels of the bureaucracy.

Another example helps to illustrate how such intermediate exchanges are used to gain better medical care. Zosia, a young woman who lives on the family farm and works in a neighboring town as a store clerk, criticized doctors and nurses for not only accepting, but also expecting bribes from patients. At the same time, she recognized that low wages are at the root of such practices, and she sympathized with the demands of nurses who were on strike at the time.¹⁵ Zosia had just spent a week in the hospital after falling down the stairs (she was in her eighth month of pregnancy at the time), so I asked her whether she had given any *łapówki* to get better care. Zosia said no, of course not. But then she explained:

"I left chocolates at the hospital, but I don't think that this is a bribe [*łapówka*]. The nurses were very nice to me. Maybe it's because I know I will be in the hospital again soon, and they will

respond to me differently. The girls in my hospital room said I should give the nurses something."

Zosia called the chocolates she left behind a present, to thank the nurses for the care she received. The nurses neither demanded nor expected anything; she gave them something of her own free will. Zosia made much of this distinction, as did other respondents. Had the nurse expected or demanded something in exchange for care, it would have been viewed as a bribe, but because the giver chose what and how much to give, it is considered a gift. If, in turn, she received better care when she had her baby, it was an outgrowth of her relationship with the nurses, not a direct exchange for the chocolates. Nevertheless, Zosia's comments also suggest that she felt some degree of obligation to give the nurses something, partly because she thought they might expect something and partly because she was advised to do so by the other women in the hospital room. In this case, the timing of gift and counter-gift is complicated by the ongoing relationship between Zosia and the nurses. Most of the nurses already know her from the store where she works. She has seen how they struggle to make ends meet, and, unbeknownst to her boss, she has allowed them to make purchases on credit until their next paychecks. In short, the chocolates were one in an ongoing series of gifts and favors between Zosia and the nurses, reflecting and perpetuating relationships of mutual obligation.

As in the above examples, gift objects are often given as an expression of thanks for non-material recommendations or favors. Although chocolate, coffee, and alcohol are no longer scarce commodities as they were under state socialism, they remain symbolic objects of exchange. This may be seen in the items Magda, Ewa, and Pani Kasia purchased on the graduation trip. Magda got a good brand of Polish vodka, and unusual imported chocolates. The other chocolates they bought were not imported, but came in large decorative boxes. Decorative packaging was also a central aspect of the bouquets they bought. Once the women decided on a price per bouquet, the florist carefully positioned the flowers, added greenery, and then tied them with colorful ribbon, the ends of which she curled and draped around

the flowers. Then, she placed the bouquet in a sheath with a clear plastic front and a reflective back, and tied it with an attractive bow made of thicker ribbon. All this attention to detail helps to mark these objects as symbols of gratitude and respect, not as commodities or bribes. The style in which the exchange is made helps to veil the instrumentality of exchanges (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990).

Before saying more about bribes, the serendipitous addition of a gift for me, the “foreign guest” on the graduation trip, warrants explanation. Although I know Magda and Ewa less well, Pani Kasia has been a valuable friend and helper since my first trip to Lesko in 1992, and my interactions with her have taught me much about gift exchange. Perhaps she sees me as a potential source of opportunity because I am American, but if I were to try to reduce our relationship to one of instrumentality, she would no doubt be offended.¹⁶ Similarly, Pani Kasia has helped me in more ways than I could enumerate, but I spend time with her because I like her. Because we define our relationship in terms of friendship, the potential for material gain or access to information remains a subtext – it is never clearly defined nor does it need to be. In fact, such reluctance to acknowledge any expectation of utility becomes a defining feature of relationships forged through gift exchange. On the occasions I have given Pani Kasia something to thank her for one thing or another, she has insisted she wants nothing from me. At the florist shop, she made clear what she hopes for in exchange for her gift – that I will think of her from time to time. Thus, she emphasized the importance of the relationship that the gift was intended to represent.

While there is no doubt that manipulation of relationships for personal gain occurs all the time, self-interest is not enough to explain what goes on in the kinds of exchanges I have described here. Other scholars have helped to account for the affective, social, and ethical dimensions of exchanges among social connections. Bourdieu states that because the return is delayed, and may not even occur, gift exchange depends upon the partners’ sense of honor and responsibility. It is key to recognize that exchanges of gifts and favors do not follow standardized rules; rather

people figure out in each situation what is most appropriate based on the particular circumstances and the relationships involved. Kipnis explains:

“As both Pierre Bourdieu (1977a, 1990) and Annette Weiner (1976: 220–222) argue, resorting to “rules” as an explanation detemporalizes practice, and time is central to gift giving. The time lapse between gift and counter-gift defines gift giving as a social form. It is the possibility that a gift might not be reciprocated that gives the gift its moral weight. Social custom, the relationship between giver and receiver, or even the lives of the parties involved could end or change abruptly during the time lapse between gift and counter-gift. Consequently, gift giving produces a contingent social field rather than reproduces a static social structure and is an art rather than a science” (Kipnis 1997: 58).

In sum, the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate must be understood as a fluid process motivated by social and moral factors that often obscure the reciprocal structure of exchange.

I return now to bribes, another form of exchange that fails to fit neatly into the categories of gifts or commodities. Although the dynamics of gift exchange can be difficult to uncover, bribes tend to be concealed under even deeper layers of secrecy. Nevertheless, a number of respondents made the generalization that “everyone gives *łapówki*.” When I followed up with the question whether they themselves have ever given a bribe, however, most claimed that they never have and never would. It seems that few call what they do bribing, but rather describe the exchanges in which they are involved as gifts. For instance, Jurek, an architect in Krakow, explained:

“I have only given one *łapówka* in my life – in the district office when I got approval for a project, I gave a woman cognac so that things would go faster. But I didn’t give it [to her] in the office; I went after her when she left work. She didn’t want to take it... but I think it helped. But I don’t think that is really a bribe. For me it isn’t a problem. It would be a problem if she expected me to give her something.”

Jurek described the cognac alternately as a bribe and then as not a bribe. His uncertainty illustrates the ambivalence Poles feel about these kinds of arrangements. He stressed that he gave the administrator the cognac outside of work hours and he doesn't even know if it had any effect on the way she handled his case. He also described her reluctance to accept the cognac, which suggests she neither demanded nor expected anything special from him. Even the token separation of place and time in which the cognac was given and the permit granted insures that the exchange appears voluntary, and thus can be viewed as gift exchange rather than bribery.

To the extent that bribes were made necessary by the inefficiencies of the state socialist system, or at least were permitted in that system, it could be inferred that they would become less common with the establishment of capitalist businesses. However, on June 4, 2001, the Polish electronic newspaper, *Donosy*, reported that according to the World Bank, Polish firms designate up to 2.5% of their profits annually for bribes. A couple of urban respondents who work in business pointed out to me that certain types of exchanges that would in the past have been considered bribery are now becoming institutionalized as formal business transactions, especially among the most wealthy. Jurek continued his discussion of bribery as follows:

"Bribes are becoming so-called 'consultation fees,' right on written agreements. You even pay taxes on them. When I worked in a firm that sold tiles, the boss told me to suggest a bribe, that is he didn't call them bribes, now they are called 'consultation fees.' He suggested 2-3% from the client, for placing the order. Either you write it on the agreement, or it is informal, under the table. This happens the most on the highest levels."

The above example reflects continuities in the interpretation of state socialist and post-communist experiences perhaps even more than continuities in the practices themselves. Clearly, contractually agreed upon consultation fees bypass some of the uncertainty and moral ambiguity of incentives that are passed under

the table. Nevertheless, Jurek equates them with bribes, and says that mostly the wealthy profit from them. He thus perpetuates certain assumptions dating back from state socialism that associate wealth with ill-gotten gains.

I was also told by others that bribes continue to function as they did under state socialism; goals are achieved by giving something of value to individuals in positions of power. Grzesiek, a computer repairman in Krakow, explained how he was prepared to put into motion a chain of prestations, ranging from vodka to large sums of money, in order to get an exemption from military service. Because he doesn't know anyone of sufficiently high rank and influence, he would have to "hire" someone to deliver the "gifts" to the appropriate officials in order to get his exemption. When I asked him where he would get the money to do so, he admitted that, luckily, his mother was able to arrange for him to get a medical release from a doctor she knows. He then assured me that he really has a medical condition that would make it difficult for him to serve. Thus, his story tells more about the idea of bribery than about an actual incidence of bribery. Ewelina, a law student in Krakow, explained why she failed to get a place as a day student (which would have meant she did not have to pay tuition), "Every year a certain number of places go to the children of wealthy families who use their influence to get into the free program. I know because I saw the test results of some of my classmates, and they got in even though their scores were lower than mine." Although Ewelina claims that this practice is very common, the journalism student I hired to transcribe my interviews told me that he thinks she exaggerated, and what she describes is actually a rare practice.

To sum up, these stories reveal a relatively clear articulation of what bribery is conceptually, but actual practices and examples are much harder to pin down. Moreover, the circumstances in which such exchanges are made are also changing as the market economy takes hold in Poland. Leaving aside the gray areas, bribes are things that other people give. And certainly nobody admits to demanding a bribe of others. Most avoid the label because they consider bribery a bad thing to be associated with. Besides

the unethical implications, giving a bribe places the giver in a position of weakness relative to the receiver—bribes are rarely equal exchanges because the receiver has privileged access to desired services. Although these social inequalities may also be present in gift exchange (as in the relationship between the graduating women and school officials) they tend to be obscured by the form of the exchange that emphasizes a mutual relationship. However, to the extent that bribe-like exchanges remain necessary for getting by during difficult economic circumstances, they tend not to be scrutinized too carefully nor judged too harshly.

Recommendations and Favors

Above I have shown that gifts are often given in reciprocation for favors that help people acquire services and opportunities that were formerly provided by the state. As the Polish state has relinquished control of the economy, the recommendation (*polecenie*) or help (*poparcie*) of a friend or a family member has become a central means of obtaining employment, especially in rural areas where very few jobs are to be found. Below, I discuss more situations in which Poles rely on social networks for recommendations and favors, and I explain why these exchanges persist even as Poland becomes more integrated into a market-based global economy.

Simply put, employers tend to trust those they know more than they do strangers. This is how Magda got promoted from cook to secretary—the principal of the school considered her trustworthiness, affirmed by several years of responsible employment, a more important qualification than secretarial skills. *Poparcie* (support or help) may involve little more than the distribution of information. When I asked how they found their jobs, many told me that a friend had informed them that there was an opening and suggested they apply. In other cases, relatives asked their employers if there were any positions available for their kin. Some employers even asked their employees to recommend someone who could fill a vacant position. Connections do not guarantee employment, but they do provide that extra advantage

for those with little experience. As one Krakow resident said, “if someone is hopeless, clearly not even *znajomości* (connections) will help him or her, but if someone is good, *znajomości* play a very big role.” Respondents explained to me that relatives and acquaintances tend to be more trustworthy, in part because they feel a social pressure to be competent workers so that they will not embarrass the person who recommended them. In a related fashion, those who recommend someone for a job feel a sense of personal responsibility for the performance of the person they recommend. In short, trust is a primary motivation for people to turn to social networks; a known entity, even when hired through a string of connections, tends to be considered a better bet than someone who is unknown. Extrapolating from Humphrey and Hugh-Jones’ (1992) work on barter, more explicitly commercial exchanges that nevertheless fall somewhere between gifts and commodities, exchange partners take responsibility for their own and others’ satisfaction out of a sense of moral obligation. Furthermore, it is in their own self-interest to protect the trust others place in them since their reputation is what assures others that they are worthwhile exchange partners (see also Anderlini and Sabourian 1992).

Recommendations remain significant in urban areas, as well, especially for those seeking employment in desirable professions such as acting, law, and banking. Aneta was studying film at the Jagiellonian University when she met a German director at a family party who invited her to be his assistant. Since then, she has produced a variety of fast-paced, youth-oriented television programs, and recently, she has become, in her own words, “a super-independent producer of very independent films.” Aneta is in an exciting, profitable, and as she describes it, very closed business. Just as she got her first job by meeting someone who took a liking to her, she continues to get work at the recommendation of friends, and to hire her friends to do projects with her. Aneta emphasizes the positive aspects of arranging things through networks:

“If I try, for example, to buy something... let’s say cassette tapes... from someone who was

recommended to me, there is contact between people. It isn't like a McDonald's, where everything is the same for everyone. This is a side of Poland that I like. People help each other. Something for something. You feel obligated when someone helps you. But still, you do it out of friendship."

Aneta says *polecenia* (recommendations) are central to the entertainment industry, and she would not consider hiring anyone she did not know, or who was not recommended to her. She says her name also opens doors, since most people have heard of her uncle who is a famous artist. Nor does money replace the need for social networks. On the contrary, social networks provide the means for obtaining work, and thus making money, especially for young people just beginning their careers. Her comments also reflect a reaction against the market, which she thinks homogenizes cultural difference and depersonalizes exchanges. Correspondingly, she characterizes exchanges among social connections as a distinct feature of Polish identity.

Ewelina, a law student from Krakow, describes her world as a place where networks remain essential. She explained a problem that a number of respondents noted – the only way to get a job in fields such as law or banking is to have experience, but the only way to get experience is by knowing someone who will hire you before you have experience. She herself expected to get her first job at the public utility where her father works. Indeed, he arranged for her to fill in part time for a woman who went on maternity leave. Ewelina was given a low salary and a temporary contract (*umowa zlecenie*), which means that the firm does not have to provide benefits nor pay as many taxes. As an added bonus, however, Ewelina gained access to data for her master's thesis on the privatization of state utilities. She told me that even if she does not really do anything important, the job works to her advantage because future employers will view it as experience and thus be more likely to hire her. Ewelina also pointed out the negative side of getting her job through connections. She said she feels like people have their eye on her and so she has to work extra hard and do everything better than most. For this reason, she never takes breaks so

that no one will have anything negative to say about her performance.

According to my respondents, the one place where connections do not seem to matter much is at large foreign firms.¹⁷ These firms have not been around long enough to be linked to the already existing hierarchies of influence, nor for employees to have the authority to hire their friends and family. Jobs in such places are considered highly desirable because they tend to pay very well. Applicants must go through a rigorous series of written applications, interviews, and in some cases even exams. There are many applicants for every position, and even those who are hired usually start as trainees or assistants who must prove themselves before being promoted to prestigious, well paying management positions. Poles in their mid-twenties with degrees in law, economics, or business are the most sought after by foreign firms. Nevertheless, the choices of my respondents are limited by the fact that most business headquarters are in Warsaw, making relocating a prerequisite to finding employment with most foreign firms.

Geographic mobility remains difficult in Poland for a number of reasons. First, there is a shortage of housing in cities; second, setting up a new household is prohibitively expensive for most; and third, there is a strong cultural value placed on locality. In other words, all things being equal, most Poles would rather remain where they are. There are psychological and economic dimensions to this reluctance to move, both of which are rooted in networks. People value the emotional bonds they have with family and friends, and they also depend on these relationships for mutual assistance. Thus, when people do move, they usually go where they have connections that, at least initially, will provide them with a place to live and perhaps a job. Due to historic migration patterns, residents of the Bieszczady Mountains are as likely to move to the United States or Italy as Warsaw or Krakow; geographic distance matters less than social networks. Among Krakowians, regional pride is so strong that few want to seek employment elsewhere.

Of all the young Poles I know, Basia's experiences most closely approximate the ideal of

social mobility in the new capitalist economy. With this comes benefits, in the form of financial and personal freedom, but also trade-offs, in the form of distance from the place and people with whom she most closely identifies. She grew up in Lesko, and was raised by her mother, a nurse, after her parents divorced. Basia had the *szczęcie w nieszczęściu*, the good fortune in bad fortune, that her father died when she was a young teenager, leaving her with an education subsidy from the state that enabled her to pay for tuition at the first private business school in postcommunist Poland.¹⁸ Armed with her MBA, she moved to Warsaw and enrolled in a postgraduate program in Public Relations, which meant that she continued to receive her education subsidy. Without this state funding, she would not have been able to afford the high rent in the city.

Basia put into practice her business school training, and sent out dozens of applications to potential employers. After a number of months, she was hired as an office assistant in a foreign firm where the working language was English. She and her boss felt an instant rapport. He was impressed by the quality of her resume, her letter of intent, and her English. At the end of her first year, her coworkers elected her “employee of the spring.” Shortly afterwards, she was offered a position as head of product promotion. With this advancement came greater autonomy and responsibility, as well as double the salary and a company car. Thus, Basia has managed to establish herself by getting just the skills that are valued in a globalizing capitalist system – training in business, management, public relations, and English. When I asked Basia’s mother how she feels about her daughter living on her own so far from home, her mother responded, “What would she do in this hole-in-the-wall?” Though Basia feels nostalgic for her small town in the mountains, she agrees that she would have no chance of using her education or of making a decent living in Lesko.

Ironically, it was Basia who told me about an article she had recently read in *Polityka*, a weekly news magazine, about the importance of connections for finding a job. She said it helped her realize how unusual her own job history is. The article reports:

“And so it is – connections, and even better, family ties. Nearly 60% of students believe that success in life depends on it. And that is not only the opinion of students. Last year, 90% of those asked on a CBOS [Public Opinion Research Center] survey “What influence do connections and favors have on success and fortune in life” responded “a lot” or “very much.”” (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:4)

The article makes the further claims:

“Specialists of the job market assure us: looking for work through family and acquaintances is not immoral. Rather, it is a professional method for any job search, and very popular and recommended in the USA. This is difficult to understand in Poland, where the majority of the population grew up with the certainty of equal access to employment. It was possible to maintain these conditions more or less when state enterprises dominated and the majority of positions were provided by the state. Under the conditions of the free market and private ownership, it is impossible to protect the dogma of a “fair” distribution of work (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:4).”

“Who gets the best job is most often decided by social position, access, connections, accident, and rarely – as our observations show – the ability to create for oneself or the actual value of one’s education. Our job market, immature like all of Polish capitalism, has not developed ways of producing and promoting talented young people... The method “*na wuję*” (through uncle), good as always, has one basic flaw: not everyone has an uncle (Miecik and Niezgoda 2000:9).”

The article reflects popular perceptions of Poland’s economy, rhetorically positioned within a discourse of difference between East and West – as immature capitalism and thus deeply flawed. In addition to describing the flaws of the present economic system, the article also seeks to prescribe for young adults some better ways of negotiating for jobs. It also builds on the assumption that capitalism is good, and that the United States provides a model of a successful capitalist economy. Although the

authors' goals are different from my own, their observations support my claim that social connections remain important, and even take on renewed significance in realms newly defined by the changing economy.

Using Networks to Get Help from the State

Involvement in the informal economy has alternately been viewed as resistance (Haraszti 1978), a means of undermining the power of the state (Ledeneva 1998), or a kind of safety valve that compensates for the inadequacy of centralized institutions (Sampson 1985–86). While conducting fieldwork in state socialist Hungary, Martha Lampland was often told, “you can steal from the state or steal from your family.” This expression helps to explain how certain acts, such as selling items acquired from work or using work time to do freelance jobs, were considered acceptable, and even admirable. Because the state did not provide what citizens believed that it should, people felt justified in using informal means to acquire those goods and services as a matter of moral expediency. Such reasoning persists in postcommunist Poland, especially in cases where the state is still held responsible for services it no longer officially provides.

I observed a striking example of reciprocity that reveals an innovative way of using state institutions and new capitalist enterprises. Some rural respondents explained a practice whereby friends or relatives are put on the books of a small business as employees so that they become eligible for state benefits, even though they do not actually work. This was not intended as a political statement so much as a tactic for getting by, using whatever means at their disposal. When pressed, they justify their unorthodox methods by blaming the state for failing to provide a “normal” means of livelihood. Such behavior fits into what Scott (1985) calls “everyday resistance,” in contrast to more public and organized forms of political protest. A case will help to illustrate this practice.

After graduating from high school, Marta spent a number of years in Italy working as a live-in companion for an elderly woman.¹⁹ She

returned to Bieszczady in 1999 because she got pregnant and she had no way of supporting herself once the baby was born. Because she was not married, she did not dare tell her employer the reason for her departure. At home, she had a free place to stay and her mother could help her care for her infant. While awaiting the birth, Marta's cousin signed her up as an employee in her store even though Marta did not in fact work there. This was to the benefit of her cousin, who could subtract the “salary” she presumably paid her employee from her net profit. Marta, in turn, paid the amount the government charged her cousin for the workers' insurance plan. Thus, the state covered medical costs when the baby was born, and Marta received a maternity leave pension for three months. Had she returned to Poland sooner, she could have been listed as an employee longer, and been eligible for several more months of assistance. Perhaps this is dishonest, but it is also a means of survival. Even though she has a high school degree, Marta has been unable to find employment in the depressed local economy. There are only a handful of businesses in her village, and she would have to spend much of her salary on public transportation if she found a job elsewhere. Because working abroad gave her a little financial security, she struggles with the thought of leaving her child with her mother and returning to Italy.

Besides illustrating the tactics used for obtaining state benefits, Marta's story reflects the limited choices open to rural residents in Poland. Despite the strong cultural value placed on locality and multiplex social relations, many Bieszczady residents have made the choice to follow single links that take them abroad for work. There is a significant difference in the choices rural and urban residents make about migration. Most of my urban respondents have been to foreign countries, but they have gone for specific work or school related activities, or as tourists. Few have any interest in emigrating; for the most part, they are confident that they can achieve their goals within Poland.

In sum, social networks continue to fill a significant, but shifting place in the newly defined and experienced postcommunist social world. The evidence I have presented supports

the claim that kinship and social networks need not lose significance when centralized economic structures such as state socialism or capitalism are established. On the contrary, when viewed from the perspective of everyday interactions, networks can contribute to the smooth running of large economic institutions in that they are the means by which information is distributed and people gain access to opportunities.

I anticipate that network-based economic tactics will persist in Poland, and in market economies generally, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they continue to work. This does not mean that they have not changed – it is their very adaptability that contributes to their persistence. In Poland, networks are no longer so important for obtaining material goods, but they remain central for attaining employment, medical care, and other services that are no longer provided by the state. Second, networks remain one of the few tactics available to the rural underemployed. Many lack the education or skills to get jobs on the basis of their experience alone, and there are few jobs that pay a decent wage in rural areas. Just about everyone, however, can turn to kin and acquaintances for help. Third, this particularism, as opposed to the universalism that tends to be conceptually associated with capitalism, also persists because of issues of trust. Especially in small, face-to-face communities, people tend to distrust strangers, and to prefer to share opportunities with those whom they already know. The relationship itself is believed to provide a guarantee. Forth, the mutual obligation felt among social connections increases the likelihood that the gift, favor, or recommendation will be reciprocated at some point in the future. Finally, orientations reflect the general understanding that there is a certain moral expediency to using connections when one is poor and institutional structures do not provide the means for earning a basic standard of living.

The unique shape of capitalism in post-communist Poland can in part be explained by the way state socialism remains a point of comparison for my respondents. They interpret and evaluate the present in relation to their memories of the past. They also retain certain orientations, perhaps most significantly a

tendency to distrust institutions controlled by the state, and to trust particularistic relations instead. They remember the past as a time of uncertainty because of unpredictable and unjust social controls, and they conceptualize the present as a period of continued uncertainty, although the reasons for the uncertainty have changed from political to economic concerns. Because of this ongoing sense of uncertainty, people tend not to plan far into the future, tending instead to keep their options open and see what comes up. Such an orientation is actually more suited to the irregular opportunities that arise through social networks, which are often not planned nor anticipated. Consequently, these opportunities take on the appearance of chance occurrences, attributed to luck or miracles rather than to the savvy manipulation of connections. This is consistent with the characteristics of gifts that I outlined above – because gifts and counter-gifts are divided in time, an element of uncertainty about whether a gift will be reciprocated always remains, and the connection between gift and counter-gift can be forgotten. Both of these factors can make the help offered by a friend seem like a miracle. Indeed, social and ethical pressures help to maintain the appearance of disinterested cooperation among social networks, further obscuring any control that anyone might have over these processes. Thus, Poles tend to see themselves quite differently from the rational actors usually associated with capitalism.

Networks and Social Reproduction

Having shown how social networks continue to be used in innovative ways that are shaped by the emerging market economy, I conclude with some comments about their impact on social inequality. Theories of social reproduction identify the institutional structures that, together with cultural beliefs, values, and dispositions, cause people to act in ways that reproduce existing social hierarchies, and cause children to retain the social class of their parents (Bourdieu 1977b). Anthony Giddens (1984) leaves more room for individual agents to make choices that affect their personal outcomes, and that sometimes affect established institutional

structures, as well. Nevertheless, case studies by Paul Willis (1977) and Jay Macleod (1995) show that often the choices made by working class British boys and poor urban Americans prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that schools are supposed to provide. The stories I presented above illustrate, on one hand, young Poles' innovative uses of the means at their disposal to make a living in the new capitalist economy. On the other hand, these stories reveal that occupation, education, and place of residence influence the kinds of support available to individuals from their social networks, and that capitalist reforms in Poland have created a social environment where economic inequality compounds social distinctions among occupational classes.

Despite state rhetoric about creating a classless society, Carole Nagengast (1991) and Chris Hann (1985) show in their ethnographies of Poland that occupation-based class distinctions persisted throughout the communist period.²⁰ Government policies gave workers and peasants special privileges over the historically dominant intelligentsia, and inadvertently kept the distinctions among these occupational groups meaningful and strong. Rural residents were aided by infrastructure development programs that brought roads, schools, and industry to rural areas. Under the former system, farmers could always find buyers for their surplus, either through official distribution channels, or on the black market. In addition, state policies that encouraged urbanization also had the unintended consequence of spawning links between recent migrants to cities and their relatives who remained on the farm.²¹ Relationships of mutual obligation with relatives in the country were essential for urban dwellers who wanted a reliable source of meat, eggs, and fresh produce (Wedel 1986). In exchange, farmers could request manufactured goods of their urban relatives, or send their children to live with urban relatives so the children could get a better education. In short, networks tended to cross class lines, and thus helped to maintain some degree of economic equality between urban and rural, educated and uneducated.

Since 1989, economic hardship in rural areas results from a combination of factors, some

deriving from the state socialist legacy, and others from pressures of the market economy. As Frances Pine (1995) points out, the failure to collectivize Polish farms under state socialism has inadvertently contributed to the difficulties farmers face when they try to adjust to market demands. Particularly in mountain regions like Bieszczady, farms remain small and the hilly terrain and short growing season make mechanization impractical. State socialist policies exacerbated this by investing the bulk of funds for agriculture in the few collective and state farms they had managed to establish (Pine 1995). In the Bieszczady region, small farmers got some help from the state in the form of a regional system of collection and processing of milk that made it worthwhile to maintain several cows at a time. Since 1989, milk collection has been deemed unprofitable and thus ceased, and new health regulations require that milk be kept refrigerated until brought in for processing. As a result, small mountain farmers can no longer sell their milk and so have reduced production to the level of their own consumption, or have ceased production entirely. Instead, they rely on temporary or long-term work abroad, or seasonal jobs in the tourist sector. As Pine notes, these are not new tactics. What has shifted, however, is the decrease in the amount of basic services and income that farmers were assured by the state under socialism. The loss of state supported services, together with the increasingly monetized economy leaves rural residents with little recourse besides social connections to gain access to temporary jobs or opportunities abroad.

Although this may not be the case in all regions of Poland, in Bieszczady and in Krakow, I have not seen much evidence of links between urban and rural relatives in recent years. Instead, I have noted more ties with relatives and friends abroad. In Bieszczady, I also see links between residents of villages and nearby towns such as Lesko and Ustrzyki Dolne. For the most part, urban residents do not seek out their rural relatives for produce. Because distribution and access are no longer a problem, they just buy what they need in stores. Overall, urban residents are better able to afford things than their rural counterparts because the bulk

of capitalist development and investment has been in Polish cities, leading to all kinds of opportunities for work and better pay. In rural areas, by contrast, private enterprises have failed to replace many of the state industries that have closed, resulting in a decline in the overall number and quality of jobs. Also, although an extended summer vacation in the countryside continues to be valued by urban residents, most rent a place in the mountains or by the sea rather than stay with relatives. This may in part be because the generation of urban Poles that I studied does not, for the most part have close relatives who live on a farm, and they are not maintaining the relationships with rural residents that their parents did.

To sum up, peasants and peasant-workers are the occupational groups most hard hit by economic restructuring. The government no longer invests in rural areas, and few private firms have taken the place of state industries and farm cooperatives. Young people who want to stay in Bieszczady have to, for the most part, find jobs in the service sector that require little formal training and offer little possibility of advancement. Urban areas by contrast boast low unemployment rates,²² high levels of commercial development, and extensive opportunities, especially for university graduates.²³ The growing structural, social, and economic inequalities between urban and rural residents might further weaken relations between these groups as rural exchange partners become less and less able to reciprocate anything of value to their urban counterparts.

The divergence of opportunities available in urban and rural areas is further compounded by differences in educational achievement. One of the central theses of social reproduction theory is that tracking in secondary school has a direct impact on occupational outcomes (see Bourdieu 1977b; Macleod 1995; and Willis 1977). Under communism, most students were tracked into technical and trade programs that prepared them for specific jobs. Some schools even had formal agreements with factories, where students participated in on-the-job training while still in school, and got jobs in these same factories as soon as they graduated. Thus, it was not necessary to call on personal social networks

to find employment.²⁴ Because of the official emphasis on industrial labor, only 25% of youths attended college preparatory high schools, called lyceum, and less than 10% completed university. Fewer rural youths went to lyceum than urban youth, and even fewer went on to higher education. This was in part because most colleges and universities are located in cities, and most rural residents could not afford to live in cities unless they could stay with a relative. In addition, getting a higher education had few obvious rewards; factory workers earned higher salaries and received more benefits than university-trained professionals.

In the early 1990s, when my respondents attended high school, students continued to be tracked into programs that prepared them for employment in state industries that no longer existed. For instance, the Technical School of Agriculture continued to teach students how to manage collective farms, even as these farms were being dismantled. Many rural residents made the accurate assessment of their social world that all they had to gain from extending their education was a temporary reprieve from seeking employment in a very tight labor market. Regardless of what they studied, all they were likely to find in Bieszczady was underpaid, low skilled service positions. These trends are borne out by the life stories I have described – Zosia made use of networks to get a job as a store clerk, and Marta pretended to work at her cousin's story so she could finagle subsidized maternity care. Urban residents, by contrast, are better able make use of social connections to advance their educational and professional goals. For example, Ewelina is getting experience that will help her become a lawyer, and Aneta got her start in the entertainment business through a family acquaintance.

During the summer of 2000, Marek, a graduate of the Technical School of Agriculture, his girlfriend Beata, and I chatted while peddling a paddleboat on the lake by his village. Both grew up in remote mountain villages, went away to universities in cities, but then came back to Bieszczady. Beata had just defended her master's thesis on the aspirations, expectations, and outcomes of Bieszczady youth. She found that a remarkably high percentage finished

secondary school (80%) and went on to higher education (35%) but relatively few have been able to find well paying work (or even work of any kind). Even those with jobs do nothing related to their majors, but rather work in the commercial sector as cashiers or warehouse laborers. Many have left Bieszczady because there are no opportunities for them there. Beata further attributed the low self-esteem of her research subjects to the education system and the general social environment that emphasizes their lack of prospects. Most blame themselves – they do not believe they are capable of achieving more. Beata said her own experience was a little different because she always wanted to be a teacher, and although she was tempted to stay in the city because of the greater opportunities there, she could not imagine raising children amidst all the dirt and traffic. Furthermore, she would miss the people and rhythms of everyday life in the place where she was raised.

Marek, by contrast, admitted that he had been one of those children who had no idea what he wanted to do, or what he was capable of doing. He asked if I remember what he was like in high school when we first met. At the time he never dreamed of going to college. He called it an accident that his friend decided to submit his papers to a university and he decided to accompany his friend. Even after graduating from university, Marek had no vision for his future. He moved back home and did nothing for six months until a neighbor mentioned to him that there was a job opening at the regional government center 20 kilometers away. Marek was as surprised as anyone when he was offered the job. Despite the low pay and long commute, he too remains attached to this place and would not want to live anywhere else.²⁵ He contrasted himself to some of his neighbors, including another graduate of his high school who is just a year younger but unemployed and alcoholic. Marek says that their own abilities have little to do with how he and his friends have turned out; it is more a matter of chance and circumstance. Marek's self-characterization reflects how people in postcommunist Poland continue to put their faith in miracles. Fortune and fate are used to explain opportunities that come un-

expectedly; personal skills and effort tend to be credited less often.

To conclude, whereas conditions under socialism helped to minimize the social and material differences between occupation and residence-based social classes, capitalist reforms compound these distinctions. Though urban and rural, educated and uneducated, turn to their social networks to help them acquire what they need, the urban and the educated gain more from the connections that they have. Nevertheless, the life stories above reveal the competence of social actors who make innovative use of the connections available to them. In part, this shows the successful deployment of agency, especially for rural residents able to recognize and make use of the transient and idiosyncratic opportunities that present themselves and thus make up for the structural failings of their social world. Through personal networks of reciprocal exchange, they build more security for themselves and their families in the midst of weakening social services, limited economic development, and high levels of unemployment. There is far from an unconditional success, however, because there is more to social inequality than an individual's ability to mobilize networks. For some, survival requires great sacrifices such as leaving behind all that is familiar and doing menial labor in a foreign country. Most patch together enough to get by, but subtle shifts in structural conditions (an increase in public transportation costs or a surprise pregnancy) can mean the difference between managing on one's own and having to turn to others for support. Local support networks remain tight enough that no one starves or is left homeless, but rural Poles remain far removed from the economic vitality of the city, and thus confront substantial limits to the benefits they can reap from the agency they exhibit. Urban residents, by contrast, gain much more from their social networks because information, favors, and recommendations provide access to more opportunities for education and employment in the city. The continued reliance on networks of intimates thus magnifies the disparities between urban and rural residents in postcommunist Poland.

Notes

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- 1 Karl Polanyi (1944) identified the distinctions among reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. He recognized that more than one kind of exchange system exists in most societies, but he tended to assume that reciprocity would not normally be a significant factor in market exchanges. Here, I show that reciprocity among networks of intimates is actually used to gain advantages within the market economy.
- 2 The diversity of the studies cited here reflect the variety of ways in which the theme of reciprocity among kin emerges. Day (1982) focuses on a rural agrarian community, while the issues of urban-rural disparities and urban-rural migration are central in Halperin (1990), Lomnitz (1977), and Stack (1974). Studies that focus on the impact of ethnicity include di Leonardo (1984) and Stack (1974) while Basch *et al.* (1994) focuses on transnational communities. Issues of gender inform Rapp (1978), Singerman (1995) and Yanagisako (1977), and class is central to Rapp (1978), Singerman (1995), and Stack (1974).
- 3 Scholars of Eastern and Central Europe have settled on a number of ways of labeling the periods before and after 1989. Whereas studies of Russia usually distinguish between Soviet and post-Soviet, studies of the former Soviet satellites variously use the terms socialist, communist, state socialist, capitalist, post-1989, postsocialist, and postcommunist. Here, I use the term “state socialist” to describe the period before the Round Table Discussions of 1989, and “postcommunist” to describe the period since then. Before 1989, Polish scholars tended to use the terms “communist” and “socialist” interchangeably; communist denoted the ideological orientation while socialist came closer to the system in practice. State

socialist is probably the most accurate term for the pre-1989 system, as the state controlled economic production and distribution. Labeling the present system as post-state socialist would be too awkward, however, which forces me to choose between postsocialist and postcommunist. The reason I favor the later is because communist ideology has been left behind, for the most part, but socialist economic structures and ideology have not. The strongest evidence for this is the popularity of reformed socialist parties throughout the former Soviet Bloc. In Poland, President Kwaśniewski, who is serving his second elected term, is a member of the socialist-leaning Liberal Democratic Party (SLD). Surveys regularly show that this political party has more support than any other (though still less than a majority). In the monthly reports published by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), support for SLD fluctuated between 20 and 38% in 1998, 28 and 38% in 1999 and 34 and 41% in 2000 (Cybulska 1999, 2000, Pankowski 2001). In short, it would be misleading to call Poland “postsocialist” when the president and the most popular political party are both socialist.

- 4 I adopt the awkward sounding expression “ways of using” from Michel de Certeau (1984). Like him, I am interested in understanding how social rules and public rhetoric are “consumed,” or used in everyday practices. In short, it is not enough to know public ideas about reciprocity. It is also necessary to view those ideas in relation to what people actually do when faced with everyday life choices.
- 5 Larissa Lomnitz (1977) collected data in an urban Mexican shantytown populated by recent migrants from the countryside. Although the context that she studied is very different from post-communist Poland, her conclusions are similar to my own, that reciprocity remains essential to the functioning of complex societies, and that social networks are one of the key adaptive mechanisms for marginal populations. She also notes that networks among the urban elite serve to reinforce their dominance over a backward countryside.
- 6 De Certeau explains, “a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’... It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’.” The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements (thus, in the supermarket, the housewife confronts heterogeneous and mobile data – what she has in the refrigerator, the tastes, appetites, and moods of her guests, the best buys and their possible combinations with what she already has on hand at home, etc.); the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a

- discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'."
- 7 All translations from Polish of interviews and written sources are my own.
 - 8 To paraphrase my respondents, "everything is available in stores." Acquisition of material goods is no longer limited by supply; all they need is the money to buy them. Nevertheless, because many rural residents cannot afford much of what they see in store windows or advertised on television, some informal exchanges of material goods continues – for instance relatives who maintain the family farm will give produce to relatives who work in town, and receive various gifts of purchased goods in exchange.
 - 9 Besides employment, in recent years, the state has moved away from subsidized healthcare, higher education, and housing.
 - 10 Ledeneva (1998), in her study of *blat* in Russia, Herrmann (1997), in her study of American garage sales, and Gell (1992) in his study of barter in Melanesia examine the similarly ambiguous space between "gifts" and "commodities."
 - 11 Other traits high school students in 1992–3 said they associate with their nation include: argumentativeness, drunkenness, intolerance, valor in warfare, and national pride. They felt ambivalent about all these traits. For instance, many said they feel proud to be Polish, even though they do not believe they have any good reason to feel so.
 - 12 Ledeneva (1998) makes a similar distinction between bribes and *blat* in Russia.
 - 13 Interestingly, the dictionary points to the connection between gifts and bribes; "łapówka" is defined as "money or a gift given with the goal of paying someone off" (Skorupek *et al.* 1969).
 - 14 In 1999 63% and in 2000 64% of those surveyed by CBOS agreed with the statement, "The present situation forces [people] to give bribes" (Falkowska 1999, 2000).
 - 15 A number of respondents in both rural and urban areas made this same point, that if medical professionals were paid properly, such irregularities would not occur. Doctors and nurses on the state payroll have shockingly low salaries, often below the national average. The nurses strike continued through the end of 2000.
 - 16 Another friend of mine, a university student in Krakow, was deeply offended once when a Polish friend of hers accused her of acquisitiveness because she had asked an American student for some corkboard that the American was throwing out. She asked me with great concern what I thought about her and her actions. She insisted that she would hate to be regarded as a poor Pole who befriended Americans for instrumental reasons.
 - 17 I include joint ventures in this category. Many foreign concerns work with a Polish partner, which eases government regulations and tax standards, but still their administrative structures remain independent of existing hierarchies of influence in Poland.
 - 18 Except for the Catholic University in Lublin, all institutions of higher education in Poland were state run under state socialism. Tuition was also free, and continues to be for day students who pass an entrance exam. However, these state schools were ill prepared to teach business or economics independent of Marxist theory. Thus, the earliest and most respected business programs were established at new "for profit" institutions, most of which were (and continue to be) affiliated with institutions in Western Europe or the United States. It is only in recent years that institutions such as the Academy of Economics in Krakow have developed programs in international relations and banking that are considered on par with the best new Universities. This means that the earliest graduates with degrees in business attended schools that charge tuition; in other words, they already constituted an economic elite. This is why Beata's case is so interesting – her intelligence, determination, and interpersonal skills had more to do with her success than social status.
 - 19 This case further illustrates how networks work – Marta followed a high school friend who had, in turn, joined her brother in Italy. In each instance, the earlier arrival arranged a job for the relative or friend who came later. Marta, in turn, helped her younger sister find a job during summer vacations from university. All were motivated by the promise of earning more than they could in Poland. This chain of relations also illustrates a variety of outcomes – the brother remains in Italy after over nine years, Marta stayed six years, her friend returned to Poland after a year and shortly thereafter married, Marta's sister has gone for short periods during school holidays. Presumably, once she finishes her studies, she will look for a job in Poland.
 - 20 A number of studies have made the point that discourses of "transition" often obscure structural and organizational continuities underlying apparent changes throughout Eastern Europe (see Verdery 1996). Lampland (1995) and Kideckel (1993) consider similarities in the organization of rural life in Hungary and Romania respectively. According to Grant (2001), monuments in the guise of childlike fairytale figures are intended to symbolize the reconstruction of the Russian state, but nevertheless remain akin to Soviet "cosmological frames" that emphasize state power projected into the future.
 - 21 Similarly, Kideckel (1993) identifies postwar urbanization as a key factor in fostering social connections between urban and rural Romanians.
 - 22 The unemployment rate in urban centers is 4–5% in contrast to over 20% in some rural areas. In Krakow and Bieszczady respectively, unem-

ployment rates are 4% and nearly 20%. The national average was down to 10% in 1999, and was closer to 14% in 2000. Further rural unemployment is masked by the high percentage of residents on disability or other forms of social support. Conversely, much rural labor is temporary, part time, and unofficial, and as such does not get registered in national statistics.

Another index that shows the difficulty for residents of Bieszczady is the number of job offers relative to the number of registered unemployed. Between March 1999 and March 2000, there were 528 registered unemployed for each job listed in the Podkarpackie Województwo (the regional administrative district) in contrast to a national average of 213 (GUS 2000:23). The difference between Krakow and Bieszczady was even more extreme when measured in 1998 within the old regional boundaries: in the Krośnieńskie Województwo there were 1591 registered unemployed for each job listed and in the Krakowskie Województwo there were 84 for each job listed, compared with a national average of 251 to 1 (GUS 1999:LXVIII, LXXI).

Residents of the Podkarpackie region have the lowest average salaries in Poland; workers in the industrial sector average 1596 zlotys per month, in contrast to the national average of 1942 zł. Residents of the Małopolski region earn 1754 zł. on average (this region includes agricultural and mountain villages as well as Krakow) while in the Mazowiecki region, where Warsaw is located, the average monthly salary is 2574 zł. The salary discrepancy between urban and rural regions would be even greater if agricultural workers were included in the statistics.

- 23 The unemployment rate for university graduates averages about 3%.
- 24 The school that youths chose was, in part, influenced by the profession and education level of their parents, but not entirely. Initially under state socialism, there was rapid urbanization that brought many peasants to the city where they and their children became skilled workers largely through technical and trade school programs. Political restrictions sometimes prevented the children of intellectuals from gaining a higher education or from going to college preparatory high schools.
- 25 Although a commute of 20 kilometers may not seem excessive, it would be impossible to do without a car. Only 2 buses a day go between Marek's village and his place of work, they do not travel at the times he needs, and they would take at least an hour per day in each direction. Marek drives a tiny Polish Fiat along the narrow, winding road between home and work. The road is often ice covered and impassable in winter. Even if he wanted to live closer to work, he could not afford to rent an apartment on the salary he is paid.

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