

INTERFERENCE OF POLITICS IN CELEBRATING DOŻYŃKI

THE HARVEST FESTIVAL IN POLAND IN THE 1950S

Bożena GIEREK

Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilizations

Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

E-mail: bozenkag@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract: *Dożynki*, the harvest festival, is celebrated throughout Poland when all crops are taken from the field, usually at the end of August or the beginning of September. In Poland this celebration is linked to the Catholic Church nowadays, but it was not always like this, at least not on every level of social life. In this article I concentrate on the period of the strong communist government, the 1950s. Analyzing articles published in 1950-1959, mostly in the nationwide daily newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* ("Tribune of Folk") I present the way the Polish communist government adjusted the festival of *dożynki* to the new reality. By giving detailed descriptions of preparations and especially the rituals performed during the festival, as displayed in the articles in *Trybuna Ludu*, I show what kind of politics, and to what extent, influenced the celebration of *dożynki* at those times.

Keywords: communist, customs, *dożynki*, festival, harvest, ideology, rituals, ritualization

Dożynki, the festival of harvest, is celebrated throughout Poland when all crops are taken from the field, usually at the end of August or beginning of September. Every rural community and region has its own *dożynki*, although the name of the festival might vary locally, as well as the objects involved in the old rituals that are conducted during the festival. These traditions have been passed from generation to generation, but the meaning altogether is the same. It is a rural festival with a very deep religious significance. Once it was celebrated by pagans, now by Christians. In Poland this celebration is linked to the Catholic Church nowadays, but it was not always like this, at least not on every level of social life.

In this article I will concentrate on the period of the strong communist government, the 1950s. It is a very interesting period; a few years after the terrible, devastating World War II began the period of rebuilding the country under the new government that represented a totally different system from what existed in Poland before the war. The new government criticised and moreover condemned the old system and those who represented it, but it could not reject or deny old customs, especially those cultivated in the countryside. Thus, the government had to adapt them and incorporate them into the new system. The festival of *dożynki* is one example.

By analyzing articles published in 1950-1959 in the nationwide daily newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* ("Tribune of Folk"), I shall present the way the Polish

communist government adjusted the festival of *dożynki* to the new reality. *Trybuna Ludu* was edited by *Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej* (KC PZPR)—the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party—during the period 1948-1990. The famous slogan of the newspaper was: "Proletarians of all countries unite!" Looking for a newspaper from those times being published in a different environment. I looked up *Tygodnik Powszechny* ("General Weekly")¹—a Catholic socialcultural paper, which represented the ideology of the Catholic Church. I found there only a few official short notes on the central festival of *dożynki*.² Searching further, I came across the newspaper *Gromada. Rolnik Polski* ("Gromada³ Polish Farmer"). This newspaper was a joint initiative of the newspaper *Gromada*, edited by the KC PZPR, and *Rolnik Polski*, edited by *Związek Samopomocy Chłopskiej* (ZSch), the Peasants' Self-Help Association. It was published three times a week in the period 1952-1995 and its content was exactly like that of *Trybuna Ludu*. I finally found the weekly newspaper *Katolik* ("Catholic"), Opole⁴ Sunday Print, the first number of which was issued at the end of December 1954,⁵ and the last one in 1961, after which the name and editorial place were changed. It is not entirely free from the general ideology, but we can find there descriptions of the festival of *dożynki*, although by a different name, which differ from those in *Trybuna Ludu*. I shall refer to them in my conclusions.

I will start my paper by explaining the term *dożynki*. Here I also give examples of similar names in other Slavic languages. Following this I list other names for the harvest festival that were still known at the beginning of the 20th century. In the next part of the article I refer to the oldest Slavic description of rituals performed during the festival after harvest. Then I present the rituals performed in Poland during that festival at the turn of the 19th century, adding the information coming from earlier centuries. With this background, I move to the festival of *dożynki* in the 1950s. In order to express the atmosphere and the language of those times, while translating into English, I try to match Polish words with appropriate English words. Thus, I deliberately use the word "peasant" (Polish *chłop*) instead of "farmer" (Polish *rolnik*), because the communist government used such language. I describe the government as communist, as such a nomenclature is commonly known and applied to those times, but it must be highlighted that none of the Polish party organisations had in their names the word "communist". Nor did the government use that term referring to the system they created.

By giving detailed description of preparations and especially the rituals performed during the festival, as displayed in the articles in *Trybuna Ludu*, I show what kind of politics influenced the celebration of *dożynki* in those times.

1 Published 1945- at present.

2 See: *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 21.09.1952, p. 2 [col. *Z dnia* - "Of the day"]; 20.09.1953, p. 3 [col. *Wydarzenia* - "Events"]; 19.09.1954, p. 2 [col. *Wydarzenia* - "Events"]; 25.09.1955, p. 2 [col. *Wydarzenia* - "Events"].

3 The word *gromada* stands for an administration unit. It comprised few villages.

4 In the newspapers from 1958, numbers: 1-48, it covered issues from more districts than Opole, as it was indicated - Sunday Print: Opole, Katowice, Częstochowa.

5 It was the only number in that year; that is why 1955 is considered as the first year of publishing.

The Term *Dożynki*

The noun *dożynki* (pl) comes from the verb (infinitive) *dożynać*, meaning “to reap up” with a sickle, in this case wheat and rye (winter cereals).⁶ As the final result of this action it means “to finish harvest”, at least from the 18th century. In the 17th century there functioned the verb *żynać*, without the prefix *do*. Thus, the noun *dożynki* (rarely in singular as *dożynek*), also *dożynanie* (the noun meaning activity), means literally⁷ “reapings up”, and further, “rituals and feast after harvest”. This name was in use from the 19th century; in the 18th century it was called *obżynki* (“reapings around”) or *wyżynki* (“reapings out”).⁸ The word *dożynki* is also known, both as a verb and a noun, in other Slavic languages: Czech: *dožímati, dožítky, doženek*; Russian: *dožínatʹ, žínatʹ, dožínki*; Ukrainian: *dožynaty, dožyn*; Belarusian: *dažynki*; Serbo-Croatian: *dòžinjati, dožnjévati, dožinjak*; Old Slavic: **žinati*.⁹

The name *dożynki* is not the only one used in Poland for the ceremony linked with harvest, however; *dożynki* and *okrężne* (“circuit”) were the most popular, as stated by Polish philologist Jan Stanisław Bystron (1860-1902), the author of a kind of a map of various names for *dożynki* in Poland. This was drawn in the second decade of the 20th century, when the Polish territory was still annexed by Austria, Prussia and Russia. It is important to remember this, because Bystron refers to the administration division from that time.¹⁰

The name *okrężne* comes from the activity of going around the field and taking all crops. Primarily *okrężne* was used (at least in the region of the upper river of Narew) only for the feast organised after all works in the field were finished, including autumn sowing.¹¹ There were also less common names used for the festival of harvest such as *obżynek* (pl. *obżynki*, also written as *obrzynki*)—“reaping around”; *wyżynek* (“reaping out”); *zarzynek/zażynek* (pl *zarzynki/zażynki*)—“reaping up”. There were also names that indicated the rituals performed during the festival. One of them was concerned with plaiting a wreath of cereal heads, hence the names *wieńcowiny, wieńcowe, wieńczyny* or simply *wieniec* (“wreath”). The other name was *pępek*, which came from a cluster or bunch of cereals or the last sheaf, *osiótek*.¹² Sometimes it was the name for the ceremony itself. A more direct connection with harvest we can see in the name *plon* (“crop”). The same can be said about the names *żniwne, dożniwki* and *żniwówka*. In Upper Silesia, for example in the district of Opole, the festival of *żniwniok* has been celebrated to the present day. The next three terms are also somehow linked with the harvest time, namely *tluka, ograbek* and *dohrabki*. *Tluka* comes from the verb *tluc* (“to beat”),

6 GLOGER 1867. 286.

7 All translations into English are done by the author of this article.

8 SŁAWSKI 1983. 159.

9 SŁAWSKI 1983. 159; BAŃKOWSKI 2000. 294; BYSTRON 1916. 97.

10 Because the Polish borders were changed after World War II, many lands listed by BYSTRON as Polish do not belong to Poland at present.

11 GLOGER 1867. 286.

12 *Osiótek* in Polish literally means “little donkey”.

which indicates the common work done at harvest. Two other names also refer to the works done at harvest. As the verb *grabić* means “to rake”, so the noun *ograbek* would mean “rake around” and *dohrabki* (pl), “rakes up” (“finishing raking”). A strong German influence in the northwest of Poland is reflected in the following names: *sztopelgans* and *kranzbär*.¹³ The first name is a polonized form of the German word *Stoppelgans*, meaning “a goose grazed on the stubble field after harvesting”,¹⁴ which would suggest that a goose was served as part of the meal at the harvest feast. The word *kranzbär* also has a connotation of harvest customs, as it means “wreath’s bear”. However, I could not find any further explanation for this term, especially what the bear may have to do with the wreath. I can only assume that it was a relic of a magical ritual, which was either to protect the crop or to offer thanks for fertility and/or to ensure fertility for the next year. This ritual would refer to the characteristics of the bear as perceived by the people.¹⁵

Bystron noticed that the highlanders actually did not know *dożynki*, neither did they have other names for this festival. They did, however, organise a feast on the occasion of the end of the harvest, but it did not include any rituals. Near the villages of Rabka and Łopuszna, the people called it *hałdamas*. The word certainly is not Polish and it is hard to guess its meaning. The fact that the festival of *dożynki* was not known among the highlanders might have the following explanations: the highlanders were not indigenous Polish people; they inhabited their land relatively late; there were no manors which played a big role in the festival of *dożynki*; there were quite poor crops in those lands, so the harvest was not reason for celebration. There were, however, some traces of harvest rituals. One of them was called *baba*,¹⁶ which was represented by the last sheaf of grain stuck on a stick. Another custom was an oat wreath, adorned with ribbons, hung over the door, discovered next to a picture of a German emperor’s family in a very poor highlander’s hut near Sucha Beskidzka. In the mountains of Silesian Beskidy, no harvest rituals were found, save a glass of vodka drunk while taking the last sheaf of corn (e.g., in Milików). Neither are harvest customs known in Slovakian lands.¹⁷

The Festival of *Dożynki*

The festival of the harvest, irrespective of its name, is an ancient festival celebrated by probably all people who cultivated land, including the Slavic groups. It is highly probable that the description of the ceremony performed in the 12th century in the temple of Arcona, among the Slavic tribe of Rugians, as provided by

13 BYSTRON 1916. 96-100.

14 STOPPELGANS 2013.

15 KIERSNOWSKI 1990.

16 Disdainfully about woman. In the region of Pomoria the last cart of crops was called *baba*, especially important was “wheat *baba*” (ZADROŻYŃSKA 1985. 140).

17 BYSTRON 1916. 99-102.

the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, is the oldest preserved description of a Slavic harvest festival. Even if Saxo does not mention the name of the festival, it is clear from the context that it had to be after harvest, as the leading priest of the ceremony, standing behind a kind of big, round bread, wished his people not to see him from behind the bread next year, which meant that he wished them more abundant crops next year. He also prophesied about good or bad crops for the next year by checking the *vinum* in the cornucopia held by the god Sventovit (a wooden statue), left there the year before. Saxo says that the ceremony was performed once a year.¹⁸

Concerning the festival of the harvest in Poland, researchers are not unanimous about its continuity from the old pagan times. Polish folklorist Zygmunt Głogier (1845-1910) was convinced about the continuity of this old festival; moreover, he was of the opinion that the Polish nation had the oldest and the most original agrarian customs of all Slavs. According to him, Prussian and Lithuanian tribes adopted harvest customs from the Polish tribe of Polan.¹⁹ Julian Krzyżanowski (1892-1976), Polish historian of Polish literature, considered all theories linking the rituals of the festival of *dożynki*, as known in the 19th century, with pagan rituals of Slavs to be pure fantasies, as they are not supported by old sources.²⁰ Henryk Łowmiański (1898-1984), Polish medieval historian, confirms that although Church documents from the 12th to 15th centuries mention various pagan feasts and customs, there is nothing on the festival of the harvest as found in Saxo's document.²¹ Andrzej Bańkowski, contemporary Polish etymologist, blames the Church for this situation. According to him, the Church uprooted the harvest festival before the 15th century.²² This possibility could be considered, although it would be an interesting case if it happened only in Poland, as votive masses, during which crops were blessed (although without a specific day or name for the festival), were known in the Middle Ages in the Church. Later on during masses, special sermons were delivered.²³ For Aleksander Brückner (1856-1939), Polish historian and Slavist, it was hard to believe that finishing the most important agricultural "act" would not involve any symbolic rituals.²⁴ We find some traces in Polish literature from before the 19th century, although there is no consensus among the researchers on regarding them as proof for the existence of harvest rituals.²⁵ One of the documents is written by Jan Kochanowski, Polish poet from the 16th century. Although the title of the work, *Pieśń świętojańska o Sobótce* (*St. John's song about Midsummer Day's bonfire*), would suggest that we should expect in it relevance to the other festival and rituals, in the part sung by "Maiden VI" there are references to the harvest time and the rituals typical for

18 Saxonis Grammatici 1880. 565-566, lib. XIV, 11-25.

19 GŁOGER 1972. 30.

20 KRZYŻANOWSKI 1965. 87.

21 ŁOWMIAŃSKI 1986. 234-235.

22 BAŃKOWSKI 2000. 294.

23 ARLIK, Pisarzak 1985. col. 180.

24 Encyklopedia staropolska 1990. 234.

25 KRZYŻANOWSKI 1965. 87.

dożynki, like a “chosen host”²⁶ that will have “a wreath of ears” when all crops are taken from the field. Although there is nothing directly mentioned about the feast that the host usually had for reapers, what we know from later sources is that in the last two stanzas, the maiden sings about resting and guests are invited by the maiden, but it seems that she is speaking on behalf of the host.²⁷ I would argue with Krzyżanowski, who does not see in this song any connection with *dożynki*. He points to the fact that in the fifth stanza a scythe, not a sickle, is mentioned, which would suggest that that was the time for harvesting barley or oats (summer crops), not wheat (the winter crop), which was taken from the field at the end of harvest. Krzyżanowski, however, leaves out the fact that in the earlier stanza the maiden mentions the sickle, which is needed for the winter crops, and the order in which the crops are listed in the song does not correspond with the order of harvesting in reality. Krzyżanowski also suggests that the host received the wreath in the field, not at his mansion, which is not expressed in the song explicitly. Neither is his interpretation regarding the invited guests convincing, that they are his neighbours, not reapers.²⁸

The oldest description of a festival of harvest in Poland, however, without mentioning a name or term for it, is ascribed to Polish writer Ignacy Krasicki, who placed it in his work, *Pan Podstoli* (“Mr. Podstoli”),²⁹ written in the second half of the 18th century. The ceremony took place around sunset. Singing reapers came to Mr. Podstoli’s house, who together with his wife welcomed them standing in the porch. He was given a wreath made of crops’ ears and was addressed by an old man. After that Mr. Podstoli gave a speech; he praised God for His protection, then thanked his subjects for “faithful work”, promised to support them like a father, and finally invited them to a feast that he prepared for them in the courtyard. Mr. Podstoli sat at the table with the men, Mrs. Podstolina with women, the daughters of the hosts with maids, and the sons of the hosts with farmhands. Before they started to eat, they listened to a priest’s preaching about “how to use God’s gifts with gratitude and appropriate joy” and had the food blessed. There was music, singing and dancing till late at night. Mr. Podstoli asserted that the above custom was handed down unchanged from generation to generation and he “recommended” his children to keep it.³⁰

A more detailed description of the festival of *dożynki* than that given above was presented by Gloger in the second half of the 19th century. Although he remarks that the customs he writes about regards the region of the upper river of Narew, he adds that these rituals are known in all of the country, although

26 The Polish word *gospodarz* can be translated into English as a “host”, a “landlord” or a “farmer”. It depends on the context. Here the most appropriate seems to be a “host”, who in this case probably was a landlord.

27 KOCHANOWSKI 1955. 356-357.

28 KRZYŻANOWSKI 1965. 87.

29 In the old times *podstoli* was an administrator at the court. He represented (or substituted for) an administrator called *stolnik* (the noun coming from *stół* – “table”) who was supervising the preparation and serving of the meal on the feast table. From the 14th to the 16th centuries he became an honourable land administrator.

30 KRASICKI 1927. 90-91.

they might vary slightly. During harvesting the most important person was the *postatnica*³¹, a female reaper who was the fastest person at work, and therefore it was she to whom the first field-bed was assigned, and she led the *postać*, the whole row of reapers in the field with crops which they occupied at work. It was *postatnica* whose privilege was to wear the wreath during the festival of harvest. The second fastest female reaper, called *postacianka*, took the second field-bed, next to the *postatnica*'s.

After the wheat was reaped and the harvest was finished, it was time for the main ceremony of *dożynki*. Still being in the field, on the day that the harvest was to be finished, reapers started to sing a long *dożynki* song, which consisted of two-line stanzas, with a refrain after each: *Plon niesiem, plon* ("Crop we are carrying, crop"). Very rarely a fourth line was added: *Do jegomości w dom* (To the landlord to his house). The content of the stanzas was linked to the harvest, to anything and anybody connected with it. The girls plaited the wreath and *równianka*. The wreath was plaited of ears of rye and field or garden flowers, and sometimes berries of viburnum, red apples and nuts were added. Sometime there was even a wheat cake or ginger bread placed on the top of the wreath. All these elements symbolized abundance of all kinds of fruit from the fields, gardens, apiary and forest.³² If the wreath were made of rye, *równianka* was made of wheat, because both crops had to be used as a sign that the harvest of all the winter crops was finished. *Równianka* was of two different kinds. The first one, a bunch (cluster) of equal ears (hence the name from the verb "to equal", Polish *równać*), looked like a small broom. The second one consisted of three bunches of the first kind tied up with straw at the end of the stems, just before the ears begin. When the wreath and *równianka* were ready, the wreath was placed on the head of *postatnica*. She had to be an unmarried girl. If *postatnica* was a married woman or a widow, she had to give the place to an unmarried girl, who carried the wreath to the manor. *Postatnica* with *postacianka*, who carried *równianka* in her hand, led the whole crowd to the manor. At the gate to the courtyard, boys poured water on *postatnica* and her wreath to reflect the wish that the next year's crops would get enough rain and be plentiful.

The whole crowd, all the time singing, stopped in front of the porch, and here they sang about the landlords and their children. The landlords were either on the porch while the verses about them were sung or appeared there after the song was finished. After that either the landlord took the wreath off *postatnica*'s head or she gave it to him herself. She wished that the landlords stay in good health in order to celebrate the next year's harvest, and in turn she got a coin or coins. *Postacianka* gave the landlord *równianka*, for which she also received a coin³³. They were hung

31 In other parts of Poland she might be called *przodownica* ("leader"), *postawnica* (from the noun *postawa* - "posture") or *postadnica*.

32 GŁOGER 1972. 31.

33 Adam Fischer (1934. 194) noted that in the regions of Wielkopolska and Mazowsze, instead of wreaths, people brought landlords clusters of crops which they called there *pepki* (sing *pepek*). In the districts of: Sandomierz, Radom and Lublin, *postatnica* was called *sternica*. The noun *sternica* probably comes from the verb *sterować* ("to steer").

in the manor and had to be kept there till they were replaced by the new ones the following year. It has to be added that seeds from the wreath and *równianka* were planted with the first sowing. The landlords invited the reapers to tables arranged in the courtyard. After the meal there were music and dancing, with the first dance performed by the landlord with *postatnica*. Because the feast very often lasted till dawn, the festival of *dożynki* was organised on Saturday. Gloger does not mention the priest and his blessing, but it is highly probable that such a ritual was present. At the time Gloger wrote about the festival of *dożynki*, one ritual was already disappearing, namely giving good wishes to the landlords by a village administrator on behalf of the whole community.³⁴ It is obvious that the most important ritual during the festival of harvest was making the wreath and handing it over to the landlord. The wreath was shaped as a crown. It was a symbol of the crops and the crowning of the whole year's work of the farmer.³⁵ The feast marking the end of the harvest was also organised on 15 August, the day of Lady in Harvest, in Polish called the day of God's Mother of Herbs (Mary's Assumption).

The Central *Dożynki* in *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* (PRL; Polish People's Republic) in the 1950s

The festival of *dożynki* was celebrated at the level of *gromada/gmina*³⁶, *powiat* and *województwo*³⁷ from around the middle of August until the beginning or the middle of September, always on Sunday. The central festival was the final and biggest celebration, the "coronation of commune celebrations."³⁸ While preparing and celebrating *dożynki* at lower levels of the administration division of the country, there were formed special committees which were responsible for the organisation of the festival in their territories. Such committees were appointed by ZSCh and consisted of representatives of local governments, political parties, social and youth organisations, Women's League, committee of peace defenders, agricultural works committees from *Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne* (PGR; State Farms), and production and commune cooperatives. The local festivals were also a kind of "general rehearsal" before the central celebration and an occasion for choosing the delegates, who were leaders in agricultural production, for the central

³⁴ GLOGER 1867. 275-285.

³⁵ GLOGER 1972. 31.

³⁶ To see the celebration of *dożynki* in Trzebonowice in 1950 go to: <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/5131>.

³⁷ Under the name "province" I understand the Polish administration unit of the highest level called *województwo* (pl *województwa*). *Województwo* comprises "poviats" (pl *powiaty*, sing *powiat*), *powiat* comprises "gminas" (pl *gminy*, sing *gmina*), *gmina* comprises few towns and/or villages. The mentioned above *gromada*, which replaced *gmina* in the period 1954-1973 was a bit smaller than the latter one. The term "region" is used in Poland usually when referring to geographical or historical parts of the country.

³⁸ Rozpoczął się 1950. 2.

festival. In 1957 it was announced that the local *dożynki* depended on the decision of peasants. At that time there were 17 large administrative units in Poland³⁹, called *województwa*, so there were 17 groups of delegates participating in the central festival. In 1956 among the delegates from *województwo* of Lublin were representatives of Ukrainians living there. Although it was theoretically an agricultural festival, the festival of the countryside, it was celebrated by all people, so that there were also delegates representing other work environments such as factory workers, railwaymen and soldiers. One article also mentions actors from the Poznań opera and professors from universities marching in the parade.⁴⁰ The intelligentsia were mentioned very rarely, and always it was stressed that they were the “working intelligentsia”. It was very important to show that the united nation was participating in this festival.

There was also the central *Dożynki* Committee that was responsible for the central festival of harvest in Poland. In order to demonstrate achievements in agriculture, there were organised local⁴¹ and central exhibitions, which displayed not only numbers and charts, but also goods, livestock and machines, including the newest models of Soviet combine harvesters, which worked in Polish fields. Numbers and charts displaying achievements of individual peasants, but especially of cooperatives, as well as of factory workers and their factories, were also carried during local and central parades in various forms, e.g., on banners, sashes on leaders and *dożynki* wreaths.

Much time was spent on preparing the artistic part of the celebration in which were involved folk bands⁴² playing old Polish folk instruments, folk-dancing groups, schools, theatres, choirs, and orchestras, including miner’s orchestras (very popular in the regions of Silesias) and philharmonic orchestras, as well as *Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe* (LZS; People’s Sport Clubs). These clubs were mainly responsible for sport events. The programme consisted mainly of folk performances, including the presentation of old Polish harvest customs like “thief and baby⁴³”, “decoration of quail”, “liberation of a young mower”, and “disguisers”. However, in 1950 in the town of Okocim was performed a stage adaptation: “We want peace!”,⁴⁴ which referred to the Korean War which had already started. A special event took place in August 1955 during the 5th World’s Festival of Youth and Students in Warszawa with one hundred delegates from all continents. The youth from the countryside from various countries presented a colourful *dożynki* performance. There were also special effects performed during the central festivals, like 5000 doves let go as the symbol of peace in 1951. In 1959, to mark the 15th anniversary of People’s Poland, a large group of fifteen-year-old youths

39 I use a short form—Poland—and only when necessary for the context I use the form proper for the time I write about.

40 KULAK – SOLSKA 1951. 3.

41 In 1957 the Central Committee decided that there would be no *powiat dożynki*, neither exhibitions on that level. This decision was made due to the high costs of the organisation.

42 In 1954 with a performance came the famous Bandurists’ Band from Soviet Ukraine.

43 See the reference 9.

44 MOŁDRZYK 1950b. 4.

marched in the parade. In 1954 the ceremony of the central *dożynki* in Lublin was transmitted on two channels of the Polish Radio, and in 1955 there was transmission from the ceremony in Warszawa.

From the earliest hours people gathered at a big square or a stadium in the chosen central festival city, with streets, shop-windows, and fronts of institutions decorated with flowers, national flags, and red (communist) and green (agriculture) banners. For a decade the city in which the central festival took place changed every year, but beginning in 1955 it was always in Warszawa.

There were always two important places in the city of the central celebrations: one where the main ceremonies took place, including handing over the central wreath and the speech of the host of *dożynki* (in the first years it was the President of Poland, then the Prime Minister or the I Secretary of Party), and the second, where the parade was welcomed by the host and honourable guests. Among the honourable guests were always foreign delegates. In 1950 it was a delegation from Soviet agricultural cooperatives; in 1951 there were groups of peasant delegates from France, Finland and Italy; in 1953, a delegation of peasants from the German Democratic Republic (GDR); in 1956, delegations from Great Britain, Sweden and Yugoslavia; in 1957, Mahavir Tyagi, chief activist of the Congress Party of India; in 1958, the president of the Bulgarian parliamentary delegation; and in 1959, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Kingdom of Cambodia and a delegation of Bulgarian peasants. So the central *dożynki* gathered thousands of people. It was estimated that in 1950 a hundred and fifty thousand peasants arrived in Lublin, and the same number gathered the next year in Poznań.

When the host and the guests (members of the government, communist party, other organisations, army, foreign delegates) took their seats in the bleachers reserved for honourable guests, they were welcomed usually by the foreman of the Chief Board of ZSCh, but in 1953 it was the Minister of Agriculture and in 1958, the president of the Chief Organising Committee of the Association of Agricultural Circles and Organisations. Then a huge central *dożynki* wreath was put in front of the bleachers, "danced around", and then the leading peasants reported on the achievements of the Polish village, giving thanks to the State for its help. Here could also be heard greetings from the peasant delegations from other countries, as well as the speech of the Marshal of the Army. Then the representatives of the peasants handed over the central wreath to the host⁴⁵ and traditional bread baked of the first crops was given⁴⁶. The host thanked the representatives and invited them to take a place in the bleachers next to him. After that he gave a speech and sliced the bread. After his speech, sometimes there were occasional speeches, such as an appeal of the Polish peasants to the peasants in the whole world condemning "American magnates—enemies of mankind,

45 In 1951 on the top of the wreath was the symbolic six reminding the audience about the six-year economic plan that was then in the process of activation, and in 1954 there was the number ten indicating the 10th anniversary of the festival of *dożynki* in the free country.

46 In 1958, salt, honey in plasters and liquid, fruits and nuts were given.

imperialistic frauds"⁴⁷ from 1950. The speeches were followed by artistic, mainly folk performances, during which bunches of flowers and ears of cereals were thrown at the bleachers.

When this part was completed, the people marched through the city in a *dożynki* parade with charts displaying achievements of villages and groups of villages and portraits of workers' and peasants' leaders, as well as of Joseph Stalin, the President of Poland Bolesław Bierut and the Marshal of Poland Konstanty Rokossowski. Delegates participating in the parade often rode on carts on which they displayed the most magnificent vegetables and fruits they had managed to grow. At the end of the parade column were various agricultural machines, such as tractors, usually led by women. Very interesting elements of the parade were so-called "life scenes", which were performed by representatives of various professions, e.g., bricklayers building a house or smiths forging iron. When the parade reached the second main place of the ceremonies in the city, the host with the guests was already there welcoming the delegates from the seventeen *województwa* of Poland, from which they received the regional wreaths. The regions could be recognized by their wreaths; for instance, those from the region of the Baltic Sea were decorated with models of fishing boats and fishing nets; one from the district of Kraków had a miniature of a chimney of a great blast furnace from New Steelworks; on the wreath from the district of Katowice, a mining district, was a big hammer; the wreaths from the districts of Białystok and Olsztyn were plaited of flax; and the one from the district of Zielona Góra was interwoven with grapes.⁴⁸ Very often bunches of flowers or ears of cereals were given to the guests. With this, the official part of the ceremony ended and then parties in various parts of the city took place, as well many sports, games, airplane demonstration in the sky and fireworks. Such parades lasted four or five hours and could be tiring, especially for the peasants carrying their crops, and therefore the Central Committee decided that beginning in 1956 there would be no parade.⁴⁹

During the celebrations there were frequently big cheers for "the great leader Generalissimus" Stalin, the President of Poland, the workers'-peasant alliance, the Peace, leaders at work, and in 1950 for Kim Ir-sen. Choirs and folk bands sang the old peasant revolutionary hymn *Gdy naród do boju...* ("When the nation burst with arms to the fight...").⁵⁰ Sometimes *The International* was sung, and always the national anthem.

47 *Apel chłopów* 1950. 1.

48 *150 tysięcy chłopów* 1951. 3.

49 *Dożynki bez korowodu* 1956. 1.

50 Also known as "March after 1831". It was probably written in 1831 or 1835 or 1848 by Gustav Ehrenberg. The text refers to the November Uprising in 1831, but also blames the magnates, nobles and clergy for losing independency by Poland. To listen to it see www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLI4KgV1y8.

Political Ideology Contained in the *Dożynki* Speeches

The main, “neutral” reason for celebration of *dożynki* was thanks to all the peasants who had worked hard for the crops, although it was also added that the peasants would not have such achievements without the help of the factory workers, and moreover the State’s help, which was always enumerated (more houses, improvement in health care, social welfare). In 1958 it was highlighted that “all achievements take their beginning in the resolutions of PZPR”.⁵¹ The other contributing factor in these achievements, always stressed, was the implementation of “great experiences of the leading Soviet agriculture”.⁵²

While presenting the achievements of small and middle-size farms, production cooperatives, State Farms, State and Cooperative Machine Centres (with the names given), it was also an occasion to remind the people and to demonstrate in numbers that the production cooperatives are more productive than individual farms, although it was always stressed that there was no compulsion to join cooperatives.⁵³ *Dożynki* very often were used as an occasion for opening a new cooperative⁵⁴, which was announced publicly. It was also stressed that one of the factors that had influence on the records of individual farms was competition at work. It is interesting that almost every year the crops were bigger than in the previous year; however, some speeches of the hosts of the central festivals contained critiques. Besides “hostile elements in the country and abroad”, imperialistic propaganda in western radios, including the Vatican, and speculation, theft and drunkenness were condemned.⁵⁵

Dożynki were an occasion to sum up the achievements of Polish agriculture (e.g., 1950 was the first year of the Six-Year Plan) and to show glorious achievements in the countryside, including the development of education and progress in technology. It was stressed that mechanization would bring improvement of the work conditions for women and would give them more time for education and cultural life. *Dożynki* in 1951 were an occasion not only to encourage the peasants to continue to raise agricultural production, but also to realize the plans of agricultural contracts and to sell the State,⁵⁶ even earlier than agreed, cereals.

Certainly the festival of *dożynki*, after the 1 May parades, was an excellent occasion to demonstrate that socialism (commonly called “communism”) was the best possible system in the world. Of course, introducing and keeping this system would not be possible without support, without an alliance with other countries of folk democracy with the leading “invincible” country of socialism,

51 *Dożynkowy wieniec* 1958. 1.

52 *Toczy się* 1950. 2.

53 150 tysięcy chłopów 1951. 1; *Podniesienie wydajności* 1953. 1; *W zespołowym gospodarowaniu* 1958. 3.

54 There were also opened new sport grounds, libraries, schools, local wire broadcasting centres, bridges, etc. The last ones were build with the help of the Polish army.

55 *Wytoczne nowej polityki* 1957. 3.

56 In 1956 the I Secretary of KC PZPR Edward Ochab announced that from 1 January 1957 the obligatory delivery of milk would be abolished.

“the mainstay of peace”, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its “great leader”, “Standard-Bearer of Peace”, “Generalissimus” Stalin.

The *Dożynki* parades were “manifestations of peasants fighting for durable peace and deepening workers’-peasant alliance”. All this was very important, as it was to give strength to overcome various difficulties, also for the realization of the government’s production plans, which were to proceed “in the atmosphere of aggravated class fight in the countryside”.⁵⁷ According to the government, the fight with “greedy rich landlords”, with “ignorance, backwardness, illiteracy”, which were “the heritage of pre-war lordly Poland” was still going on.⁵⁸ This workers’-peasant alliance was strengthened by brotherhood with the People’s Army. To underline the meaning of the socialist system, everything was called “people’s”, so there were also *Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe* (People’s Sport Teams) that were praised and promoted during the festival.

There was always a reason for choosing a particular city to host the central festival. Thus, in 1950 (10 September) it was Lublin, the main city near Chełm, which was first liberated from German occupation and was therefore called “the first capital of liberated fatherland”. It also represented one of the main agricultural regions of Poland.⁵⁹ In 1951 (9 September) the host city was Poznań, referred to as the old Polish city, chosen to underline the fact that the Polish lands, regained from Germans, were back in the fatherland. In 1952 (7 September) the festival was celebrated in Kraków, called the city of heroic fighters (especially Tadeusz Kościuszko), workers’ case (Ludwik Waryński), the city in which the old and new traditions met (the building of a new steelworks had just begun).⁶⁰ That year was the 15th anniversary of the great peasants’ strike and although it occurred throughout Poland, the strongest protests were in the region of Małopolska in and around Kraków. In 1952 *dożynki* were celebrated only a month after the Constitution of the Polish People’s Republic was passed, and the peasants were to “express pride and joy”⁶¹ because of this. That year the festival was also an occasion to mobilise peasants’ support for the elections to Sejm (Polish Parliament). In 1953 (6 September), Szczecin was the city of the central celebrations. As in the case of Poznań, it was to remind the people that it was a very old Polish city, the history of which is connected with the first founders of the Polish state, the line of Piast. Choosing that city for the place of the central festival was to be “the answer for imperialists and their Adenauer-Nazi confederates”.⁶² This referred to Konrad Adenauer’s policy — the remilitarization of Germany, the union of Germany, and not recognizing the border with Poland, which was set at the rivers of Odra and Lusatian Neisse. In 1954 (12 September), the host city of central *dożynki* was again Lublin, as it was the tenth anniversary of liberation of these lands. Beginning in

57 10 września 1950. 2

58 Toczy się 1950. 2.

59 Dostatni 1950. 4.

60 The day before the central *dożynki* a group of leading peasants (almost 1000) visited the steelworks and workers’ housing estate. Among the guests was also Soviet consul Nikitin.

61 W Krakowie 1952. 1

62 Podniesienie wydajności 1953. 1.

1955 (18 September), and on 8 September 1956 and 1957, 7 September 1958, 6 September 1959) Warszawa, described as the heroic capital, was the host of the central *dożynki*. As was stressed in 1957, peasants themselves influenced the decision about the place of the central festival.

Current foreign political events were always referred to by the Polish communist government during *dożynki*. During the Korean war, which started in 1950 and lasted until 1953, America was described as an aggressor killing brave Korean patriots. "American magnates" were called "enemies of mankind", "imperialistic frauds", and those who wanted to set on fire the whole world.⁶³ Polish peasants and workers condemned Americans and demonstrated solidarity with and friendship for the Korean peasants and workers. They assured them that they were "in the same common front of peace, which under the leadership of an invincible country of socialism—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, under the leadership of the Standard-Bearer of Peace, Stalin—will lead to the victory of justice".⁶⁴ In 1951, the President of Poland, Bolesław Bierut, criticised the resolutions of the conference in San Francisco (from 8 September), which ended with the signing of the peace treaty with Japan, which the USSR and its allies opposed.⁶⁵ The people from the countryside were to protest against the remilitarization of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).⁶⁶ In 1952 the delegates from Zielona Góra carried the Polish and GDR flags showing that "the present border joins them, not divides". They were welcomed with cheers: "Let live the border on Oder and Neisse!"⁶⁷ In 1954 a group from Szczecin carried the GDR flags and also two symbolic border posts. In 1953 the leading peasant, who reported to the host of *dożynki*, said that "the Polish peasant together with the working class will do the best to preserve forever our borders on Oder, Neisse and the Baltic",⁶⁸ and the host, Bolesław Bierut, in his speech assured the inviolability of the Regained Territories (in the western part of Poland), which was the response to Konrad Adenauer for not recognising the Polish-German border. In 1954 the host of the central *dożynki*, President of the Cabinet Józef Cyrankiewicz, stressed in his speech that democratic Germany was in the same camp with Poland and the border on the Oder and Neisse was the border of peace. He also referred to the peace in Korea and Indochina, as well as to the French proposition (27 May 1952) to create a European Defence Community (EDC), which eventually the French National Assembly refused to ratify on 30 August 1954.⁶⁹ In 1955 Józef Cyrankiewicz informed the audience with joy about the conference in Geneva, which brought international detente and the beginning of the normalization of relations between the USSR and FRG.⁷⁰ In 1958 Władysław Gomułka spoke

63 Apel chłopów 1950. 1.

64 Rozpoczął się 1950. 2.

65 150 tysięcy chłopów 1951. 1.

66 Od 19 bm 1951. 1.

67 100 tysięcy chłopów 1952. 1.

68 60 tysięcy delegatów 1953. 1.

69 Chłopi – współgospodarze 1954. 1.

70 Partia i rząd 1955. 1.

about imperialism that “provokes dangerous war tensions in various parts of the world, at present at the border of the Chinese People’s Republic”.⁷¹

The ideology was also expressed in slogans on banners. Here are some examples of it: “Production cooperation—the way to durable prosperity of the Polish village”; “More bread, fat and meat, more milk, sugar and fibre—this is our contribution to the Six-Year Plan”; “Following working class we develop movement of competition in the countryside”; “Let live great Stalin—the leader of the world camp of peace and socialism—the best friend of Poland”;⁷² “Go away with aggressive treaty on EDC!”; “We greet the defenders of peace in the whole world”.⁷³

Conclusions

In 1950 an announcement of the central festival appeared in *Trybuna Ludu* as early as 12 August. It is noteworthy that in the first years of the 1950s there were quite numerous notes and articles on local and central *dożynki* in *Trybuna Ludu* compared with the second half of the decade, which could be explained by the hard years immediately after the war and the government’s being occupied more with the country than with foreign affairs, although the latter were always present in the newspaper. The announcements always gave the main ideological headwords that appeared in the speeches given by the hosts of the central *dożynki*, as well as during local festivals. Reading these newspapers gives one the feeling that the same text was given as a directive to all newspapers, which had to publish it in the “prescribed” form. Very important were also notes about the information on Polish *dożynki* in the Soviet press, for instance in the newspapers: *Правда* (“Truth”), *Известия* (“News”), and *Труд* (“Toil”).⁷⁴

The central festival of the harvest, besides the celebrations of the Day of 1 May, was a kind of show, the purpose of which was to prove that the prevailing system had the support of the entire nation. It was also an occasion to remind the people that Poland was liberated thanks to the brotherly Soviet Army and could feel safe because it belonged to the camp of democratic countries, together with the Chinese People’s Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the best friend of Poland.

It was certainly a great event for the leaders of agricultural and factory production, who were always called by name with their achievements announced in public during both the local⁷⁵ and central festivals. During the local festivals they received *dożynki* wreaths. Shaking hands with the host of *dożynki* and being invited to sit in the bleachers next to him was a great honour for an ordinary worker and farmer. The leaders at work were recognised on the local level but

71 W zespołowym gospodarowaniu 1958. 3.

72 Obchody dożynkowe 1950. 2.

73 Chłopi – współgospodarze 1954. 3.

74 Prasa radziecka 1950. 1.

75 MOŁDRZYK 1950a. 2.

also on the central level; in the latter usually by the President of Poland or the I Secretary of KC PZPR. This ceremony took place shortly before the central *dożynki* or immediately after the official part of the festival. In 1952, the president received the leaders in the Wawel Castle in Kraków, which has a special place in the history of Poland because Wawel was a seat of the Polish kings when Kraków was a capital of Poland.⁷⁶ Such a distinction was certainly an incentive for people to work harder and gave them a feeling of self-fulfilment.

On the one hand, the government boasted about the achievements of the People's Polish Republic, but on the other hand, to enhance the nation's achievements and as a contrast to them, the old times were always remembered, the times of oppression and poverty under the landlords' and capitalists' rules before World War II. To support the criticism of that system there were also delegates of farmers from capitalist countries who spoke about their misery in their countries.

To show that the festival of harvest in the new Poland was rooted in the old folk tradition, the communist government used the same pattern of the ceremony (excluding any Church rituals or even mentioning this institution), as it was known from the old times, but adjusted to the new reality⁷⁷. Thus, the host who received and gave gifts was a representative of the communist authority (government, party) and the leaders at work in the countryside, not of landlords.⁷⁸ It was stressed that there was a link between the present *dożynki* and the old folk traditions, which was seen in folk songs and colourful folk costumes, especially maintained by circles of country women.⁷⁹ The folk song *Plon niesiemy plon!* "although based on traditional motifs, reflected the best new thoughts, new endeavours of the peasants, who worked in production cooperatives"⁸⁰ For instance, one of the lines of the song was as follows: "We are carrying gifts from the lands of Opole for People's for Fatherland"⁸¹ The Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz put it this way: "*Dożynki*, it is the old festival of the reapers. And at the same time, how different, how new in People's Poland today, Poland ruled and built by workers and peasants"⁸² Of the same significance were the words of the President of Poland, Bolesław Bierut, in his speech: "Magnificent and colourful are Polish *dożynki* parades, but only in People's Poland they have become a joyful festival of millions of working masses, both in the countryside and in cities"⁸³ During the local *dożynki* in Opole in 1959 the Member of Parliament Józef Baron reminded the audience about the times when this traditional festival was also an occasion for a great manifestation of Polishness.⁸⁴ It could be understood twofold: as the

⁷⁶ Warsaw became a new capital of Poland in the 17th century.

⁷⁷ It is worth to notice that the communist government did not revived the pre-war custom of celebrating so called "presidential *dożynki*", which was introduced by President of Poland Ignacy Mościcki in 1927 and ceased with World War II.

⁷⁸ KANIA 1952. 3.

⁷⁹ W przededniu dożynek 1958. 5.

⁸⁰ DAWIDOWICZ 1950. 4.

⁸¹ Report 1957. 9.

⁸² Toczy się 1950. 2.

⁸³ 150 tysięcy chłopów 1951. 1; Sojusz robotniczo-chłopski 1952. 1.

⁸⁴ Święto plonów 1959. 3.

reference to the Polishness of regained western lands or to the Silesian uprisings in which people opted for Polishness.

We know that in the countryside there were still organised traditional processions of village people going from farmhouse to farmhouse and giving their owners *dożynki* wreaths.⁸⁵ There were also songs sung about the harvest and people connected with it. Once these were landlords and other nobles, but in the Polish People's Republic they were local authorities, mainly co-operating with the communist party. One of the folk songs sung in the village of Godzianów (district of Skierniewice) began with the words taken from the prayer "Our Father", "The daily bread...", but as the author of an article noticed, "man does not live only on bread", so the people demanded more lard and meat. They also pointed out the weak sides of local authorities.⁸⁶

As we can see, there were no "Church accents" in the celebration of official *dożynki*, although it was very interesting to find the following expression in the speech of the I Secretary of KC PZPR Władysław Gomułka: "God [be] with you!" given as the contemptuous answer to those who did not like the idea of cooperatives.⁸⁷ Relying only on the communist media, one could get a picture of a totally secular Poland and her people, but it would not be true. Although the communist government did everything it could to draw people away from the Church and God, it proved futile. "Katolik" is one of the newspapers which supplies numerous examples of this. The traditional *żniwiok*, as *dożynki* were called in the region of Opole, always began with a solemn mass in the church,⁸⁸ where thanks were given God for His blessings of the farmers' work.⁸⁹ During the mass, *dożynki* wreaths were put at the altar and blessed by the priest⁹⁰. In Grudzice (district of Opole), before people marched to the stadium where the local authorities awaited the parade, all people gathered at the farmhouse of the honourable farmer and sang one of the so-called "God songs". It could be *Serdeczna Matko* ("Cordial Mother") or *Boże z Twoich rąk żyjemy* ("God we live by your hands").⁹¹

According to the communist ideology, as represented by the communist government in Poland, the socialist system they created was a *societas perfecta*. Thus, referring to the dichotomy (*sacrum-profanum*) presented by Émile Durkheim (in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*) or Mircea Eliade (in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*), the communist political institutions were to be seen as *sacrum* and anything that would dare to oppose them as *profanum*. This *sacrum* needed affirmation: homage had to be paid, so a ritual set had to be created. As Andrzej Flis noted,⁹² the party's monopoly could "only be main-

85 Chłopi obchodzą 1959. 1.

86 Dożynki w Godzianowie 1959. 4.

87 Nie szczędźmy sił 1959. 3.

88 Podziękowanie za żniwa 1958. 2.

89 WILCZEK 1955. 2.

90 Zwieżliśmyy plon 1957. 1. After World War II, a new custom was introduced, namely making wreaths of corns in a shape of religious emblems or pictures, sometimes models of a church or a chapel. (Arlik, Pisarzak 1985. col. 181)

91 NIEDŹBAŁA 1958. 7.

92 FLIS 1988. 51-52.

tained in the long run by a religious or quasi-religious form of legitimation”, so ritualization of political behaviour was indispensable. The other reason for this was the necessity “to present fiction as if it were reality” in order to justify the ruling of the communist leaders, as this “reality” could “only exist as long as the ritual behaviour that creates it continues to be played out”. Flis argued that “the all-embracing ritualization of political behaviour becomes the only way by which the communist system can exist”. Hence the ideological reality had to be continuously presented to the people in the sphere of public life. Ideological symbols, songs, banners, poetry, flags, slogans, and marches were essential in the ritualization of political behaviour, as “they represented the only socialist reality in communist states”.

The festival of *dożynki* was an ideal festivity to be included in the ritualization of political behaviour. The festival was a perfect occasion for a match of old, folk, sacralised rituals with communist ideology. The pattern, time, roles and symbols were taken from the old ceremony and adapted to the new ideology, so that they, together with the people, were to serve the new state, the new “ideal” system. Despite the communist government’s endeavours to strip the old festival of its prime sacral meaning and appropriate it to the party’s own purposes, people remained faithful to the old tradition, even if they participated in the official gatherings because they were forced to do it.

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