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Lithuanian Farmers, Nature and the Ties that Bind¹

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Introduction and Theory

We begin with three questions that should be answered in order to understand the reason for writing and the potential importance of this and other studies in this special issue of *World Cultures*. My answers reflect the motivation, theoretical stance and content of this paper. The questions are: What is a cultural model? Why is it important to understand farmer's cultural models of nature? Are there cultural models of nature particular to farmers?

The first question is the most complicated and easiest to answer for me. Simply put, a cultural model is a shared mental construct through which sensory input is interpreted in ways that one can be reasonably sure other members of the relevant group (culture) are likely to interpret that input; and secondly this input partially triggers or activates other cognitive cultural models that shape subsequent plans, scripts, and actions. Cultural models thus are mental constructs that mediate between sensory input, neural-cognitive processes, and behavioral output in ways that are anticipated or expected by other relevant members of the cultural group.

Now for the complicated part. In the process of this study I have become more and more jarred by the "fact" (it is my fact) that a cultural model is part of a multi-dimensional dynamic contingent process that operates at several levels of abstraction and descriptive thickness. That is, to study a cultural model in isolation is a little like studying a nail without studying hammers, tables, composition, the concept of building things etc. Cultural models exist in fields of cultural models at different levels of abstraction, as part of identities, and in particular contexts.

Here is the problem as it developed during this fieldwork project: farmers place themselves both inside and outside culture; they see themselves as agents acting on nature and nature as the agent acting on them; they see humans as the destroyers of nature, the stewards of nature and totally at the mercy of such a whimsical all powerful force. They see nature as pure and a place to go to rest, replenish one's spirit and to remind one of one's childhood. They see the city and civilization as impure and outside of nature while at the same time seeing everything as a part of nature. As farmers, they seek to take from nature using their wits and technological tools, yet as Lithuanians (non-farmers) nature gives them life and tools do not play a part in that relationship. The one constant is that they have a relationship with nature.

These complications led me to consider cultural models as relative to identity and context as well as connected to other cultural models and purposes. In this paper I hope to show that these thoughts regarding the role of cultural models are not only reasonable but imperative in our further examination of cultural models as functional cultural-cognitive models.

Nature is a key element in Lithuanian national identity as defined by Simonas Daukantas at the beginning of the 19th century (Roepstorff and Simoniukštytė 2001). Daukantas asserted that the main criterion of Lithuanian ethnicity was language and only those who know and speak Lithuanian were truly Lithuanians. This point was interesting because the language of intellectuals was Polish. Thus, by asserting that language was key to identity he also asserted that the peasantry were the bearers of Lithuanian identity and as a result, according to Roepstorff and Simoniukštytė (2001) nature became a central feature of the national identity: peasants live in the “forest,” retain pagan traditions, and work in/with nature. A core feature of this identity is the contrast of rural to urban; the pagan animist conception of nature in contrast to the Christian one; the authenticity of the peasant and their toiling with nature compared to the elite and their cunning machinations. Ever since Daukantas’ proposal of this peasant culture, lifestyle and traditions would be essential features of Lithuanian national culture. He established the idea of a Lithuanian pagan past, a golden age that was destroyed by Western civilization and by Christianity. Interestingly, as the above authors write, Poland was developing at the same time its own official construction of national identity, but instead of embracing its peasantry and nature it turned to modernity and the Catholic church (2001: 147).

I now propose answers to the second and third questions. Farmers may oscillate between defining themselves as humans having a steward-like role with nature, as extractors of important resources, or as passive adapters to this overwhelming force. It is important to know what contexts or under what conditions one role dominates over others and if farmers vary in the roles they adopt. Roles themselves are mediated so that even the extractor role can be dampened by a conception of the role as one of stewardship or of nature as the overwhelming force. Cultural models of nature have some impact on how people eventually act or evaluate other people’s actions toward nature. Knowing these cultural models and the contexts in which they operate helps us understand ways to shape and effectively encourage more ecologically sound, “sustainable” farming practices. “Yes” there seem to be cultural models of nature that are particular to farmers that are not shared by other members of the culture. But to assert that Lithuanian farmers and non farmers have dichotomous cultural models and at the same time separating these two identities would be a false simplification. The fundamental idea behind anthropology is that through the *longue durée* of fieldwork we can put ourselves in the shoes of members of another culture and see, feel, act, in a word, experience their world as “they” do. “We” and “they” become another to each other. Lithuanians know and share the cultural models of farmers, it is just that farmers use some aspects of the cultural model of nature more often and—in their use of it as farmers—these cultural model of nature in the context of farming can be said to be more complicated.

The central take away lesson I have learned in this study is that cultural models of nature are a product of the type of relationship a person has with nature. Farmer’s see nature through their relationship with it as farmers—through what I call a farmer’s identity. Thus, activating a farmer’s identity they relate to nature and view it differently than when they are relaxing in nature. Both farmers and non farmers

Lithuanians can, and do, see nature as a whimsical, unpredictable force, but for the farmers the expression of that representation threatens their livelihood, for the non farmers it may just inconvenience them as when there's a sudden cold period when they are on vacation. The farmers' cultural model is different than the non farmers' model; not in content, but in what aspects are foregrounded and important to them in their engagement with nature as farmers.

Second, if all politics is local, so is all of life. Randall Collins (2004) noted that life, from birth to death, is inescapably lived in a sequence or "chain" of micro-contexts. Cultural models are the cognitive constructs that function to instantiate culturally feasible and understandable behavior and by definition, this behavior is local, contextualized, culturally meaningful, entangled in a web of meaning at different levels of concreteness and never just an isolate bit of meaning. A farmer's relationship with nature is analogous to two chess players, the farmer acquires knowledge and experience to be able to succeed in growing his/her crops or raising farm animals and must anticipate the "moves" of his opponent, nature, as well as recognize that those moves can be unpredictable. Given this scenario, the farmer should have a cultural model or complex of cultural models at hand to anticipate and deal with the variety of moves nature may make. For instance, the cultural model may feature that we are a part of nature and nature is a powerful and unpredictable force. The farmer, however, must also act on nature, anticipate and adapt to its force and whimsy with knowledge and power. Cultural models are important because they provide the symbolic tools to understand and interact with nature in purposeful ways. They must be both generic and yet complicated enough to deal with the morass of contextuality and half-hazardness, as well as the predictability that constitutes everyday life.

The remainder of this paper consist of a methodological section, a discussion section and a conclusion. In the methodological section I describe how the data was collected through free listing tasks and semi-structured interviews. In the discussion section I seek to tie the theoretical and methodological (i.e., results of the analyses of the data) sections together.

Fieldwork Site and Participants.

Fieldwork was conducted in Lithuania and was multi-sited (see Figure 1). I had originally thought to conduct single-sited research in the rural area around Telsiai in NorthWest Lithuania. I had previously conducted fieldwork in that region in 2002-2004. However, for both pragmatic and methodological reasons I decided to extend the research to different areas of Lithuania.

The main pragmatic reason is that I had hired three Lithuanian graduate students in anthropology to help with collecting data in Lithuanian. We worked together in a number of villages in different areas of Lithuania. Methodologically, this allowed us to extend the study to include a variety of different farmers from different areas so that we could be confident in our ability to generalize from our sample to the target population of "Lithuanian farmers." Our samples are of sufficient lengths and variability (in terms of land size and cattle versus crop farming). In fact those for the freelists (N=32)

and the semi-structured interviews (N=37) are sufficient to meet the requirements for cultural domain sampling as described by Weller and Romney (1988), Handwerker and Wozniak (2002), and Bennardo and de Munck (2014).

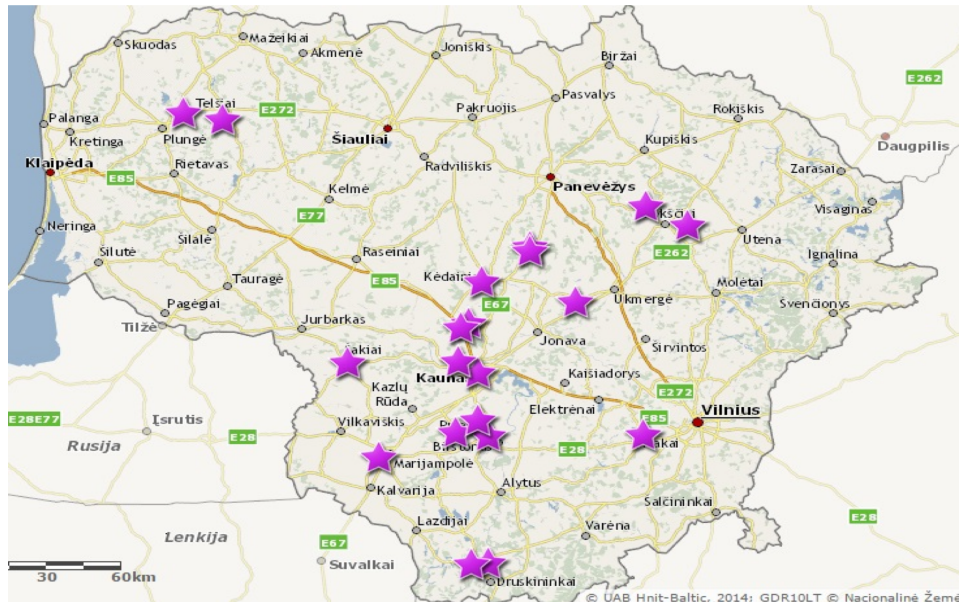


Figure 1: Map of Research Sites in Lithuania

Methods: Free Listing and Semi-Structured Interviews.

The main method discussed in this paper is free listing. We use the semi-structured interviews to comment and expand on the freelist results. Our purpose is the development of a feasible cultural model of nature that includes the farmer, nature and other relevant elements/actors in farming. The results of the free list tasks discussed are used to develop the cultural models of nature that farmers hold. The semi-structured interviews are used to develop the idea of a farmer's identity and how this shapes the way in which static cultural models are used dynamically by them depending on both context and the identity through which they view nature.

Freelisting: Data Collection and Results of Analyses.

Collection. All freelists and semi-structured interviews took place in the residences of the farmers. All the farmers were sympathetic, willing to participate and understood that they could quit whenever they wanted without any ill will or problems.

Respondents often provided phrases or short commentaries for the freelist questions. After freelists were collected, the primary investigator, with one or two assistants, reduced long responses to "gist" phrases. The four questions used to generate freelists are:

1. List everything that comes to your mind when you think about nature (Lithuanian: *Kokios mintys ateina į galvą kai pagalvojate apie gamtą?*)
2. In what ways do humans use nature? (Lithuanian: *Kaip žmonės naudojami gamta?*)
3. List all the problems you have as a farmer (Lithuanian: *Su kokiomis problemomis susiduriate ūkininkaudamas?*)
4. What are the effects of climate change on your farm work and productivity? (Lithuanian: *Kaip klimato kaita įtakoja jūsų ūkininkavimą ir produkciją/produktivumą?*)

Analysis An analysis of the top ten to fifteen terms for each freelist is provided below. For any free listing task it is assumed that first listed items are more salient. The results for the first freelist question are shown in Table 1.

Statements such as “man and nature are the same,” “are one” were reduced to “unity;” “humans trash,” “destroy,” “act thoughtlessly,” “exploit nature” were changed to “humans-bad;” and “nature better than Vilnius,” “can’t live in city all summer,” “go to countryside” were changed to “city-bad.” The thirty-two informants provided 340 responses, 285 unique terms and averaged 10.6 responses per informant. When asked to respond to nature ‘*gamta*,’ we get into the dilemma of which identity lens are they using to interpret *gamta*. The non farmer lens focuses on nature as a place of “peace” that one goes to for “rest” and to “rejuvenate” oneself through its “beauty,” the clean “air,” the feeling of “unity,” going for a “walk” and listening to the “birds sing.” This non-farmer cultural model of nature is a default cultural model that encompasses all Lithuanians in the sense that they collectively use nature in the same way.

Farmers adopt this model, but they also foreground nature as used for farming; this is only evident however in terms 15 and 16, soil and crops. Thus, I posit two cultural models based on the way nature is used. Our emphasis is on the second model that I call the farmers’ model. I do want to emphasize that the dichotomy prevails only in terms of the different way farmers use nature as opposed to those who don’t farm and that the dichotomy is more based on what is functionally foregrounded and backgrounded than on differences in the content of the cultural model.

The ‘first cultural model’ of *gamta* has two sub-plots or facts: the first seems to be a causal one in which nature is pure and one goes to nature to feel better (i.e. revitalize oneself, rest). In the second the causal vector is reversed and it is humans who “pollute” nature. We also note that the city is seen as bad versus nature as good. This dichotomy implies that humans are somehow distinct from nature and outside of it, but at the same time “unity” is noted. In the default version of the first cultural model one leaves the city and goes to nature where by listening to birds sing, swimming in lakes, walking or resting in a forest one feels better. The marked or “subplot” version of this model is also relational, but it is adversarial in that humans act thoughtlessly and put chemicals in or trash nature, polluting it (see the following freelist—in Figure 2—which extends this theme).

Table 1: What comes to your mind when you think about nature?

#	Item	Freq	Freq %
1	Rest	15	47
2	Peace	12	38
3	Pollute	11	34
4	Beautiful	10	31
5	Forest	9	28
6	Animals	9	28
7	Unity	8	25
8	Air	7	22
9	City-bad	7	22
10	Rejuvenate	6	19
11	Humans_bad	5	16
12	Birds_sing	4	13
13	Steward	3	9
14	Walk	3	9
15	Soil	2	6
16	Crops	2	6

I think though that the dichotomy between humans and nature is that of a marked hierarchy where the overarching term subsumes both the default and marked category. Thus, “NATURE” writ large subsumes “nature” (writ small) and humans as agents acting on nature in the same way as MAN can subsume both “man” and “women.” The idea of a marking hierarchy (de Munck 2000; Bennardo and de Munck 2014) allows for cognitively considering nature and humans as distinct and in various sorts of relationship while at the same time seeing both as subsumed under the over-arching category of NATURE. Both Lithuanian farmers and non-farmers view nature as providing food, but only farmers are immersed in the task of growing and extracting surplus food from nature.

The ‘second cultural model,’ apparent in the last two terms (‘soil’ and ‘crops’), is viewing nature through the lens of the farmers’ identity. Here nature seems to be transformed to “*žemė*” – that is, to earth or “soil.”

The idea of a relationship between farmer and nature is developed in freelist 2. For all terms mentioned (n=287), 27% (N=77) implied a relationship between humans and nature; terms number 3, 4, 9, 10 and 14 are examples of terms expressing a relationship. The notion that humans are dependent on nature is greater than that of humans as the caretakers of nature. This difference suggests that we are in a relationship, and that nature is the more powerful partner. Yet, we also “pollute,” “litter,” “destroy,” and more neutrally “take from nature;” thus humans exploiting nature is a powerful and pervasive theme in the freelist (and later in the interviews). Terms

were reduced as before, thus “Pick mushroom” also includes picking berries and other plants from the forest; “Fish” includes the names of numerous fish; and so on.

Table 2: Freelist how do people use nature

#	Item	Freq	Resp %
1	Rest	20	63
2	Pollute	16	50
3	Take from Nature	14	44
4	Steward/take Care	12	38
5	Pick mushrooms/etc.	12	38
6	Make a Living	11	34
7	Litter	9	28
8	Work	9	28
9	Live In/part of	8	25
10	Nature_gives	8	25
11	Grow Grains	8	25
12	Get Water	7	22
13	Destroy	7	22
14	Depend on	7	22
15	Fish	6	19

The themes of humans as “stewards” and “destroyers” of nature highlights the dialectic relationship of humans to nature mentioned above in regard to the first cultural model. Nature is both a force that acts on us and a home in which we live, and humans are seen both as recipients of nature’s bounty as well as exploiting and taking that bounty. What is new here—and this seems to fit the second cultural model of nature (that is, the perspective of nature as foregrounded or highlighted by the farmer’s identity)—is the notion that nature is also whimsical and unpredictable. This viewpoint is expressed in comments such as: “farmers are dependent on the pranks of nature;” “nature rewards if used wisely;” and “however much effort you put [into farm work], if summer is bad your harvest is bad.”

Nature is not seen neutrally or as an unalloyed primitive good, but through a particular cultural farming identity. People must be cognizant and respectful of nature and then its bounties may be obtained. The relationship is contingent, probabilistic and not mechanical. Non farmers may also see nature as a whimsical force but except for extreme storm, this is not particularly salient to them, their livelihood and daily engagements with nature do not depend on foregrounding this characteristic of nature.

Table 3: What problems do you encounter in farming?

#	Item	Freq	Resp %
1	Bureaucracy	25	78
2	Pests	16	50
3	Unstable_weather	15	46
4	Unstable_produce_prices	12	38
5	Plant_diseases	9	28
6	Shortage_of_good_workers	9	28
7	High taxes	8	25
8	Financial_money_problems	7	21
9	Can't be lazy	7	21
10	Laws_change_frequently	7	21
11	Not knowing what EU_payments_will_be_next_year	5	16
12	Expensive repair	5	16
13	Events in the Ukraine	4	13
14	Theft	4	13
15	Poor soil	4	13

For the freelist about problems in farming (see Figure 3) there were 32 informants; a total of 107 unique terms/phrases elicited; and an average of four responses per person. "Bureaucracy" was the most frequently cited term. Many of the other terms in the above list were also related to bureaucracy (see for example, items number 7, 8, and 10). These comments signal quite clearly the farmers' frustration with many newly implemented bureaucratic policies.

This freelist task has no obvious, direct link to nature. Only "pests," "plant diseases," and "poor soil" refer to nature. The first two items, however, are directly linked to climate change in interviews (and is evident in the next freelist). In interviews farmers said, "There has been an increase in Colorado beetles;" "there are now more ticks because in winter they don't freeze;" "It is hard to predict the weather;" "nature has become unstable." "Can't be lazy" refers to farming and reflects, as evident in interviews, the farmers' pride in their own hard work. It is also indicative of a contested relationship with nature, where humans and nature are locked in a contest in which humans must outwit nature's whimsies. This is an important and pervasive model of the relationship between farmer and nature as used by most all farmers in their interviews about nature.

Our final freelist task on climate change (see Figure 4) elicited the following frequencies: total number of informants = 32; total number of terms = 103; total num-

ber of responses = 114; average number of responses per person=3.563. Only the top ten terms are listed because the range of variation was not so great, and the answers were almost always presented in sentences.

Table 4: What are the effects of climate change on your work and productivity?

#	Item	Freq	Resp %
1	Warmer/Snowless winters	13	25
2	I_donâ€™t_feel_climate_change	11	36
3	Climate_changing_very_much	10	33
4	No effect	8	25
5	Childhood, weather very different	8	25
6	Unstable_weather	8	25
7	More droughts than before	7	22
8	Diseases	6	19
9	Hard_to_tell_the_direction_of_change	5	16
10	Plant/harvest rot	5	16

Most of the farmers made comments acknowledging particular changes in the weather, yet they also noted that they “don’t feel climate change” or “no effect.” It is clear through the interviews that most farmers noted changes at the local level but mostly did not identify them with global climate changes. Common responses were “everything happens earlier,” “doesn’t affect me much because I have a small farm;” “The hot evenings are bad for spraying.” Further, many answers were expressed as personal experiences: “the weather was colder during my childhood;” “The winters are snowless.” What appears to be the case is that they are adapting to local climate change, but they do not generalize their experiences to the notion of “global” climate change. This seems logically, and even scientifically sound reasoning for one is not supposed to generalize from a sample of one location to the globe without further information.

Semi-Structured Interviews.

Thirty-seven farmers were interviewed between June 2014 and August 2015. Preliminary metaphor and gist analyses were conducted following the works of Bennardo (2009), D’Andrade (2005), and Quinn (1987, 2005). Farmers shift between two identities. The first, as noted, is a default Lithuanian model in which nature is used as a peaceful beautiful place where one can go to rejuvenate oneself. This model of nature stems from the peasant model described by Daukantas and explicitly contrasts rural Lithuania (*kaimas*) with the “city” and (though less explicitly) with the artifacts of the modern world. In my ethnographic experience of living in Lithuania for approximately four years, I am confident in stating that every

Lithuanian recognizes this cultural model of nature and the entailed contrast between rural and urban.

The second model is one viewed through the farmer's identity. Nature still gives us food and health, but in addition it is viewed as a whimsical force and resource. The farmer is engaged in a contested relationship with nature in which through hard work, knowledge and luck resources are extracted. Sustainability is not particularly considered. In both models, agency can shift: humans act on nature for good (as stewards) or bad (destroying, exploiting); nature can also act on humans, revitalizing us or giving problems when it manifests itself as a whimsical force. I emphasize that the two models are not dichotomous. The differences between these models is not one of content, both non farmers and farmers can (probably) reconstruct both models with little effort (or provide the symbolic indicators for us to infer those models). The difference between the two models is in the people's use of the cultural model of nature. What is the case is that farmers have an additional identity relationship with nature and as a result they foreground the contested, unpredictable aspects of nature, because if they don't, their efforts will likely fail.

The discussion below focusses only on coding that reflects themes so far developed. It is divided into two areas: how people emotively (ethos) relate to nature and how they relate cognitively (Bateson's [1958] "eidos") to nature. My emphasis is on the relationship between farmer and nature. This approach owes its inspiration to Bateson's analysis of the Naven ceremony among the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea (Bateson 1958) and is intended to sketch out the three features of the cultural models proposed so far. The metaphors and gist words are written in **bold**.

Ethos: Born to Farm. Farmers consider farming to be **in their blood**. A good farmer is **born to farm**. Farming is not just an occupation, it is who one is from birth. All farmers came from rural areas and had experience with farming from childhood. Audrius, a fifty-seven year old farmer sitting side by side with his wife, describes the ethos and conception of self that most of the farmers hold in the following passage:

"You have to be born [a farmer]. (*laughing*). Or to study it well and have a lot of practice because a farm is not some kind of a store – here you bought this, resold it and you have a profit. It is hard to even calculate that profit here. Because so many things depend on the climate and on the fertility, on the breeds and cultures... also on the time you choose to sell your grains, whether you will be able to wait, and how you will predict changes in price."

Other farmers made similar kinds of comments. Donatas said, "During the winter I look at the fields and wait for the spring to come faster, thinking how I will cultivate the land (**thinking**). That is inside a person. That is what I like." Rimantas said, "You have to **like** everything, you know, if you are farming. If you do it, you have no other choice. If you **don't like**, then you can not work at all." Another interviewee said, "Here is the beautifully tilled earth, sprouting crops, growing. So, you **contribute** everywhere, you know what your hand has touched upon. You can somewhat

change the course. I would say it... is not just for making a living but also it gives a lot... probably no one, if he really does not like it... farms, does he?"

The ethos aspect of the farmers' cultural model of nature is composed of this: *it is in your blood, you have no choice but to do it; the farmer intrinsically likes the hard work (because s/he was born to farm); through working with nature the farmer contributes to society.* The cultural model of nature as a whimsical force that provides food is one held by both farmers and non farmers however only farmers obtain their identity from these features. As a consequence of their engagement with nature, farmers view themselves as stoic, strong, hard working, taking pleasure in and obtaining meaning through their work.

Eidos: Without Knowledge you Will Fail. I chose to use the term "eidos" (coined with reference to cultural configurations by Gregory Bateson 1958) as a complementary contrast with ethos. Eidos, is the logical machinery through which you think about how to behave and make decisions. It is distinct from the intuitive and emotive basis for action in that the reasoning can be articulated by the person. Bateson writes that Iatmul culture had "some internal tendency to complexity, some property which drives it to fabricate... more and more elaborate constructs" (1958:216). This is what the farmers also point out—a general evolution to increasing complexity both driven by new technology and increasing bureaucracy. Farmers valorize the pursuit of knowledge and many rue their own lack of knowledge. For instance, Linas, a relatively new ecological farmer said, "The main problem is that we do not have experience. We do not have **correct experience** and **little knowledge**. Those would be our personal problems. And also that we want things fast, that everything would happen here and now, and would be perfect." Similar statements were made unbidden by many of our non-ecological farmers. The acquisition of knowledge was a major theme for all farmers. The importance of knowledge was emphasized eloquently by Jonas.

"Your knowledge needs to be applied everywhere...it is like **the driving force** that allows you to **improve yourself**. Anyway each year is different and that knowledge every year needs to be applied differently. It also happens that you need to oppose your own beliefs and knowledge. There is not one year that's the same as before (*stated firmly*). And each year you have **to look at your knowledge** and **continuously add** to it, so that... Each year opens something new. And it is very joyful to see that... that you make progress. And... Yes, indeed it is fun."

Bateson's "internal tendency to complexity" is reflected by the farmers as a requisite for being a successful farmer. Milda provides a good account of the many levels and kinds of knowledge required to be successful:

"So you go into the fields and look. Depending on different species of plants: some species ripen earlier. It depends on soil. Also when certain chemicals were applied to that soil. So you see, you can see from a grain. You carry them, look at the moisture... if it is dry then all is good. You start threshing from that field. You decide everything yourself –

when to spray, when to sow, when to do anything. You have to make the decisions yourself. Because nobody will tell you from the consulting service when to sow your field. Maybe it is still wet in my field. I would go to work in that field but it is still a puddle there so I start with another field this year. Or when to thrash. The same species can ripen faster in one soil but later in a different soil. Maybe soil is different there. Sometimes... mmm... even two days difference in sowing makes a difference when to thrash. Every decision needs to be made on the spot and in time.”

Through experience and by birth the farmer acquires the knowledge to successfully grow crops or raise cattle. Since nature is a “driving force” that is fickle, one must constantly improve one’s knowledge. The relationship is one of contestation and the farmer must reckon with nature’s power and changeableness. Decisions are made and depend on recognizing and adapting to even minor changes in nature. Nature is experienced and viewed at the local level of the farm or region and not globally. It is, therefore, not surprising that farmers do not answer affirmatively to questions about global climate change, they are focused on their farm and local effects on nature. Questions on climate change must be phrased in local rather than global frames.

Conclusion.

In the ethos sub-section, nature and humans’ relation to it can be viewed in terms of an ethos that binds the individual to farming and through farming to land, plants, animals, weather, as well as social, political and economic forces. Farming is “in the blood.” As a consequence there is no leaving, it is, in Sapir’s (1924) words, a “genuine” cultural-work relationship rather than a “spurious” one. The farm identity motivates the farmer to work hard and take care of things directly as best s/he can—her actions are meaningful.

The eidos aspect of their relationship emphasizes nature as an unpredictable force from which, if one acquires experience and knowledge of it, one can obtain its rewards, its bounty. Thus, one adapts to changes in climate and to micro-level changes in features that affect ones crops or livestock. The relationship between farmer and nature is much like opponents in a chess game and nature is seen as one’s opponent. The difference however is that nature is the more powerful force and does not yield its bounty to those who are not very good at reading its signs and adapting to them, especially at micro-levels that inexperienced farmers are unlikely to recognize.

Given our acquired data, results of analyses, and discussion, it is feasible to posit that the basic cultural model of nature by farmers is that:

Nature it is a force that is often unpredictable, it is changing, it can give what the subject (the farmer) wants if it is (a) not too unpredictable, and (b) the farmer has adequate experience and knowledge to make good decisions; and (c) the bureaucracy does not sink the farmer under paperwork and regulations. The farmer does not consciously respect or worship nature; she considers how s/he will plan, prepare and work on or with nature in order to obtain a good yield (of milk, meat, grain, vegetables, fruits).

What is important about the cultural model of nature as described above is that it is a powerful whimsical force that gives health, food—in other words, life—to people. Humans are all in a permanent relationship with nature; farmers are in a more complex relationship because they are agents contesting nature which is also agented and more powerful than they are. Only through continual effortful work, knowledge, experience, and adapting to changes can the farmer obtain what s/he wants from nature. Nature does not obtain anything from humans, but humans can damage nature through pollution, chemicals, trash, and destructive actions.

My emphasis has been to view the cultural model of nature in terms of a functional relationship between nature and farmer. I regard this perspective as an important one because cultural models must be used in real life and studied as such if they are supposed to be anything but butterfly collections for academic discussion. I hope to have shown that in using their cultural models, farmers draw upon other cultural models that exist at different levels of abstraction and as part of social identities and particular contexts.

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