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# Accepting the maelstrom? Emotional responses to drought in farming households in Poland and the involvement–detachment continuum

## Abstract

This article focuses on responses to drought among Polish farmers. Framed by the concept of the involvement–detachment continuum, as proposed by Norbert Elias, this article shows the unbreakable bond between natural occurrences and social life, especially of a specific social group of farmers. Drawing on interviews and participant observations in two research locations in Poland, purposefully chosen to reflect the diversity of the sector in the country, the article describes a response to drought dubbed "weary acceptance".

Based on Elias's essay "Fishermen in the maelstrom", the article argues, that when certain structural conditions are met, an objective assessment of the possible actions against drought is being made by the farmers. Based on this assessment, a position of passivity is assumed, wherein the unpredictability and uncontrollability of drought are being accepted as part of the course for farming, and stoicism in the face of hardships is seen as a part of legitimised farming habitus.

**Keywords**: drought, climate crisis, Poland, Norbert Elias

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## 1. Introduction

In the summer of 2025, the European Drought Observatory noted worsening drought in Central and Eastern Europe, while in the Southeastern Mediterranean, drought conditions remained critical (EDO 2025). The situation in Australia remains dire (Nicholas, 2025), and even more so in sub-Saharan Africa (Toreti & Bavera et al., 2025). Media headlines with similar information have been present for decades now, and the persistence and severity of drought remain one of the more easily noticeable effects of the climate crisis. While global chains of food supply make it so that large parts of the population, especially in the countries of

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the Global North, may not experience the most direct consequence of a lack of water – hunger – drought is a natural occurrence of paramount importance for social life.

The increased frequency and severity of droughts in Poland (e.g., Ghazi & Salehi, 2025; Somorowska, 2009), which, along with other unpredictable weather occurrences, are undoubtedly caused by the climate crisis, constitute the primary context of this article. Another is the acknowledgment that vulnerability to drought is experienced and felt differently across social groups. Therefore, in studying the social implications and impacts of drought, this article focuses on the emotional responses to drought among adult members of farming households (hereafter referred to simply as farmers, since farming labor is often undertaken by all members of such households). Around 9 % of the workforce in Poland is employed in agriculture (Eurostat, 2022), pointing to the significant role of the profession in the life of the country.

The point of departure for this paper is that farmers are among those most vulnerable to drought, as they work closely with nature and are materially dependent on it. The paper will show that they respond negatively to the uncontrollable and unpredictable occurrence that is drought, with emotions such as anger, self-doubt, and hopelessness. However, some employ certain rationalising strategies to lessen their emotional engagement with drought and are more likely to exude a posture of "weary acceptance." This "weary acceptance" is a strategy aimed at emotional survival – admitting that there is no way of controlling drought may, paradoxically, serve as a defence mechanism against experienced hardship.

Using the framework of the involvement–detachment continuum proposed by Norbert Elias (2007), this article will show, first, that members of farming households, due to their proximity to and dependence on nature and land, are among the social groups most likely to experience an intense emotional response to crises such as drought. The uncontrollability and unpredictability of nature emphasise a truth: that no matter the scientific achievements that increase human control over all aspects of life, it is not possible to control everything – and in that truth lies the source of pain. Second, it is proposed that while some emotional responses take the form of rebellion against this painful truth, others take the form of recognition and acceptance of it, as a means of protecting one's well-being. Lastly, the importance of the structural conditions of agriculture in the investigated communities for shaping these emotional strategies will be emphasised.

## 2. Norbert Elias's involvement and detachment

This article will focus on one particular aspect of the data collected in the research process, namely an emotional response that is, in this paper, called "weary acceptance" or "resigned acceptance," framed by Norbert Elias's conceptualisation of the involvement–detachment continuum. The involvement–detachment contin-

uum forms the basis of Elias's theory of knowledge and science. He notes that human control over non-human forces and actors is growing (and so is, of course, the self-control that we as humans exercise as well); this growth results in the proliferation and strengthening of a detached perspective on reality (Elias, 2007).

This detachment is, in short, an objective perspective of an individual who is able to observe the social and natural processes surrounding them in an analytical way, carefully considering the interplay between corresponding factors and actors. Emotions are, in this case, pushed aside, and assessments are made on the basis of the observed reality. Natural events are understood and perceived as impersonal results of a chain of events bounded by objective laws of physics, biology, gravity, etc. Involvement, then, is an emotional, subjective perspective of an insider to the process. For example, an involved perspective on a sea storm would be to perceive it as divine punishment, rather than the result of the interplay of currents, Earth's rotation, and air temperature.

While it is perhaps tempting to treat these categories as rigid and dichotomous, the notion of a continuum serves as a reminder that there are innumerable stages between these two ends, and no individual or society can be readily and unequivocally described as either detached or involved at all times. The positions on the continuum are not static. In fact, as Elias writes, usually only very young children can be completely emotionally involved, with no regard to material reality or any semblance of facts, and only very few people, in turn, can be completely unmoved by what is happening around them (Elias, 2007, 61). In the civilising process, detached models of understanding the world and oneself became a part of sociopsychological structures, a "second nature", although one's position on the involvement-detachment continuum may, of course, shift as a result of many conditions and contexts, as well as rising and falling social and mental pressures (see e.g. Loyal & Quilley, 2005, 816–817).

In Elias's essay "Fishermen in the Maelstrom", which is published as a part of Involvement and Detachment, he uses Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom" to illustrate the overarching themes present in involvement and detachment. The essay starts with an image taken from Poe's short story: we have two brothers on a boat on a stormy sea, and a maelstrom – a powerful whirlpool sucking in everything in its way – is forming. The boat that the brothers are on is circling closer and closer to the edge of the whirlpool, and fear is paralysing them. At some point, however, one of the brothers manages to snap out of the fear-induced paralysis and notices a regularity in the workings of the maelstrom – namely, that smaller, circular objects move slower than larger ones. The observant brother therefore makes a decision to tie himself to a barrel and jump out of the boat; the other one, still paralysed, remains on board. The boat with the unlucky brother gets sucked in and sinks, while the barrel with the other sibling circulates

slower and slower until the whirlpool ceases. The observant brother survives (Elias, 2007, 45–60).

What does this story mean when it comes to questions of control, fear, distance, and involvement? Elias points out that the brother who managed to shake his fear and observe the regularities of the maelstrom did so because he managed to observe his surroundings as if he were not involved in them – but from a distance. He was able to perceive himself as a "figure on a chess-board forming a pattern with others (…) turn his thoughts away from himself to the situation in which he was caught up" (Ibid., 46). Then he was able to – after cool observation – understand the uncontrollable process enough that he used the elements of said process to ensure his own survival (Ibid., 46).

The maelstrom – or an uncontrollable crisis, a process that has a negative effect and causes a strong affective response – can then be managed and/or controlled, affectively as well, by positioning oneself in a detached manner. While there are, as Elias points out, situations in which such a detached emotional position is close to impossible to achieve, the parable of the two fishermen shows us the circularity of the "physio-psychological and socio-psychological double-bind" (Ibid., 48). In short, uncontrollable crises bring with them strong emotional responses that hinder the ability to detach oneself from the situation and subsequently the ability to survive it, which again increases the negative emotional response, and so on and so forth. The affective structures and the natural structures are bound together – the interdependencies of human and non-human nature are inescapable, and to adequately analyse societal structures, one must do away with ontological dualism, or the idea of a rigid split between human and non-human nature (Ibid., 48–49).

## 3. The double-bind: social impacts of the natural

The question pertinent to this particular article is this: can drought be a maelstrom? It is, undoubtedly, a crisis, in that it endangers an individual's material standing, emotional well-being, and indeed even physical well-being. Regardless of the media and political framing of climate change at large, and drought as one of its symptoms, the consequences – especially for social groups dependent on nature, such as farmers – can range from simply negative to dire.

Margaret Alston, for example, finds that drought has a detrimental effect on mental health, even contributing to suicides among rural men in Australia (Alston, 2012; Alston & Kent, 2008). In her other research, she notes that the mental strain caused by drought may factor in the increase in incidents of domestic violence in rural areas (Alston, 1997). These findings were corroborated by research in India (Dehingia et al., 2023) and sub-Saharan Africa (Aguilar-Gómez & Salazar-Díaz, 2025). Other consequences of drought may include, of course, the breakdown of local economies (Fleming-Muñoz et al., 2023), but also increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco, as well as other substances, especially among men (Mosberg

& Eriksen, 2015). The emotional response to drought may be strengthened by its unpredictability and uncontrollability, as emphasised by Rebecca Jones (2018), or by narratives, be it political or media, attempting to "shock" the individuals into action by emphasising the damaging impact of climate crisis (see e.g. Höijer, 2010; Rutledge-Prior & Beggs, 2021).

While it is common to think of crises, disasters, and catastrophes as relatively short and violent events – such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or indeed maelstroms – one must also consider the processual nature of such happenings, even in a longue durée perspective (Williamson & Courtney, 2018). The temporal nature of drought as a crisis – namely, that it does not happen overnight and can last for years at a time (as exemplified by the Australian Millennium Drought, or "The Big Dry," between the late 1990s and 2009) – makes the affective response to it even more torturous and less apparent.

This article proposes to look at and analyse drought as a maelstrom – or rather, a perpetual maelstrom of varying intensity, a threat of its forming. It focuses on the social group most prone to experiencing the negative effects of drought by virtue of the profession of its members, namely farmers. Their professional habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), structuring and binding together their lives, self-perception, and mentalities, determines (to an extent) the way in which they drift on the uneasy sea. Drought is the maelstrom – the uncontrollable crisis that threatens to suck the farmers in. While, as Elias wrote, there are some who are able to observe the process from a detached perspective and act in such a way that allows them to remain on the surface, I posit that some, while observing, choose to accept their circumstances in an attempt at psychological and emotional survival. In short, resigned or weary acceptance, often based on detached observation, is a survival strategy as well and is often employed by those whose repertoire of action is structurally limited. I will elaborate on these structural limitations in the next part of the article.

## 4. The Context: Polish Agriculture and Its Idiosyncrasies

This part of the article gives an arguably limited but necessary overview of the context in which the investigated farming households function. Polish agriculture, while embedded within the global structures of the free market since the fall of communism in 1989, and even more so after accession to the European Union in 2004, is also influenced by long-lasting cultural scripts warranted by the historical developments of the country. The legacy of feudalism, which lasted until the latter half of the 19th century, with its stark division between the serfs and the nobility, has resulted in Polish agriculture being dominated by small, family-run farms (the average farm in Poland is less than 12 hectares of arable land in size, as per Agencja Restrukturyzacji i Modernizacji Rolnictwa, 2024). The collectivisation efforts of USSR-backed post-war governments were largely unsuccessful, to the point that

– in stark contrast to most other Eastern Bloc countries – the majority of farms remained privately owned (Gorlach, 2000). Communal farms were mostly concentrated in a few areas of the country, usually in the west and north, on formerly German territories. Based on such historical developments, regional differences in agricultural structures are abundant, and this research largely hinges on the acknowledgment of these contextual differences.

The emotional component of farming hinges, first, on the role of family in agriculture. Farms were, and still mostly are, operated by individual farmers, usually with substantial workforce contributions from family members. In this vein, succession becomes immensely important – the farm is somewhat of a collective legacy to be passed on to another generation, usually in a patrilinear succession (Dudek, 2016; Gorlach & Drąg, 2019). Second, the farm can be perceived – especially in regions of Poland where, after the Second World War, collective forms of farming were not as common, or not common at all – as one of the last spheres of individual autonomy and influence. This emotional component of farming as a profession is a result of longue durée structures of the relationship between individuals and the land they operate on (Bukraba-Rylska, 2008).

It is, then, useful to consider the notion of professional habitus, as proposed by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). Habitus relates to internalised dispositions and meanings shared by members of a social group (Raedecke et al., 2003, 69). As Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) note, habitus is created by the interplay between free will and structures over time, framing the actions of those who act in accordance with said dispositions. It is possible to speak of a farming habitus, that is, a specific habitus emerging in the field of agriculture, dictating the "rules of the game" (Ibid., 233) of what it means to be a good farmer. As this paper will show, these habitus may differ locally, as they are influenced by structural conditions.

Decisions made by individual Polish farmers regarding their farms are made in an environment of possibly clashing logics and rationalities: the loss–gain logic of modern capitalism and the emotional underpinnings that stem from long-term psychosocial structures. These decisions are also dependent on a usually detached assessment of the existing and available repertoire of choices – the composition of agricultural structures in a particular local context can, as will be elaborated later, influence these decisions and judgments of rationality profoundly.

## 5. Methods

The empirical material at the basis of this article comes from ethnographic fieldwork conducted between August 2023 and March 2025. In the course of the fieldwork, which was conducted in two purposefully chosen locations in Poland, 30 individual interviews with adult members of farming households were collected. The interviews aimed to answer two main research questions: first, what strategies are undertaken by farming households when faced with drought; and second, how

these strategies are decided upon, also regarding the internal gendered hierarchy within the households. The interviews lasted between around 50 minutes and over three hours. Coupled with the interviews were participant observations, during which I set out to observe everyday life and labor in the field sites, as well as important community events. I aimed to obtain a rich picture of the way labor is structured and decisions are made. In the course of the research, it became increasingly clear, that I had not anticipated and imagined the degree to which drought was only one of many interloping crises, happening almost simultaneously. Among them were: the war in Ukraine and its economic consequences, cost of living crisis and high inflation, especially in 2023, hailstorms and torrent rains… The concept of polycrisis, first defined by Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern (1999), and recently elaborated on by Michael Lawrence et al. (2024) seems applicable here. To extract the thread of drought from all the other happenings was difficult, as it seemed as everything was connected and formed a Gordian knot of sorts. It is then paramount to keep this in mind while reading the article, that drought in the farmers' narratives of their experiences is merely one of the many ongoing crises.

To situate the paper in the broader context, a brief overview of the socio-demographic and geographical characteristics of the research areas is needed. Of the two field sites, one – Adamowo – is located in the eastern part of the country, some 80 kilometres from the Belarusian border; the other, Celinowo, in the northwest, around 100 kilometres from the German border. Due to concerns about anonymity, the names of the locations and participants are changed in published writings. The reasoning behind choosing these particular places as field sites was to give the research a comparative character, in that the field sites were to reflect the diversity of Polish farming and rural areas.

Adamowo, a commune of around six thousand inhabitants living in twenty villages, is dominated by livestock farms as well as some fruit plantations. The farm size is, on average, smaller than the national average, which is small in itself (12 ha; the average in Adamowo is 8 ha). There is little land available for sale or lease, and therefore expansion into a large-scale farm that can easily compete with others in the free market is difficult. The lease system is largely unregulated and hinges on informal agreements between participants, i.e., retirees lease some portion of their fields to active farmers for a fee. These agreements are often made without any paperwork, thereby guaranteeing little security for those involved. An issue reported to me by interviewees is land fragmentation – for example, one of my participants operates on approximately 30 hectares of land divided into a dozen plots scattered within a 13-kilometer radius, which hinders labor effectiveness. Due to the conditions previously explained, many male farmers are, in fact, bi-professionals, supplementing their income from agriculture with other endeavours, i.e., construction businesses or work in nearby towns' public sectors. In farming households, care work and housework are delegated to women, who are rarely employed "outside" the home.

Celinowo is a community of some three thousand people gathered in twenty villages, and its farming sector is dominated by plant production. In the years immediately following the Second World War, it experienced significant population turnover, with the German population being forcibly relocated, and settlers from central and eastern Poland, as well as formerly Polish territories now belonging to Ukraine and Belarus, migrating in their place. State enterprises of collective farming were established in the commune. The assets of collective farms were subsequently privatised following the fall of communism in 1989, and as such, the lines of succession are much shorter than in Adamowo. Farms are larger on average (over 40 ha) (Statistics Poland 2025), with some farmers operating on over 200 ha. Land fragmentation is an issue as well, though not as prominent as in Adamowo, and the lease agreements are much more secure, as they are often made between a governmental agency and the individual farmer. Therefore, farming in Celinowo is structurally better conditioned to invest in and expand agricultural operations. In the course of the research, it became evident that women in the farming households are more likely to work outside of them, mostly because the larger farm owners can afford seasonal and administrative help, making women's labor not as necessary as in smaller farms.

Both of these locations share some crucial characteristics: they experienced droughts of varying intensity throughout recent years and are located on soils of poorer quality. The poorer quality of soil results in susceptibility to drought, and both Adamowo's and Celinowo's soils are marked on official maps as either susceptible or highly susceptible. Another common characteristic is that farming remains an important part of the local economy. In 2022, almost 40 % of Adamowo's households derived over 50 % of their annual income from farming; the corresponding figure for Celinowo was almost 60 % (Statistics Poland, 2025).

All in all, the two field sites diverge in terms of both agricultural production and the organisation of labor. In Adamowo, long-lasting structures of (usually) patrilinear succession have resulted in the proliferation of small, fragmented farms that struggle to compete on the market. The conditions within which they operate shape, to an extent, the psychological response to drought, as will be presented in the subsequent sections of the article. In Celinowo, with larger and more concentrated farms, the repertoire of actions at farmers' disposal – be it investing in machinery or innovative techniques – is broader, impacting the psychological response to drought as well.

## 6. Fighting Against the Current – Drought and Emotional Response References

This section of the article provides an analysis of the empirical material described in the Methods section. Its focus is the involved, emotional perspective and response

to drought, emphasising the deep impact this natural occurrence may have on the well-being of those whose livelihoods depend on it – specifically, farmers.

Emotional responses to drought were articulated by my research participants, usually touching upon emotions such as anger or disappointment. An example may be this excerpt from an interview with Karolina, a 40-year-old female farmer from Adamowo:

> *Researcher: "I wanted to talk to you about stress connected to the weather. How would you…"*
> *Karolina: "Stress? It's, you know, I'll speak frankly – you go fucking crazy. Because you see the clouds – like today: 'Oh, it's going to rain, let me check my phone.' It's like this: spring, all the way until the harvest, is the worst time for us, farmers. We look for the rain like it's salvation (…) Looking at the phone, all the time. There was a cloud on the way, passed us by, it rained over there, like 'Oh God, why did it rain in [another village] and not here?' You get so angry."*

The above quote shows the multitude of negative emotions triggered by drought. The frustration and anger are connected to the lack of control and the unpredictability of the crisis, which is underscored by the action of constantly checking one's phone for weather updates. The updates are sometimes inaccurate as well, adding to the emotional strain. The impossibility of complete control – something contemporary societies were, to an extent, promised through the civilising process and the growing influence over natural forces (see e.g. Loyal & Quilley, 2005) – is laid bare by the fact that even the most sophisticated meteorological instruments cannot always accurately predict rainfall patterns.

Rain is, in a way, described as if it were a sentient being. The observed weather patterns that some of my interviewees spoke of – where rain falls in one village but not in the neighboring one – can, in this involved way of thinking, be perceived almost as personal slights.

While Karolina's negative emotional state was expressed in a very direct manner, another interesting form of involved response to drought reflects what Elias would call "childhood patterns of thinking," wherein an individual turns to a higher power for explanation and/or a solution to the crisis. One example of this is participation in Roman Catholic prayers for rain.

Poland is a predominantly Roman Catholic country, with over 70 % of the population self-reporting as believers of this faith in the 2020 census (Statistics Poland, 2025). To this point, prayers for rain in times of drought have been staged periodically, most notably in the Polish Parliament's chapel in 2006. While this instance was widely ridiculed and publicised, many parishes still include rain and good weather in their Sunday mass intentions, and I propose that attending them constitutes an emotional response to drought. One of my interviewees from Celinowo, Ryszard, said this of his brother, who is also a farmer:

> *"They went to mass in [another village] (…) they were going to the church, there was a mass on Saturday so that the rain would fall, right? And I told him, how am I supposed to go, I'm drying out my hay. (…)*

*But I went to the mass, then it didn't rain for another two days, and then it started again. (…) They prayed so hard, the rain wouldn't stop falling all the way through the harvest."*

While the tone of the quote is slightly amused and not wholly convinced of the logic or productivity of such an action, there seems to be an acknowledgment of the emotional importance of participating in a ritual designed to bring about the desired solution to the problem of drought. In other words, while no clear process of cause and effect can be observed here – and the narrative strategy of the interviewee is to distance himself from the ritual (note that Ryszard admits to going to the mass but then uses "they" to describe the praying persons) – there is an admission that participation in such social rituals "cannot do harm" and is, to a degree, understandable.

Emotional responses to drought can include feelings of anger, resentment, and hopelessness. The involved perspective on drought also includes perceiving the occurrence as almost a personal slight or as the doing of a higher power – all of which highlight the deeply emotional and social dimensions of facing environmental uncertainty.

## 7. Giving into the maelstrom? "Weary acceptance" in the face of drought

The adult members of farming households in Adamowo, when asked about the feelings they experience in times of drought, express the unpredictability of nature and the fact that life in the countryside and working in agriculture are closely bound to it. This is exemplified by this quote from Barbara, a 60-year-old female farmer:

*Barbara*: *"When it's dry? When you live in the countryside it's like… how do I put it… you know you can't get over some things. You just live in peace with nature, what else can you do? (...) We can water, or hoe, fertilise, whatever, but some things you can't get over, you have to make peace with it, that's it. You do what you can, give the plants what you can at the right moment, and so on, but you can't break down, cause what good would that do? That wouldn't change anything. You have to, like I said, make peace with it. You can't get around it. It's not for a farmer to do. What he can do, he does. (...) No other way around it."*

The emotional response – or "breaking down," in other words, an overly involved perspective – is presented here as useless, as it will not change anything. Nor will, of course, the detached perspective; however, it helps to save oneself some emotional turmoil. This disposition is presented, in this quote, as a part of farming habitus: being close to nature makes one familiar with its unpredictability, internalising it. Another part of professional habitus is evident in the narrative of having to "give the plants what you can at the right moment," or acting in a way that follows the legitimised rules of the profession and its self-perception as custodian of the land and the plants.

Similar expressions can be found in this excerpt from a 50-year-old Maria, a female farmer:

*Maria*: "*We have no control over how it goes – drought, hailstorm, whatever. Take hailstorm. We had times when we had beautiful potatoes, corn, and they suffered. It was beautiful, I remember. (…) Two days later, a hailstorm came, knocked all of it down, smashed it (…) Well, what, nothing more left, failure...*"
*Researcher: "And then you..."*
*Maria: "Well, what, words fail. You have to move forward, not look at it. Many such instances. What to do?"*

Being able to move past the failures one cannot control is, again, presented as part of the professional habitus in farming, due to its inherent connection with uncontrollable nature. Maria emphasises feelings of profound loss by declaring that the crops, which were exceptionally good, were still wiped out – this time not by drought but by hail. The loss is even greater when one grows attached to and proud of their crops.

The perception of farming as a profession in which one is perpetually endangered by natural occurrences is also evident in this quote from an interview with a 35-year-old couple, where the husband, Kamil, says:

*Kamil:* "*Drought is like… it's just farming. Can't plan anything (…) it's all fortune-telling (…) you do what you can, what's possible (…) you can put fertiliser on the field with a little spoon, but without water, you can't do anything.*"

Here, once again, unpredictability and instability are presented as the main characteristics of the farming professional habitus. Another crucial part of it is the deep connection to the soil and to the crops – a theme present in previous quotes but once again clearly visible in another quote from Kamil:

*Kamil:* "*It just doesn't give you satisfaction. When drought kills the plants. When it's beautiful out in the field, when it's growing, your heart is happy, you want to keep going, keep evolving. But we have nothing on drought so far. Maybe we can try to water [the crops].*"

There are, of course, ways to mitigate the adverse effects of drought, as signified by the last sentence of the above quote. Among them are new farming techniques more suitable for dry periods, such as the strip-till method; using irrigation equipment, such as drips or rain sprinklers; and switching plant varieties and crops to those that are more resilient when water is lacking. These methods and actions, resulting from scientific progress and innovation, can be described as products of a detached mode of thinking.

In the course of my research, it became evident that these methods were much more broadly adopted in Celinowo. In Adamowo, very few of my respondents told me that they adopt – for lack of a better word – active strategies to counter drought, instead turning, much more often than in the second location, toward the described "weary acceptance." In the next section of the paper, I will argue that such differences are a result of the structural makeup of their respective economic and social environments, which to a degree restrict the repertoire of available actions.

## 8. Structural explanation of "weary acceptance"

In the course of the research, I have asked my interviewees about the strategies they adopt when faced with drought. In Celinowo, strip-till – a soil cultivation method that, in short, prevents the soil from drying out quite so quickly – was popular among my interviewees, used by almost all of them. When asking about these methods in Adamowo, I received different answers. Virtually none of my interviewees admitted to using what can be called active strategies, such as new methods of production. I pose that the reluctance to do so stems from structural factors limiting the available repertoire of actions.

Quoting Kamil again:

> *Kamil: "To buy a new sprinkler, you'd have to pay around 100 thousand PLN. And now to see a return… If I knew for sure how much I'll get for the potatoes, at least 1.50 PLN per kilo, then I'd buy two sprinklers, because I'd know that I'll have the money. "*

The investment needed to have the appropriate machinery to water the fields is unworthy of the perceived risk due to – again – instability that is perceived to be an inescapable part of the farming professional habitus. That instability, as previously discussed, stems from natural causes but also from the volatility of the market, with – as my interviewees perceive it – few guardrails from the government. Therefore, the nature of contemporary farming as a profession is perceived here as limiting the repertoire of possible actions, making weary acceptance the safer strategy.

The structure of farming in Adamowo, with land fragmentation and usually small-scale production, is limiting in itself as well. As a married couple in their fifties, Michał and Grażyna, who operate on 12 (!) plots of land within an 8-kilometer radius, explain their reluctance to water the fields:

> *Michał: "If I had my farm in one place, I'd do the paperwork and buy a sprinkler. For one well. If I were to do a well on each of my fields (…) I'd be doing separate fieldwork on all of them. "*

The amount of labor required to install wells on 12 plots of land is perceived as not worth the expected gain. To further the argument of structural limitations, the system of private land lease, which is highly unstable and unregulated, also prohibits farmers from Adamowo from investing in proactive anti-drought measures:

> *Kamil: "To have a well on leased land… doesn't make sense. The owner tells you "Goodbye," and what now? "*
> *Researcher: "And do you have a lease agreement?"*
> *Kamil: "Only verbal."*

The structure of agriculture in Adamowo hinders the farmers' ability to invest in and use the techniques, methods, and machines to mitigate the negative effects of drought. Therefore, when the structural conditions do not appear to allow for taking certain actions, "weary acceptance" becomes a strategy of emotional survival when, realistically, there is little action to be taken. Structural issues such as land fragmentation, limited available arable land, and unstable lease conditions influence

the habitus of Adamowo's farmers, making it so that a certain stoicism and passivity in the face of drought are perceived as the only rational strategy. This contrasts with the second fieldwork location, Celinowo, where my interviewees usually have more assets at their disposal (larger farms, often more stable lease conditions, more income to invest in new technologies), and the professional habitus seems to be aligned more closely with the capitalist logic of activity and progress.

## 9. Discussion

Relating back to the Eliasian framework of involvement–detachment, this article outlines three categories of responses to drought among Polish farmers. First, an involved, emotional perspective, wherein drought provokes untamed emotional turmoil, sometimes treated as a personal slight or a sign from above, perhaps only for God to solve. Second, a more detached position, connected to the active use of technological advancements and objective, scientific knowledge. Practices associated with this position include investments in new methods of soil cultivation, irrigation systems, or switching to plant varieties that are less susceptible to drought.

Finally, the disposition that was the focus of this article is a detached, yet passive one – a position of stoicism and acceptance of the unpredictability of nature with all of its consequences. This article argues that such a position results from a detached process of assessing available resources and strategies, and that the fact it is more prevalent in one of the two research locations is caused by the structural conditions of farming in the local context. Interviewees from Adamowo are able to assess their situation similarly to one of the brothers in Elias's *maelstrom* parable – from an outside, detached perspective – and recognise that the structural conditions of the region in which they farm, such as land fragmentation, limit their range of choices. Since there is no way, the interviewees say, to secure a stable, long-term lease on more arable land; since the farm is scattered across a dozen small plots; since the productivity of a small farm is insufficient to generate resources for modernisation and investment; and since any attempts to control drought are, of course, futile – the only choice to shield oneself from emotional turmoil and suffering in times of drought is to accept the situation as it is.

This specific brand of stoicism therefore forms part of a locally specific farming habitus. The unpredictability of nature and acknowledgment of the profession's dependence on its whims dictate a measured, almost stoic response to hardship, coupled with an imperative to shake off failures and keep going. These findings emphasise the need to understand involvement–detachment in Eliasian terms as a spectrum. To perpetuate an oversimplified binary – passive, emotional, involved perspective versus active, detached, objective one – is to overlook the fact that sometimes a detached assessment may lead to the conclusion that doing nothing may be seen as the best course of action for survival.

An intriguing alternative or, rather, complimentary interpretation of the research funding could be based on Becker and his Terror Management Theory (TMT). Janis L. Dickinson (2009) outlines a convincing argument on why is it that the awareness of a danger (i.e. climate crisis) does not necessarily lead to change in practices and behaviour. She uses TMT, which is an emanation of Becker's idea on the management of death anxiety in the context of Western society's distant (detached!) relationship with nature during the accelerating climate crisis, to show that – depending on the pre-existing immortality projects (or systems of meaning beyond death) – responses to climate change may include climate change scepticism, denialism, minimalisation of its' impacts, but also increased striving for self-esteem, for example in form of consumerism and firmly entrenching oneself in one's beliefs, contradictory as they may be (Dickinson, 2009). This may also be an explanation as to why some farmers refuse to substantially change their practices.

## 10. Conclusion

Using Norbert Elias's conceptualisation of the involvement–detachment continuum, this article has sought to present the complexity of Polish farmers' responses to drought, and the ties between the socio-psychological and the economic/structural. The inclusion of the Eliasian framework, along with the parable of the fishermen in the maelstrom, served to highlight the connection between human and non-human nature, and the affective implications of this double bind. A strong affective response to crises of varying degrees of severity can limit the possibility of objective assessment, which in turn hinders the ability to find a solution – perpetuating a feedback loop of frustration and despair. To form a detached, objective perspective, Elias writes, is to be able to find a way out of the crisis.

Drawing on empirical material gathered through individual interviews with farmers in two Polish locations, as well as participant observation, this article described manifestations of the involved, emotional position toward drought. Its main focus, however, was the position of "weary acceptance," in which passive acceptance of one's lack of control over drought emerges as a result of a detached, objective assessment of structurally limited resources and repertoires of action.

"Weary acceptance" is more prevalent in Adamowo, a field site shaped by specific structural conditions of agriculture. These conditions make it – in the assessment of farmers – irrational or impossible to invest in new technologies and production methods to mitigate the effects of drought. On the other hand, engaging in an overtly emotional response – or to "wail," as Elias (2007: viii) would say – is perceived as useless and nonsensical. Therefore, a position of stoicism, coupled with an ethos of resilience, emerges – one in which the uncontrollability of drought and the unbreakable dependence of farming on nature are accepted as *par for the course*.

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