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THE SHAPING OF THE PERSONALITY OF PEASANT  
YOUTH AND ITS START IN LIFE IN CENTRAL POLAND,  
1864–1939

Peasants not only comprised the most numerous stratum of Polish society (both in 1864, i.e. at the time of the completion of agrarian reforms, and in 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of the second world war); they also exerted an essential impact on the shape and functioning of society, determined the level of agriculture, created a sales market and constituted a demographic reserve for the non-farming sector of the economy<sup>1</sup>. Naturally, the answer to a question concerning the way in which the successive generations of young peasants on the threshold of adulthood were prepared to function in the rapidly changing social and economic conditions of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century — did they act as a stimulus or a factor hampering the modernisation of society — is an important step towards understanding mechanisms of transformations affecting not merely the peasant stratum.

For many decades, studies on the socialisation of peasant children and adolescents remained the domain of ethnography and ethnology. As late as the nineteenth century, representatives of those scientific disciplines constructed a model of the course of those processes, used up to this day for describing so-called

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<sup>1</sup>The most extensive information on various aspects of the history of Polish peasants is to be found in the collective work: *Historia chłopów polskich (History of Polish Peasants)*, vol. I–III, Warszawa 1972–1980.

traditional peasant culture<sup>2</sup>. In an analysis of cultural transmission within a traditional village community, published in 1980, Bronisława Kopczyńska-Jaworska and Wanda Paprocka stressed the distinct domination of primary groups in processes of peasant socialisation; at the same time, they wrote: "Conditions of upbringing, forms of cultural transmission and the specific features of village life, which included, i.a. the activity and production universalism of the peasant family, had, on the one hand, a positive impact on shaping an extensive range of practical knowledge and skills among the children; on the other hand, the manner of conduct, well enrooted and handed over from generation, led to a ritualisation of production activities and social conditions. The strong influence of authorities was the reason that the reception of cultural contents was dominated by adaptation. This feature restricted cognitive possibilities, while the absence of automatisisation in the activity pursued by an individual to a certain degree hampered the development of some emotional traits and individuality"<sup>3</sup>. The authors indicate that in the course of overcoming the isolation of the village the role of primary groups in shaping personality diminished in favour of non-local institutions, especially schools, social and cultural organisations, and the direct impact of town culture.

Already during the inter-war period, Polish sociology became interested in the processes of socialisation among the peasant stratum. In 1938, Józef Chałasiński published a four-volume work containing an analysis of more than 1,500 autobiographies taking part in a diary competition addressed to villagers under the age of 30<sup>4</sup>. Similarly to ethnographers, J. Chałasiński accentuated the systematic decline of the influence exerted by primary groups (families and local communities) upon shaping the personalities of the young generation of peasants, and the simultaneously rising meaning of external factors (state institu-

<sup>2</sup> See: I. Okłńska, *Wychowanie dzieci chłopów pańszczyźnianych w świetle prac Adama Bućkiewicza (The Upbringing of the Children of Serfs in the Light of Works by Adam Bućkiewicz)*, "Przegląd Historyczno-Oświatowy" 1970, fasc. 4, pp. 599-605.

<sup>3</sup> B. Kopczyńska-Jaworska, W. Paprocka, *Przekaz kultury w społeczności wiejskiej (The Transmission of Culture in the Rural Community)*, in: *Etnografia Polski. Przemiany kultury ludowej (The Ethnography of Poland. Transformations of Peasant Culture)*, vol. II, Wrocław 1980, p. 376.

<sup>4</sup> J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów (The Young Generation of Peasants)*, vol. I-IV, Warszawa 1938.

tions, especially schools and the army, social organisations, as well as industrial civilization and culture). The outcome of such a situation, in the opinion of Chałasiński, was the widening range of the autonomy of the young generation within the rural community, and a growing degree of an identification of the young people with social institutions possessing a broader range<sup>5</sup>. The progress made by this process during the inter-war period expressed by the considerable social and political activity of peasant youth, registered in the autobiographies presented for the competition. A natural consequence of the acceptance of a similar assumption was the contrasting of the primary group, intent on preserving the *status quo*, and the young people who, under the influence of external factors, aimed at conducting changes within the local community. Such contrasting was performed not only by Chałasiński. As Thomas and Znaniecki put it succinctly: "Once the community establishes contact with the outside world, it becomes natural for chiefly the young people to develop new stands and introduce new values"<sup>6</sup>. The recognition of youth as the group most inclined towards changes led to a thesis about the special role played by the generation conflict in the modernisation of the peasant stratum. Chałasiński claimed: "The fundamental social process in Poland is, on the one hand, the emancipation of the village from under the impact of estate tradition and the intensification of democratic tendencies; on the other hand, it is the assimilation of the rural community within a national-state community. It is obvious that processes which permeate the structure of our society so deeply do not occur rapidly, but require generations. The prime role in such processes is ascribed to the young generation. As a rule, social reconstruction starts not among individuals with a stable social role and situation, but among those whose situation and role are as yet unstable. This category is composed primarily of the young generation"<sup>7</sup>. In a commentary to the study by Chałasiński, Jan Szczepański wrote: "I am of the opinion that the contribution made by Chałasiński to sociological knowledge about genera-

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<sup>5</sup> J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów*, vol. III, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> W. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce (The Polish Peasant in Europe and America)*, vol. IV, 2nd. ed., Warszawa 1976, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów*, vol. I, p. 182.

tions, their role and possibilities lies precisely in such a demonstration of a generation as a development force"<sup>8</sup>.

In 1984–1991, the author of this article conducted research aimed at a verification of the cited opinions with the assistance of research instruments at the disposal of an historian. The source foundation of the reflections was composed of:

a) autobiographic material, both published and manuscripts kept in archives and libraries<sup>9</sup>,

b) material amassed and published in ethnographic studies and works on folklore<sup>10</sup>,

c) the peasant press from the period of the Kingdom of Poland and the peasant youth movement<sup>11</sup>,

d) statistical data, especially the material of universal surveys of 1897, 1921 and 1931.

The gathered source material permitted a comparative analysis of the socialisation of three generations of peasant children. The first (born about 1870) grew up immediately after the completion of agrarian reforms, at a time regarded as the period of an effective functioning of autonomous traditional peasant culture in Central Poland<sup>12</sup>. The childhood and youth of the second generation — born in 1890 — took place in conditions of violent economic and civilisational transformations connected with the urbanisation and industrialisation of the Kingdom of Poland and economic migration; on the other hand, this generation observed

<sup>8</sup> J. Szczepański, *Posłowie (Postscript)*, in: J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów*, 2nd. ed., Warszawa 1984, vol. IV, p. 596.

<sup>9</sup> The most important published collection of diaries was *Pamiętniki Chłopów (Peasant Diaries)*, vol. I–II, Warszawa 1935–1937. The non-published autobiographies are kept predominantly in the Archive of the Institute of the History of the Peasant Movement in Warsaw and the Józef Chałasiński room in the Centre of Polish and Emigré Diaries in Rudne near Warsaw.

<sup>10</sup> Particular importance is ascribed to the complete edition of the monumental work by Oskar Kolberg, *Dzieła wszystkie (Collected Works)*, vol. I–LXIX, Warszawa 1968–1996. In addition, use was made of monographic studies on villages and regions as well as contributions scattered in pertinent periodicals and professional literature. Cf. especially Halina Błitner–Szewczykowska, *Dziecko wiejskie (The Peasant Child)*, "Rocznik Muzeum Etnograficznego w Krakowie", vol. IX, Kraków 1985, pp. 1–206.

<sup>11</sup> For the 1984–1914 period the analysis encompassed primarily the periodical "Gazeta Świąteczna" and "Zorza", and for the inter-war period — the copious press of assorted currents within the peasant youth movement.

<sup>12</sup> K. Dobrowolski, A. Woźniak, *Historyczne podłoże polskiej kultury chłopskiej (The Historical Foundation of Polish Peasant Culture)*, in: *Etnografia Polski*, vol. I, Wrocław 1976, pp. 59–60.

the first symptoms of an involvement of peasants in a struggle waged for the sake of national targets (especially during the revolution of 1905). The childhood of the third generation (born in 1910) coincided with the first world war, while its school days and youth were spent in conditions of independent state existence albeit also during the economic crisis of 1929.

The basis conclusion to be formulated upon the basis of the conducted research is that the socialisation of the Polish peasantry during the post-enfranchisement period was subjected to two, mutually contradictory goals. The processes in question were supposed to form a future farmer, at best a co-owner of a family farm, and, at the same time, a member of an autonomous rural community. Their intention was to shape the personality of a person who accepts and duplicates existing patterns, and acknowledges the role of tradition and the older generation — in a word, a person adapted to living within a primary social group and guaranteeing a continuation of the distinctness of the peasant world. An analysis of the wide complex of customs and rites originating from 1860–1910, and connected with the birth of a child and his introduction into the family, the village and the religious community, demonstrates that the peasants had a precise vision of the postulated physical condition and personality of the children and their lives. In the first place, the child should be healthy, free from physical deformities and mental handicaps. He should develop properly, be plump, never cry, grow quickly and become tall, vigorous and strong. A girl should have long braids. As a member of the family, the child should be good, obedient, comply with the wishes of his mother and father, "comfort his parents, obey the father and mother, love his siblings, and not stray from home". Attempts were made for him to become wise, sensible, calm, happy, sympathetic towards others, patient, never haughty, well liked, and "respected". Children were to be protected against "sluggishness in God's service", drunkenness, the acquisition of the features of a "thief" or a slut, a mischievous character or that of a ruffian. This portrait shows a person adapted to life in a small community, devoid of all rebelliousness, and counting, at best, on an unexpected change of fate (riches) or social position (by becoming a priest, a civil servant, or a "gentleman"). Such a person was interested in winning approval and a rank, as high as possible, within his own

environment. A status of this sort was to be achieved through respect for elders and tradition, tranquility, patience, and attaining the acknowledgement of others. An interesting feature of this list is the absence of character and personality enabling the achievement of individual success, regardless of the approval of the surrounding world, guaranteeing ingenuity and facilitating the defence of one's own interests and convictions against the attitude of others (resourcefulness, inventiveness, courage, independence, etc.)<sup>13</sup>. An analysis of the conditions of peasant childhood as well as the upbringing and nursing to which the child was subjected makes it possible to ascertain that the older generation to enforce the above outlined model. A confrontation of the obtained picture with material illustrating the fate of successive generations leads to the conclusion that as late as the 1920s the upbringing model observed by the peasant stratum did not undergo essential changes.

On the other hand, it is obvious already at first glance that the young person, moulded in accordance with the above model, would experience enormous problems with functioning in the rapidly changing civilisational, social and economic reality of the nineteenth century. In addition, in the conditions of agrarian overpopulation and a lack of land, phenomena which grew under the pressure of a demographic revolution, socialisation could not be aimed totally at forming the "peasant-farmer". It had to render possible, or at least facilitate the adaptation of the young generation to rules binding outside the limits of the native village, and to enable the young people to act in a world organised according to principles totally different from those governing the rural community. An ideal solution would be someone who, faced with the lack of work available on the farm, would be capable of finding employment outside the family farm but, at the same time, could at any moment return to agriculture and the rural community, and maintain contact with his family even if he resorted to emigration (America).

The observed contradiction is distinctly reflected, i.a. in considerable divergencies between the complex of norms recog-

<sup>13</sup> W. Mędrzecki, *Socjalizacja dzieci i młodzieży chłopskiej na ziemiach Polski Centralnej w okresie 1864–1939 (The Socialisation of Peasant Children and Youth in Central Poland during the 1864–1939 Period)*, typescript in the library of the Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Warszawa 1991, pp. 66–72.

nised as binding by peasant communities, and the actual situation and attitudes of groups and individuals. An interesting description of a Kurpie wedding from 1870 mentions: "If the groom marries into a home, in other words, remains at the home of the bride's parents, he should present a dowry, namely a pair of horses, a carriage, a wagon with metal fittings, a pair of oxen, a plow with a harrow, several cows, a number of sheep and at least a single pig. Moreover, he is obligated to outfit the younger sisters and brothers of his wife, that is, give them the same dowry as the one he presented to her ... If the bride follows the groom to his home, then she is expected to offer a double dowry, with the exception of the horses, wagon and plow. Furthermore, if the groom is subjected to army enlistment she is to provide the father of the groom with half of the sum needed to redeem him from military service"<sup>14</sup>. If peasant families were to really outfit their children in such a manner, then a wedding would become a luxury accessible to only the select. The cited example is particularly vivid, but if we take into consideration the basic requirements for starting a family within the peasant stratum, or at least hope for one's own farm, then it becomes apparent that at least one-third of the 1870 generation and a half of the 1890 and 1910 generations could not meet them. This means that already a few decades after the reform conducted in the mid-nineteenth century the formally binding principle, namely that each peasant family assured children the achievement of a future social and material position no worse than that of the parents, had become fiction. Only children from wealthiest families or those with few siblings were capable of realising this norm. The others, despite the fact that they were destined for the life of a peasant, could at best rely on the limited help of their relatives for starting their own farms<sup>15</sup>. The fundamental effort, however, was to be made by them. Despite this, the principle that the family is responsible for outfitting its youngsters was formulated universally until 1939.

Searching for traces of an adaptation of the mechanisms of socialisation to an ever more rapidly changing reality, we find that a differentiation of attitudes towards children in the peasant

<sup>14</sup> O. Kolberg, *Dziela*, vol. XXVII, pp. 227-228.

<sup>15</sup> W. Mędrzecki, *The Peasant Woman in the Kingdom of Poland (19th century, beginning of the 20th century)*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" 174, 1996, p. 132.

family became noticeable relatively quickly after the enfranchisement. A larger number of children (more than three) entailed special selection. Although it was accepted that basically the children could stay on the farm, the parents were well aware of the fact that there would be not enough land to guarantee them all a fair future. The institution of an "heir" — the son (sometimes two) who would take over a basic part of the family property — became universal, especially in the inter-war period<sup>16</sup>. It seems worth drawing attention to the fact that every third author of the diaries contained in *The Young Generation of Peasants*, encompassed by my analysis, described himself as such an heir<sup>17</sup>. There was no single universally binding rule for designating successors. In certain regions, they were the oldest children, owing to their greatest contribution to work on the farm and closer ties with the parents; elsewhere, they were the youngest offspring, who remained at home when the older siblings sought work and adventures in the wide world. At times, the decisive factor was the affection felt by the parents. The situation of the daughters resembled that of the sons. Although it was basically presumed that they were to wait for marriage while helping their mothers, under the watchful eye of the father, uncles and aunts, who guarded their virginity, already some thirty–forty years after enfranchisement it became obvious that only scarce maidens could expect a decent dowry. Those children whom the parents did not intend to take into consideration while dividing the property, were not deprived of the right to assistance in winning their independent status, although the parents did not foresee that their share could significantly reduce that of the "heirs".

Throughout the entire examined period the goal of an overwhelming majority of peasant children was to win their own farm and obtain the status of a farmer (farmer's wife); those plans did not exclude dreams about a fairy-tale prince or becoming a priest,

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Zwyczaje spadkowe w Polsce. Województwa centralne (The Inheritance Customs of Peasants in Poland. The Central Voivodeships)*, Warszawa 1929, pp. 54, 92–95.

<sup>17</sup> The analysis pertains to about 300 biographies selected from among the papers of Józef Chałasiński, kept in the Centre of Polish and Emigré Diaries in Rudne. The criterion was residence in the central voivodeships and a year of birth between 1907 and 1914.

an officer or simply very rich<sup>18</sup>. From their youngest years, children were involved in the life of the family and the local community, as well as work on the farm. The family and village community did not include a division into a world of adults and a world of children. The latter listened to conversations held by their elders on every topic, and participated in all celebrations, rituals, conflicts and rows. In this manner, they became familiar with the binding systems of values, social hierarchy, ways of behaviour in certain situations, forms of expressing opinions and feelings, as well as learning what is fitting or unsuitable. Among their peers, the children and adolescents emulated the attitudes and behaviour observed among the adults: one of the games played by peasant children was the staging of a funeral, with collective prayers, chants and processions. In those conditions, primary groups exerted a decisive impact upon the shaping of their personalities, attitudes towards others (especially members of the family), and basic world outlook questions. In our opinion, this pertained both to those who were born immediately after the enfranchisement, as well as children born at the beginning of the inter-war period. Emphasis must be placed on the fact that the child started becoming familiar with the principles of family and social life, as well as embarked upon work on the farm at an age when criticism towards adults was still slight; before such an attitude could develop, the child was trained to live in the family and local community, and to function within a system of work obligatory on the farm. With certain exceptions the peasant child accepted the authority of the older generation and did not question the model of parents life and work. Obviously, cases of rebellion did occur, but they remained rather an exception from the rule.

It must be stressed that the models observed and emulated by the children changed. The model of the peasant family and village community evolved rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. The ensuing transformations affected relations between the nuclear family and the rural community, as well as between

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<sup>18</sup> According to the outcome of a survey conducted in the mid-1930s, two-thirds of pupils of village schools decidedly stressed the wish to work on their own farm. The commentator of those data wrote that farming "is no longer an attractive profession, a workshop or a source of income; it is an awareness of the merit of the estate and estate duty". J. Leżeński, *Wieś o sobie (The Village about Itself)*, Poznań 1938, pp. 150-154.

particular members of each family, while village convention succumbed to swift changes; the same holds true for morality, norms of behaviour and systems of value<sup>19</sup>. Although each generation found a relatively cohesive cultural system, basically observed by all, it was subjected to quick modifications, especially from the turn of the nineteenth century. The mechanism of becoming acquainted with the closest social environment remained unaltered, but the effects of the process of socialisation were different for each generation.

An extremely important aspect of the processes of socialisation was training the child for independent work. Sometimes the peasant child began to perform certain auxiliary chores at home or watched over grazing cattle already at the age of 4–5. Girls and boys aged 6–7 commenced regular work, predominantly as shepherds (first of geese, then pigs, cattle and, ultimately, horses). The children tended either animals belonging to their families or were hired to help with the stock of those farmers who had no children of an appropriate age. Simultaneously, they undertook other farm and household chores, under the surveillance of their older siblings and parents<sup>20</sup>. In this way, they became familiar with the techniques of carrying out certain activities and accompanying ritual and magical operations. By means of emulation and observation they won consecutive skills, and at the age of 16–18 were ready for independent work. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the still practised custom of “knighting a farm hand” symbolised the transition from a group of “adolescents” to “young men” (ready for independent work and marriage)<sup>21</sup>. Apparently, training for the profession of a farmer could be compared to training an artisan. In both cases, by imitating the teacher and working under his supervision, the student became acquainted with the arcana of the art. In the crafts, this procedure was not criticised, since it is assumed that the craftsman perfected his profession while raising the general level of technology. A similar situation occurred in agriculture. Our re-

<sup>19</sup> D. Markowska, *Rodzina w środowisku wiejskim — ciągłość i zmiana (The Family in the Rural Environment — Continuum and Change)*, Warszawa 1976.

<sup>20</sup> H. Bittner-Szewczykowa, *Dziecko*, pp. 63–71.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Szromba-Rysowa, *Zwyczaje towarzyskie, zawodowe i okolicznościowe (Social Life, Professional and Special Occasion Customs)*, in: *Etnografia Polski*, vol. II, Warszawa 1980, pp. 164–165.

search proved that successive generations of peasant children were taught a different range of knowledge and skills. The post-enfranchisement generation learned natural land cultivation, based on the fallow-land three-field system and extensive animal husbandry. The generation of 1890 was taught to work upon the basis of more modern tools, the application of green manure, calculation of profitability, observations of land integration and reclamation, etc. In the 1930s, the same people taught their children methods of work and knowledge considerably different from those which they themselves learned. At this point, we arrive at the extremely essential problem of the mechanisms of the modernisation of peasant farming. J. Chałasiński tried to convince his readers that young people comprise a factor stimulating changes on peasant farms. In doing so, he referred to accounts by graduates of agricultural schools, participants of farming courses and desperate adult sons, who tried to convince their fathers to introduce novelties. Let us draw attention to the fact that, as a rule, opinions of this sort were voiced by a specific group of people, who consciously heeded authorities from outside the village community; in the second place, we deal most frequently with testimonies of failed reforms<sup>22</sup>. Changes required the consent of the farmer (and most frequently also of his wife). This holds true especially for basis decisions concerning land integration and reclamation, the structure of the crops, the selection of a horse or cow, the model of new farm machinery. As late as 1939, the binding principle proclaimed that "once you are on your own farm you can make changes, but until then do as you are told". Let us also draw attention to the fact that even after becoming independent farmers, the young people working on small farms as a rule did not have enough money or time for experiments, but were intent on attaining a certain level of prosperity. Intentional innovations in the system of farming and new tools and crops were usually made several years after taking over a farm, and their goal was to reach the level achieved by the best farms in a given village. Having accomplished this target, the farmer became embroiled in routine work, and consecutive modernisation was

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. M. Gwiazdowicz, *Wspomnienia (Reminiscences)*, Warszawa 1974. After graduating from an agricultural school, the author tried to persuade his father to introduce changes on the farm; the resultant conflict forced the unfortunate reformer to leave his family farm.

conducted already by his successor. An important exception was the rather sizable group of "enthusiasts", who, regardless of their age, were captivated by progress and experiments.

From his earliest years, the peasant child maintained contact with the outside world. After First Communion, he attended church regularly, went to school increasingly frequently, and in the inter-war period on a universal scale, went to fairs, after graduation sought seasonal work, took part in pilgrimages and, in the inter-war years, went on school excursions. First and foremost, already in his cradle he listened to tales about the distant world, and grew up aware of its dimension and variety. In time, the peasant child learned not only about what existed beyond the limits of direct experience. The conversations of the adults provided him with an interpretation and commentary to the contemporary outside world and taught him how to retain his own identity while maintaining contacts with the world.

A considerable number of peasant children had direct with a system of values and a social environment different from their own, provided predominantly by schools<sup>23</sup>. In Central Poland, schools began playing a certain role in the life of the peasants at the end of the eighteenth century, when a network of elementary village schools was created upon the initiative of the Commission of National Education. An uninterrupted development of village schools continued up to 1830. Post-insurrection repressions, especially after 1863, produced a distinct regression. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, only every sixth peasant child in the Kingdom of Poland attended school. As a rule, the pupils were boys, owing to the universal conviction that, in contrast to the girls, they should be able to read and write (especially in Russian). The school showed the child a world of values and ways of living other than his own, and revealed different manners of social communication. This is not to say that the peasant child was compelled to face a dramatic choice between preserving the heretofore way of perceiving the world and rejecting it in favour of the one presented by the teacher. As a rule, peasant children became acquainted with patterns demonstrated by the school, and were ready to adapt to them the moment they found themselves outside the boundaries of their

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Dzieje oświaty na wsi polskiej (The History of Polish Rural Education)*, vol. I. *Do 1918 roku (Up to 1918)*, Warszawa 1980.

social environment. Nevertheless, they did not introduce such models into their "normal" functioning within the family and the local community. This is the reason why both prior to 1914 and during the inter-war period they usually reconciled their duties in the family and on the farm with the realisation of the social role of a pupil. Such a tendency was particularly significant during the inter-war period, when schools became truly universal in the central voivodships. Up to 1931, illiteracy among children became a marginal phenomenon. In the second place, the very character of the school differed from the pray elementary school. The peasant child was taught not only a complex of basis skills useful in his later practical life, but also an extensive range of knowledge from the domain of the social, natural and exact sciences. Peasant children, especially during the 1930s, spent much more time at school than did their parents or even older siblings. The impact of the school was additionally reinforced by the growing network of so-called agriculture schools (whose several months-long courses made it possible to win a certain range of general knowledge and to raise the professional qualifications of the future farmer). An essential role in elevating the level of general and professional education in the village was also played by the activity of cultural and economic organisations and the peasant youth movement, frequently maintained by teachers. The outcome of such activity assumed the form of an amateur cultural and artistic movement, self-education campaigns and assorted educational courses. One of the leading forms of this type of activity were agricultural competitions financed by the state and self-governments, which enabled young peasants to become familiar with modern methods and techniques of work on the farm and at home. I fully share Chałasiński assessment of the significance of the school and the peasant youth movement for the modernisation of the peasant stratum. The appraisal proposed by Chałasiński is also confirmed by contemporary studies on the topic<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, I would be inclined to question the thesis formulated by the author of *The Young Generation of Peasants* about the conflicting social roles of the shepherd and the pupil. A child was sent to school by his parents and, as a rule, his attitude towards school was the same as that

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. Biernacka, *Oświata w rozwoju kulturalnym wsi polskiej (Education in the Cultural Development of the Polish Village)*, Wrocław 1984.

of other members of the family. Some peasant families treated school as "unavoidable evil", and their children went to school only for brief periods of time and with no visible effects. Others regarded education as necessary and observed the duration of obligatory school attendance. With the exception of specific situations, up to 1939 schools did not instigate conflicts within the peasant family.

Already prior to 1914, the employment of peasant children outside their native villages became a mass-scale phenomenon. Each year, hundreds of young people from the Kingdom of Poland went abroad in search of seasonal or permanent work. Further hundreds of thousands stayed in the Kingdom where they worked in towns (in industry, construction or as household servants), built roads and railway tracks, or were employed in local enterprises. Heretofore reflections show that in the majority of cases peasant children outside their villages had almost no technical knowledge, and often (particularly before 1914) were unable to read fluently or write, as well as being devoid of all knowledge on how to live outside their own environment. As a rule, they proved capable of adapting themselves to new conditions, learning a trade, and facing the demands of school work. Employed outside the farm, and living in towns, army barracks or boarding schools, the peasant child tried to subordinate himself to norms and principles binding in a given place. He changed his clothes, attempted to speak in a manner accepted in a given environment and worked in a way envisaged by his employers. Such a stand was the outcome not only of a wish to be liked or to obliterate peasant descent, but of a desire to adapt oneself to a new environment. In this way, the conviction, imbued from youngest years, that a person should remain in accord with the surrounding world, and blend into it by accepting the prevailing rules, bore fruit. According to the same principle, upon his return to the native village the young person subjected himself to the norms observed within its limits. The system of socialisation, one of whose aims was to adapt oneself to the existing social environment, did not constitute an obstacle for the admittance of peasant children to industrial society, albeit it did not provide peasant youngsters with favourable conditions for starting independent life within its range. Furthermore, it did not facilitate enrootment in the new environment. Only after a several years-long process

of adaptation could the young person undertake work requiring qualifications or a certain level of technical knowledge. He encountered probably even greater difficulties in starting a family outside the village. The bride of a young man who left village and decided to marry in a new place of residence, was usually a girl of peasant origin. In turn, peasant girls were much more willing to wed pure "townspeople".

The intention of our remarks is to indicate the possibility of formulating a thesis that although the socialisation of the peasant child aimed at training a farmer modelled on the previous generation, it denoted, apart from installing rigid norms and principles, also a transmission of a certain of knowledge about the closer and further environment. One of the basic messages of the socialisation of the next examined generation (born in 1890) was to encourage the child to develop his own initiative in the creation of conditions for starting an independent life. During the first decades after enfranchisement, the peasants, generally speaking, were unprepared (mentally and materially) for embarking upon endeavours intent on an independent preparation for adult life. At the same time, the outside world did not create conditions convenient for leaving home. Children grew up retaining a passive attitude towards the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that an increasing number of peasant families became the scene of a struggle, at times ruthless, for winning an even small plot of land that would permit the maintenance of the status of a peasant-farmer. Growing symptoms of family conflicts, generated by the division of property, appeared in the 1870s and 1880s. Unless they were capable of forcing through their decisions (which usually favoured one or two of the children), the current owners avoided responsibility, and ran the farms up to the last days of their life. Their death was followed by merciless competition for the legacy.

Already the last years of the nineteenth century witnessed attempts made by the peasant family at an adaptation to changing social, economic and cultural conditions. Children and adolescents were brought up by the family and village community in the conviction about the indispensability of assorted work performed outside the farm, also in town or abroad. The older generation accepted, or at least tolerated foreign or town clothes and habits, introduced by the young people. Each year, tens and

then hundreds of thousands of youngsters left their native villages in search of a better fate or at least cash, which would facilitate the subsequent inauguration of independent life. Sometimes, the young people spent whole years away from the village, and usually returned if they failed to achieve stability in the new place of residence. Upon their return, they brought numerous novelties, until then unknown on a wider scale (especially clothes), new ways of spending leisure time, new habits and experiences. It must be stressed that the returnees usually planned to start their own farms, and decided to accept even a small plot, within the division of family property (probably due to the conviction that the money earned outside the village would facilitate the later attainment of prosperity). This process enjoyed the full approval of the family and the village community. The complaints voiced in the peasant press and by economists, anxious about the enormous demoralisation associated with mass-scale migration movements or the absence of people willing to work on farms, another phenomenon caused by migration, did not exert any impact on the stand represented by the peasants. In the inter-war period, the peasant family fully supported the search for employment or, better still, for living outside the village, best evidenced by the several hundreds of thousands of peasant girls working as household servants in the cities.

A presentation of the socialisation of peasant children and adolescents during the post-enfranchisement period would be incomplete without considering yet another question. From 1864 to 1939, the peasants essentially accepted their social status and lifestyle. Nonetheless, they were aware of the existence of much better places in the social structure, and, conditions permitting, tried to guarantee at least some of their children the achievement of a distinctly higher social status, as a rule by means of education and finding a "post". In the enfranchisement generation this was not a large category, but in the next generation it involved two to three for every hundred peasant children born in a given year; in the inter-war period this number was four. As a rule, those children were boys, and even at the end of the inter-war period the number of girls in schools higher than primary was four times lower than that of the boys. The decision about "educating" a child was made already when he started attending elementary school, and usually pertained to one of the younger

offspring, at a time when the farm was already prospering and the older children were engaged in helping the peasants. Frequently, the young man knew his ultimate goal already upon the threshold of his education, namely, to become a priest, a teacher or a civil servant. He was a studious pupil from the very beginning, and before 1914 usually resorted to additional tutoring. For all practical purposes, he ceased being a member of his peer group at the age of 9–12. Final severance of all ties took place after enrolment in a secondary school (gymnasium or seminary). Such a decision about schooling a child was tantamount to coming to terms with the fact that he would cease being a peasant. This was so in the majority of cases up to the 1920s. Those years marked a significant growth of a group of the so-called peasant intelligentsia — persons who sometimes had no formal education, but who worked as civil servants and instructors in assorted state and self-government institutions active in the countryside. During the Depression, there emerged a large group of “would be members of the intelligentsia”, to use an expression proposed by Chałasiński. In this way, not until the twentieth century did the growing number of peasant children attending schools of higher learning denote an elevation of the general intellectual level of the peasant stratum as such.

The basic goal of the peasant family in relation to successive children was to guarantee them social and economic conditions for existence within their local community, or, in conducive circumstances, significant social and material promotion. The majority of the representatives of the young generation accepted such aims. Nevertheless, civilisational transformations, combined with demographic explosion, meant that only some of the peasant children could rely on their parents for funds enabling them to start their own farms or win an education, which was conceived as a fundamental condition for advancement. In relation to most of the remaining children, the peasant family in the Kingdom of Poland set itself a target, possibly not overly ambitious but the only realistic one, of assisting each child in finding a foundation for further existence; this entailed training for work on the farm or outside agriculture, i.e. financing the learning of a profession, small sums which facilitated first steps in town or the opening of a small business venture in the village (a store, a tailor shop), covering the costs of emigration, etc. In medium and

less prosperous peasant families in the Kingdom of Poland, not to mention the inter-war period, the awareness that the majority of children would be forced to create their own future was universal and reflected in the processes of socialisation. Although basically such processes focused on training a future farmer or farmer's wife, they also favoured shaping a readiness to leave one's social environment in search of other solutions, or (more often) funds making possible the attainment of a desirable social status within one's own environment. The above reflection leads to one of the most essential conclusions of our studies — the absence of foundations for a conviction about the contrasting impact of primary groups (family, local community) and non-local institutions in the socialisation of peasant children. The peasant family and the rural community, especially from the end of the nineteenth century, tried, albeit frequently unsuccessfully, to adapt themselves to changing external conditions, while retaining basic features decisive for their own socio-cultural distinctness. This was the attitude passed on to successive young generations.

*(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)*