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WAR, CHILDREN AND YOUTH. THE IMPACT  
OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR UPON CHANGES IN  
THE POSITION OF CHILDREN IN THE PEASANT  
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

It is customary to consider the impact exerted by war upon various domains of life, including peasant children and youth, exclusively from the viewpoint of the negative consequences of hostilities for socioeconomic phenomena. Obviously, one cannot negate the destructive effects of war, especially in the domain of the material existence of children and youth, devastated school buildings, libraries and their outfitting, or phenomena of a moral nature. On the other hand, it seems worth drawing attention to other aspects of war. The accumulation of numerous experiences, resulting from rapidly changing wartime conditions, accelerated certain essential phenomena in village life, such as the closely linked increase in the significance and activity of women and youth within the family, on the farm and in the rural community. Those lesser known questions also comprise the main theme of my paper. I intentionally resigned from presenting the influence of war upon the hastening of the formation of the national and civic awareness of the rural youth, and associated participation in military organisations and formations, especially “Junactwo” (Youngsters), Polish Legions and the Polish Military Organisation. Those questions have been better examined, and are the topic of extensive literature.

In accordance with the title of the paper, I shall concentrate my attention on problems of village children and adolescents, specific for the First World War, as well as on processes and phenomena initiated earlier, and rapidly quickened under the impact of new, wartime conditions.

The employed sources make it possible to recreate, in the first place, the opinions of peasant environments as regards questions of interest to us, producing, predominantly, a self-portrait. I resort to letters written by peasants and published in 1915–1919 in peasant movement periodicals,

especially in the weekly "Piaś", issued by the Polish Peasant Party in Galicia. This particular periodical, which contains also numerous correspondence from the Kingdom of Poland, presented a total of about 2,974 letters. Among the 2,374 letters signed by men and the 482 written by women, numerous examples are by boys and girls. This was the first time that letters by young correspondents, similarly to those by women, were published on such a great scale. It is impossible to determine the exact size of the correspondence, issued usually in special sections of "Piaś", such as: *The women's section, Letters from our soldiers, The young are coming. The youth section*<sup>1</sup>.

The number of journalists of peasant origin, who published articles in the peasant press during World War I, also grew considerably. At least several score such articles concerned problems discussed in my article. Particularly valuable statements concerning the reform of village schools and education in the countryside, problems to which the peasant movement press devoted most attention, were those made by village teachers.

The above listed sources permit a reconstruction of new models of conduct, manners of their dissemination, the capturing of changes in the stands represented by the young people, and the first effects of those undertakings.

In its capacity as the largest and most popular periodical of the peasant movement during the First World War, "Piaś", whose circulation grew from 6,000 in 1914 to 75,000 in 1918<sup>2</sup>, enjoyed greatest opportunities for the propagation and dissemination of new models among the young readers as well as for initiating their activity in assorted domains of life.

At the very outset, I must make the reservation that I shall deal primarily with two groups of young villagers. The first was composed of children attending elementary village schools<sup>3</sup>, who in Galicia were six years old and more, and in the Kingdom of Poland — seven years old and older. The second group includes young people between graduation and military service, which began at the age of 18. The task of determining the actual age boundary separating those groups is by no means easy.

<sup>1</sup> A more extensive discussion of peasant letters as an historical source in: J. M o l e n d a, *Postawy kobiet wiejskich wobec unowocześniania gospodarki chłopskiej w pierwszym dwudziestolecu XX wieku (Attitudes of Women Towards the Modernisation of Peasant Farms During the First Two Decades of the Twentieth Century)*, in: *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego wiek XIX i XX. Zbiór studiów pod red. A. Żarnowskiej i A. Szwarca (The Woman and Culture of Daily Life During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Collected Studies Edited by A. Żarnowska and A. Szwarz)*, vol. V, Warszawa 1997, pp. 195–198; M. K ł a w e – M a z u r o w a, M. K u ł a, J. M o l e n d a, D. P i a t k o w s k a, A. W a ł a s z e k, *Metoda Znanięckiego w oczach historyków (The Znanięcki Method in the Eyes of Historians)*, "Przegląd Polonijny" 1983, fasc. 4, pp. 35–53.

<sup>2</sup> J. M o l e n d a, *Postawy kobiet wiejskich*, pp. 196–197.

<sup>3</sup> In Galicia they were officially known as "public village schools" and in the Kingdom of Poland — as "primary schools".

Officially, obligatory school attendance in the Austrian partitioning area pertained to children aged 6–12<sup>4</sup>, and in the Russian partition — to those aged 7–10<sup>5</sup>. In practice, the percentage of children who attended elementary school remained low, especially on the eve of World War I, despite a growing network of schools. In particular provinces (*gubernia*) of the Kingdom of Poland the percentage of peasant children attending school oscillated from merely 6.6% in the Suwałki *gubernia* to 19.4% in the Piotrków *gubernia*<sup>6</sup>. It should be kept in mind, however, that in 1901 “about 33% of the population took part in clandestine teaching”<sup>7</sup>.

In 1900, in Galicia, where the situation in this respect was much better, 41.3% of village and town children did not attend any sort of school (in the countryside this percentage was even higher), and 55.2% did not benefit from supplementary teaching<sup>8</sup>. It is noteworthy that reasons for non-attendance included, in the first place, the non-enforcement of the obligation to attend school (19.1%), and only in the second place — the absence of schools (13.4%), followed by false information about the place of the children’s residence, offered by their parents (11.1%). Teachers reported that during the enrolment period parents took their children away either to distant relatives or to serve in neighbouring villages, and advised persons conducting school surveys to make suitable notes about the absence of the children at home. Several weeks later, the children returned to their parents and no one appeared to be interested in their education.

Some of the authors writing about the reasons for this state of affairs indicated that “this was solely the fault of the parents”<sup>9</sup> [original emphasis — J. M.]. Others, such as Jan G ą t k i e w i c z, a village teacher who worked 28 years in his profession, author of many articles on educational themes, published in “*Piast*”, and headmaster in Czarny Dunajec, perceived the fault also in “other states of things [...]. After all, some people fear the educated peasant”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Apart from the six years of obligatory school attendance in Galicia, the law of 1895 foresaw the organisation of supplementary courses held by elementary schools in villages and small towns.

<sup>5</sup> In practice, villages in the Kingdom of Poland had three year-long one-class schools with a single teacher, which in 1914 totalled 4,977, and only 63 two-class schools with two teachers. Z. K m i e c i k, *Ruch oświatowy na wsi. Królestwo Polskie 1905–1914 (The Education Movement in the Village. The Kingdom of Poland 1905–1914)*, Warszawa 1963, pp. 97.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> M. C h a m c ó w n a, *Szkolnictwo i oświata ludowa w dobie porozbiorowej (The Peasant School System and Education in the Post-partition Era)*, in: *Historia chłopów polskich (History of the Polish Peasants)*, vol. I: *Okres zaborów (The Partition Period)*, ed. S. I n g l o t, Warszawa 1972, p. 620.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 598.

<sup>9</sup> M. E. S., *Trzeba chcieć (We Need to Want)*, “*Piast*” № 41: 10 October 1915, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Jan G ą t k i e w i c z, *Znieśmy i tę pańszczyznę (Let Us Abolish Also This Corvée)*, *ibid.* № 27: 2 July 1916, pp. 4–5.

In villages with schools, the constant problem faced by the local teachers was the irregular attendance of their pupils. This phenomenon occurred particularly in the spring and autumn, when children were employed for tending the grazing cattle, but in the Kingdom of Poland attendance in many schools dropped below 50% even during the winter<sup>11</sup>.

A negative impact on primary education was exerted by the practice of ceasing to send children to school at a time earlier than foreseen in suitable laws, a habit rather widespread in the countryside. Data cited by Zenon Kmiecik, derived from particular school headmasters, show that the number of children completing a given course declined rapidly, starting with the second year of attendance. By way of example, in 1912, the full three-year school period was completed by only 18,227 children in the Kingdom of Poland, while as many as 72,285 pupils left school prior to the official term. In Galicia, according to the estimates made by the above mentioned Jan Gątkiewicz, the obligatory six years of school education "are completed at best by 20% to 30% of children in the entire country"<sup>12</sup>. Such an attitude towards elementary education, disclosed by a considerable number of peasants, together with the low level of teaching, meant that school graduates were usually barely 9–11 years old and did not possess sufficient skills as regards reading or writing. Those who after graduation had no further contact with the written or read word became illiterate after a period of several years. The dimension of such secondary illiteracy was enormous; in the Kingdom of Poland it reached about 74% in 1897 and 69.5% in 1907<sup>13</sup>, while in Galicia in 1900 it totalled 68.1% among the Poles and 79.7% among the Ukrainians<sup>14</sup>. Another fact worthy of mention is the considerable drop of illiteracy, to 27.9%, among Polish youth in Galicia aged 12–21<sup>15</sup>. It is probably this age group which was represented by the above mentioned authors of articles and correspondence published in peasant periodicals. In successive age groups, especially between 32 and 51 years of age, the percentage of illiterates grew considerably.

During the First World War, the earlier listed ills of education continued to dominate. Problems appeared to grow increasingly intense as a result of the devastation of numerous schools in the course of armed hostilities, the lack of fuel for heating schools during wintertime, insufficient shoes among

<sup>11</sup>Z. Kmiecik, *Ruch oświatowy*, p. 101. A similar assessment of the situation in Galicia was proposed already during the First World War by the above cited Jan Gątkiewicz, *Znieśmy i tę pańszczyznę*, p. 4; M. E. S., *ibid.* № 42: 10 October 1915, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Z. Kmiecik, *Ruch oświatowy*, p. 101, 104; Jan Gątkiewicz, *Podwaliny odrodzenia (The Foundations of Renaissance)*, "Piast" № 28: 11 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Z. Kmiecik, *Ruch oświatowy*, p. 12, map on p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>M. Chamicówna, *Szkolnictwo i oświata*, p. 598.

the poorer families, and an unsatisfactory working force on the peasant farms.

Already prior to the war, the more enlightened social groups, including a growing number of peasants, indicated the need to improve the existing situation. Not until the First World War did the basic attitudes of the peasants towards negative processes in education change on a mass scale. Under the influence of new experiences, the peasants became aware of the profits of learning to read and write and thus of regular school attendance, the need for the professional training of farmers and artisans, and the benefits of reading books and newspapers. This was the beginning of active participation in a national discussion about the reform of elementary and vocational schools as well as the involvement of larger funds in the development of a school network and the improvement of living conditions for the teachers. During the war, the skill of reading and writing became indispensable almost from day to day. In the eyes of the peasants themselves it proved to be most useful for correspondence, the presentation of assorted requests, the filling of postal orders and benefiting from useful press information and legal advice.

Already before the war, military service and economic emigration meant that correspondence with families became a daily issue. Letters written by those emigres from the Kingdom of Poland who settled down in Brazil and the United States (1890–1891) demonstrate that the illiterates were forced to resort to the assistance of mediators for both reading and writing correspondence. This fact explains rare contacts with families<sup>16</sup>.

The war separated millions of peasants on an unprecedented scale, caused by recruitment and the voluntary or compulsory migration of the civilian population<sup>17</sup>. Almost half of this enormous, 4.5 million-strong group of Poles from Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland, who left their homesteads, was comprised of illiterates. Similarly to the above mentioned Polish emigres in America they were forced to request others, frequently strangers, to write or read their private correspondence. There seems to be no need to describe the importance of waiting for news, especially from the front or relatives in captivity.

<sup>16</sup>*Listy emigrantów z Brazylii i Stanów Zjednoczonych 1890–1891 (Letters by Emigres in Brazil and the United States 1890–1891)*, prep. and introduction by W. Kula, N. Assorodobraj–Kula, M. Kula, Warszawa 1973, pp. 30–33.

<sup>17</sup>Peasants dominated among Poles subjected to compulsory recruitment into the Russian (1,196,000) and Austro-Hungarian army (1,400,000), *Księga chwały piechoty (The Infantry Honour Book)*, Warszawa 1937–1939, pp. 192 ff. Similarly, in 1915, the majority of the about 800–900,000 refugees, as a rule compulsory, from the Kingdom of Poland to Russia, were also peasants. The latter comprise a considerable percentage among the ca. 650,000 inhabitants of Galicia, evacuated to Austria during the first wartime year; approximately 350,000 seasonal labourers from the Russian and Austrian partition areas were detained by force in Germany after the outbreak of the war.

The press frequently wrote about the benefits of school education and its absence in wartime conditions, both in the daily life of closest members of the family and in public life. "The blessing of learning", declared the author of an article issued in "Pia st", "that first lesson of reading and writing, never became so distinct as during this terrible war. How much joy and happiness was brought by those simple letters from the front, often filled with unsteady and unclear but dear handwriting. They were read by the family, relatives and acquaintances, and all rejoiced that the distant author was alive and well. Just think how much sadness and grief there would be if those who had gone away could not write or if that 'art' would be possessed only by a few? Unfortunately, there are still those whose families live in constant fear and anxiety, and spend long months waiting for news from their nearest. Those are the unhappiest of the unhappy"<sup>18</sup>.

Apart from moral losses, such persons faced expenses and material deprivation. Frequently, mediators demanded high payments in return for writing a letter, a request, or an application, or for filling out a postal order. The dishonest swindled the illiterates out of packages and money, supposedly sent in their name. "Today, quite a few find it a bitter experience that they are unable to write a letter to the army, cannot sign their names, etc. Evil persons profit from this state of things. Those are the people who make large incomes thanks their writing and reading skills, and who demand relatively large fees for writing a letter, a request, or an application, or for reading a letter, etc. Forced by sheer necessity, the others pay"<sup>19</sup>.

The need for frequent and mass-scale wartime correspondence, petitions and requests was also an excellent verification of the abilities taught at school. Unfortunately, it became apparent that those rather numerous persons who did not observe obligatory school attendance and either attended irregularly or left school before graduation, without completing a full course, rapidly turned into semi-illiterates. They found it difficult to formulate legible and understandable letters and postcards. Correspondence of this type was simply thrown away by military censors<sup>20</sup> or never reached its destination due to imprecise addresses<sup>21</sup>. The author of the article *Za mało*

<sup>18</sup> I. Mi g o from Izdebnik, *O pracownikó w przyszości. Uwagi przed nowym rokiem szkolnym (On Workers of the Future. Remarks on the Eve of the New School Year)*, "Pia st" N° 35: 29 August 1915, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> M. S., *Za mało oświaty (Too Little Education)*, "Pia st" N° 26: 27 June 1915, p. 8; S., *Parę słó w o analfabetyzmie (Several Words on Illiteracy)*, *ibid.*, N° 17: 29 April 1917, p. 27. Cf. also: Józef Petronel from Rzeszów, *Smutny objaw (Sad Symptom)*, *ibid.* N° 24: 11 June 1916, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Koczubówna from Wyżne in the region of Strzyżów, *W ważnej sprawie (Concerning an Important Issue)*, *ibid.* N° 20: 14 May 1916, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Władysław Kraczkowiak, *Nieco o pisaniu (On Writing)*, *ibid.* N° 14: 8 April 1917, p. 21; M. S., *Za mało oświaty*, p. 9.

*oświaty* (*Too Little Education*) commented on this state of things: "Our people are themselves guilty by neglecting the needs of education. Present-day problems might make quite a few aware that today no one will achieve much without schooling, and that everyone spurns an *ignoramus*"<sup>22</sup>.

This awareness of the need to learn was attained both under the impact of the daily obstacles connected with the inability to write and read, and observations, conducted on an unprecedented scale, of the life of neighbouring nations. Higher educational aspirations, especially among the younger generation of the rural community, came into being under the impact of contacts between tens of thousands of young soldiers—peasants from Galicia and prisoners of war, Poles from the Russian army (inhabitants of the Kingdom of Poland), employed in Austro-Hungary, as well as under the influence of the culture and civilisation of Southern and Western farmers, far outdistancing the local level.

It became obvious that with a similar plot of land at his disposal, the Czech or Moravian peasant could obtain much higher yields, live and work in large and clean houses and neat farms, and enjoy leisure time intended for cultural entertainment. At the same time, the Galician peasant realised that conditions for better farming entail not only graduation from elementary school but also vocational training in agricultural schools, familiarity with professional literature, and contact with the press, which he saw in every home. Such mass-scale education was transmitted in hundreds of letters, published in "Piast" and addressed also to younger readers.

The observed attainments were associated with universal and systematic school attendance, professional training, also of the farmer, and the self-education of adults. Such observations were widely described in numerous articles and letters written by Polish soldiers, and more rarely — by Russian prisoners of war, i. e. Poles from the Kingdom of Poland. Their authors expressed the regret that their parents had not created conditions for learning to read and write, proclaimed the implementation of newly won experiences and, predominantly, embarked upon an extensive discussion about a reform of elementary and secondary education and schools for adults. The fact that, apart from village teachers, this exchange of opinion involved also young soldiers and peasant girls appears to be worth of particular emphasis.

For the first time, not only peasant and educational activists, as was the case up to then, but also the peasant youth dared to publicly criticise negative

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* The author of this article, as well as other numerous army correspondents, informed that Polish soldiers were ridiculed by their foreign colleagues, especially the Czechs, Germans and Slovenians due to their inability to write a letter or postcard or to address them properly.

parental attitudes towards education<sup>23</sup>. A “prisoner of war from the Kingdom of Poland”, who taught himself how to read and write at the age of 19, appealed: “Best aware of the significance of being able to write and read, I implore readers who do not send their children to school: you inflict harm upon yourselves, your children and the whole country!” [original emphasis — J. M.J. Remember how frequently grown-up children curse their parents for not sending them to school!”<sup>24</sup>. Also in the Podhale region, illiterate soldiers on home leave “heaped bitter reproaches upon their parents for not having been concerned with their education at an appropriate time”<sup>25</sup>. A “girl from the Pilzno region” blamed the fathers for the lack of interest in the education of their children<sup>26</sup>.

The critical attitude of the children towards their parents was accentuated especially by village teachers. The above cited Jan Gałkiewicz shared his experiences in a particularly interesting manner in a series of articles published in “Piast”: “Upon numerous occasions, I asked the elders or farmers in a village, in which a school existed for a long time, why were they unable to read or write? I had foolish parents — this was the answer I always heard. A certain farmer’s wife told me recently that she harboured a great grudge towards her parents for sending her to school for only two years, and for the fact that she never learned how to write. Now she finds it extremely unpleasant to ask some stranger to write a letter to her husband at the front. I send my children regularly to school, added this woman, so that later on they would not experience the same regret in relation to me as I did towards my parents”<sup>27</sup>.

The information offered by this mother, as well as many women who treated regular school attendance in a similar way, i. e. as an indispensable condition for learning how to read and write, testified to the growing number of peasant parents who appreciated the need to learn. They provided support for those village teachers who tried to persuade recalcitrant peasants to observe regulations about compulsory education. The universal hostility and

<sup>23</sup>For a more extensive discussion on the negative attitude of parents towards elementary and vocational education see: J. M o l e n d a, *Postawy kobiet wiejskich*.

<sup>24</sup>Józef Ł a s z c z, *List jeńca Królewiana, Lubliana w październiku (A Letter by a Prisoner of War from the Kingdom of Poland. Lubljana in October)*, “Piast” № 45: 11 November 1917, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>S., *Parę słów o analfabetyzmie*.

<sup>26</sup>A girl from the region of Pilzno, *Przez oświeconą kobietę do celu (Reaching the Target with the Aid of an Educated Woman)*, “Piast” № 33: 15 August 1915, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>Jan G a ł k i e w i c z, *Znieśmy i tę pańszczyznę, ibid.* № 28: 2 July 1916, p. 4. Cf. also: i d e m, *Podwaliny odrodzenia, ibid.*, № 28: 11 July 19151, pp. 3–4. A similar characteristic of the attitude of illiterates to their parents, formulated under the impact of wartime experiences, was expressed by another headmaster, Mikołaj J ę d r u s i a k, *Gdy zaczyna się rok szkolny (When the School Year Begins)*, *ibid.*, № 36: 3 September 1916, p. 3.

even threats on the part of the peasants towards those teachers, who rigorously executed this obligation, appeared to grow weaker<sup>28</sup>. Those factors probably explain the rising number of teachers, who during World War I publicly condemned parents for systematically neglecting obligatory school attendance.

In 1915–1918, teachers in the Kingdom of Poland faced lesser problems with irregular school attendance than was the case in Galicia. The involvement of the local peasants in the growth of education was also greater<sup>29</sup>. Just as other social groups, they were capable of profiting from conducive conditions for the development of the school system, especially in the part of the Kingdom of Poland occupied by Austro–Hungary after the departure of the Russian partitioning authorities in 1915<sup>30</sup>.

Alongside the old functioning stereotype sayings such as “education is unnecessary since a peasant will never become a philosopher and the plough and the colter are his alphabet”, “I shall live like my father and grandfather before me”, “a daughter wishes to know only what her mother knew”<sup>31</sup>, the changing atmosphere for education in the villages was evidenced by the new postwar mottoes: “Do not spare funds for school and books, because they shall bring profit”, “if only the next generation could be wiser than ours”, “our children should be wiser than we [the mothers — J. M.] have been so far”<sup>32</sup>.

What benefits were reaped by peasant children from those positive changes in the attitude of their parents towards elementary schooling? Apparently, such advantages, both direct and longer–range, were quite considerable.

The most spectacular transformations occurred in the Kingdom of Poland in 1915–1918. After the Russian authorities withdrew from those regions, the new German and Austrian administration permitted all school subjects to be taught in Polish. School children were also allowed to learn Polish history and literature.

<sup>28</sup> Extensive information on the reaction of Galician peasants towards attempts at implementing regulations about compulsory school attendance was provided by village teachers in “*Piast*”.

<sup>29</sup> Benedykt Kubski from Gabułów, *Głos wolny Królewski* (*A Free Voice from the Kingdom of Poland*), *ibid.*, № 33: 13 August 1916, pp. 7–8.

<sup>30</sup> More extensively on this subject specially in: K. Konarski, *Dzieje szkolnictwa w b. Królestwie Kongresowym 1915–1918* (*The History of Education in the Former Congress Kingdom 1915–1918*), Kraków 1923; Z. Marciniak, *Sprawa upowszechniania nauczania początkowego w Królestwie Polskim sierpień 1914–sierpień 1917* (*The Dissemination of Primary Schooling in the Kingdom of Poland. August 1914–August 1917*), Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1962.

<sup>31</sup> In his article: *O reformę szkoły ludowej* (*For a Reform of the Village School*), *Kalendarz “Piasta” na rok Pański 1918* (*The “Piast” Calendar for Year of the Lord 1918*), Kraków 1918, p. 43, Józef Bałaban noted the decreasing number of village supporters of stereotype sayings.

<sup>32</sup> During the First World War both “*Piast*” and *Kalendarz*, published by its editorial board, repeated slogans–appeals, propagating school and extra–curricular education.

The multiplication of financial means offered by the peasants for education increased the development rate of the network of elementary schools in the Kingdom of Poland; the same holds true for the number of pupils and teachers. In 1915–1917, the number of schools alone grew from 4,449 to 8,883, the number of teachers — from 6,816 to 12,276, and that of school children — from 308,632 to 721,590; the tempo was much higher in the villages than in towns<sup>33</sup>. Despite speedy progress, the Kingdom of Poland still lagged behind other Polish lands. In January 1917, it had 76 pupils per 1,000 inhabitants, while Galicia had 143, and the Poznań region — 194<sup>34</sup>.

Essential changes in regular school attendance and the associated effectiveness of teaching are less tangible. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that during the First World War the parents themselves expressed, on an unprecedented scale, the conviction about the need to send children to school throughout the whole year, and not only in winter. They also agreed to observe the official period of obligatory school attendance, and promised that they would take their children from school after 2–3 years of learning. Nonetheless, only a few declared a readiness to reduce the range of the farm work performed by the children, especially the tending of grazing animals, for the sake of homework. Adam Młynarski, headmaster in Lipnica Murowana, declared: “The war changed one thing for the better, namely, the fathers and mothers are more concerned with education. [...] the poor mother, exhausted by year-round heavy toil in the field and at home, spends half a day grazing the cattle, and braves the autumn winds and rain so that her child could profit from learning!”<sup>35</sup>.

Just as useful for the peasant children was the spreading conviction about the need to raise the level of primary schools, at the very least to such a degree so that the peasant graduate would possess the ability to read and write, and not be a semi-illiterate.

Numerous villagers, especially members of the older generation, still did not appreciate the need of school education, even elementary. During the First World War, the peasant elite expanded and grew in strength to such an extent that it began exercising a visible impact on the creation of an atmosphere conducive for schooling, especially primary. This factor contributed to more convenient conditions both for the work of the village teachers and the education of peasant children.

<sup>33</sup>Z. Marciniak, *Sprawa upowszechniania nauczania*, p. 247.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>The article: *Na czasie (On Time)*, “Piast” № 45: 11 November 1917, p. 6.

The wartime period also witnessed the participation of a growing number of educated peasants in public discussions on a fundamental school reform to be conducted in the already independent Polish state. It is impossible to present the tens of articles and thousands of letters on educational topics, written predominantly by representatives of the younger generation, including peasants. Their authors expressed views both on basic issues, such as the place of the school in national life, and on more pragmatic themes. In their opinion, the reformed primary school of the future, including the village school, should be universal, obligatory and six to seven year long. Furthermore, it was to educate and bring up in the spirit of patriotic and civic commitment. Another demand called for the provision of various practical information, necessary both on the farm and for settling official issues, e. g. the filling out of assorted printed mater in communal and county offices, at the post office, or in forest district offices.

Apart from corrections introduced into the curriculum already during the war, the extensive discussion on the reform of elementary teaching, and, to a smaller measure, also on secondary teaching, produced within the peasant environment a social basis for a reform of the school system and education at the outset of the Second Republic.

New wartime conditions witnessed particularly essential transformations among peasant children and youth aged 9–12 to 17, i. e. from their graduation from primary school to recruitment into the army.

On the eve of the war greater social activity was disclosed within this group only by the then scarce students of comprehensive secondary and agricultural schools, schools for girls and other vocational schools. Those were also the readers and correspondents of the peasant press, members of the first groups of peasant youth and military organisations<sup>36</sup>, and the persons most frequently described by the peasant press.

A certain stimulus was also produced by the seasonal work performed by young people, which entailed leaving home and was particularly widespread prior to 1914. The earnings, frequently exceeding the income of the

<sup>36</sup>For more extensive information on the beginnings of the peasant press, youth organisations and their co-participation in the creation of pro-independence military organisations see especially: M. Mióduchowska, *Centralny Związek Młodzieży Chłopskiej 1912–1928 (The Central Union of Peasant Youth 1912–1928)*, Warszawa 1984, pp.12–54; J. Snopko, *Polskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne "Sokół" w Galicji 1867–1914 (The "Sokół" Polish Gymnastic Society in Galicia 1867–1914)*, Białystok 1997; Junactwo. *Geneza ruchu wojskowo-niepodległościowego wśród młodzieży wojskowej i rzemieślniczej w byłym zaborze rosyjskim w latach 1912–1932 (Youngsters. The Origin of the Military-Independence Movement among Young Peasants and Artisans in the Former Russian Partition Area in the Years 1912–1932)*, Warszawa 1932; *Zarzewie 1909–1920. Wspomnienia i materiały (Zarzewie 1909–1920. Reminiscences and Materials)*, selection of documents and footnotes by A. Garlicka, preface by A. and A. Garlicki, Warszawa 1973; *Drużyny Bartosze 1908–1914 (The Bartosz Brigades 1908–1914)*, Lwów 1939.

parental farm, offered greater independence and freedom both within the family and the rural community. This fact, in turn, affected the way money was spent, behaviour, and increasingly fashionable clothes, giving rise to interest on the part of peers as well as criticism expressed by the older generation. Already observers from the period noticed the impact of the seasonal emigration of young peasants upon heretofore family and village bonds<sup>37</sup>.

Not until the First World War was attention drawn to the group of the 9–17 year-olds, who attended secondary school and worked as seasonal emigres. Changes in the position of the peasant youth in the life of the village and the country, and the associated rising interest in their fate, were affected primarily by:

- the co-participation of young people in taking over the duties of their parents and older brothers as a result of wartime mobilisation;
- the ease of finding local well-paid work without the need to resort to seasonal emigration, and the opportunity to spend the earnings;
- a growing need for young members of rural socioeconomic organisations;
- the dissemination of town fashion and customs;
- the crystallisation of the principles of an organised movement of village youth, and its growth;
- an increase in the number of peasant youth in military organisations and formations.

Wartime transformations, which were accompanied also by negative phenomena, especially by increasing demoralisation, pointed, on an unprecedented scale, to the large significance of the group of young people of interest to us, both in the life of the family, the farm, the village and the nation. At the same time, there emerged a rising awareness of the insufficient training of those young people, with the exception of particular individuals, for the performance of growing obligations. As a result, work was initiated on new educational programmes, both longer-range and current, which were to tackle the new tasks and needs<sup>38</sup>.

The war disturbed the traditional, centuries-long division of functions and duties within the family and on the peasant farm. Depending on the family situation, mobilised fathers and older brothers were replaced, and typically male jobs in the field and on the farm were carried out by wives

<sup>37</sup>M. Ch., *Posyłajmy dzieci do szkoły! (Let's Send Our Children to School!)*, "Piaśt" N° 37: 12 September 1915, p. 3. Those issues were discussed in brochures as well as articles and correspondence published in peasant periodicals.

<sup>38</sup>Attention was drawn to this problem already by observers from the period; Walenty Paśierb from Czarna, *Odrodzenie młodzieży (The Renaissance of Youth)*, *ibid.*, N° 24: 11 June 1916, p. 18.

and older daughters, while chores connected with ploughing and the harvest — by adolescent boys. In the case of the absence of the latter, such demanding jobs were performed by the mothers and even young girls<sup>39</sup>.

Information found in “Piaś” shows that typically male field work, requiring the physical strength of an adult, was carried out by 14–15 year-old boys, sometimes even by those aged 12–13, and sporadically by girls<sup>40</sup>.

The new position of young peasants in the family and on the farm, similarly as that of the women, was intensified by forecasts claiming that this new division of work would be prolonged also during the postwar years. In the course of the war it became apparent that tens of thousands of fathers and older brothers would never return or would remain invalids, incapable of performing the hardest chores, which then would be entrusted to the youngsters and mothers. Consequently, attention was drawn to the need of tackling this situation during longer periods of time<sup>41</sup>.

A new phenomenon in the wartime life of peasant youth, similarly to that of women running farms on their own, was the ease of making earnings on the spot, without the need to resort to seasonal migration, as well as greater freedom in spending the income.

Heretofore research does not make it feasible to determine whether the considerable sums of money at the disposal of the village youth came from their own farms, were earned in return for additional work performed in place of the mobilised fathers and older brothers, or were received for hired labour on other farms, which at the time experienced a distinct need for an additional labour force. Particularly highly paid proved to be hired labourers with their own horses, whose insufficient number was another hardship experienced by the village.

The years-long absence of adult men in rural organisations denoted the need for their replacement by new members and activists. The fact that young people worked in lieu of the adults, usually successfully, was a *sui generis* test of their abilities both in the family and on the farm, and comprised a serious advantage for increased participation in the life of the village community.

<sup>39</sup>This deficit of the male labour force in the villages occurred particularly acutely in Galicia, where the enlistment of men older than 18 was strictly observed. In the Kingdom of Poland the situation on the labour market was slightly better since the Russian authorities were incapable of conducting full army mobilisation, and some of the workers affected by industrial unemployment returned to their relatives in the country.

<sup>40</sup>Correspondence published in the *From communes and counties* section of “Piaś” № 52: 17 December 1916, p. 12; Marianna Hałuchowa, *O wychowanie młodzieży (On the Upbringing of Youth)*, *ibid.*, № 34: 22 August 1915, p. 17. In his article *Na czasie*, Adam Młynarski, headmaster of a school in Lipnica Murowana, indicated that “the entire farm rests [...] upon the shoulders [of children — J. M.] from the last form”, *ibid.*, № 45: 11 November 1917, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>Maria Józefa from Słopnica Polska, *Uczmy się same! (Let's Learn Ourselves!)*, “Piaś” № 37: 12 September 1915, p. 12.

The wartime peasant press not only encouraged young people to join farmers' circles and associations but also published numerous information about access<sup>42</sup>. The growing participation of young peasants in socioeconomic organisations was mentioned especially by the weekly "Piast". This phenomenon should be explained by the still growing lack of adult males in the Galician village, possibly greater than in the Kingdom of Poland.

On the other hand, after the departure of the Russians (1915), young peasants in the Kingdom of Poland took a much more active part in the cultural life of the village than was the case in Galicia. From 1915, it became possible to expand the repertoire of theatrical spectacles and to feature patriotic plays.

Another growing need was that for young participants of the artistic performances, usually with patriotic themes, which comprised a constant and important element of the celebrations of national anniversaries<sup>43</sup>. The peasant press widely publicised the presence of young people at those events, as well as the spreading amateur theatre movement, with particular emphasis on a patriotic repertoire. In accordance with the conceptions propagated by the organisers of national anniversaries and the amateur theatre, such participation was to expand the development of the national consciousness of the peasants, "the creation of enlightened citizens", and in 1912–1918 — the winning over of peasant youth for military organisations and formations<sup>44</sup>.

Apart from the above discussed positive phenomena, which took place during the First World War among the village children and youth aged

<sup>42</sup>Information about the increased participation of young people and women in the life of agricultural organisations and associations became intensified especially from 1916. More extensively in: J. Mołenda, *Postawy kobiet wiejskich*, pp. 211–212, 217.

<sup>43</sup>On Kościuszko anniversaries in poetry, prose, drama and art see especially: M. Micińska, *Gołąb i orzeł. Obchody rocznic kościuszkowskich w latach 1894 i 1917 (The Dove and the Eagle. Celebrations of Kościuszko Anniversaries in the Years 1894 and 1917)*, Warszawa 1997, in particular pp. 169–257; F. Ziejka, *Złota legenda chłopów polskich (The Golden Legend of Polish Peasants)*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 151–198, 296–330 (both chapters concern peasant participation in the uprisings of 1794 and 1863–1864 as depicted in the *belles lettres*).

<sup>44</sup>For a more extensive presentation of the participation of peasant children and youth in the realisation of the artistic part of celebrations of national anniversaries see: J. Mołenda, *Wpływ obchodów rocznic powstania styczniowego na kształtowanie się świadomości narodowej chłopów od lat 90-tych XIX w. do 1918 (The Impact of Celebrations of the Anniversary of the January Uprising on Shaping the National Consciousness of Peasants from the 1890s to 1918)*, in: *Powstanie styczniowe 1863–1864. Aspekty militarne i polityczne (The January Uprising 1863–1864. Military and Political Aspects)*, ed. J. Wojtasik; *idem*, *Obchody rocznic kościuszkowskich współorganizowane przez ludowców — koniec XIX w. — 1918 (Celebrations of Kościuszko Anniversaries Co-organised by Peasant Parties from the End of the Nineteenth Century to 1918)*, in: *Kościuszko — powstanie 1794 — tradycja. Materiały z sesji naukowej w 200-lecie powstania kościuszkowskiego 15–16 kwietnia 1994 (Kościuszko — Insurrection of 1794 — Tradition. Material from a Scientific Session Held on the 200th Anniversary of the Kościuszko Insurrection. 15–16 April 1994)*, ed. J. Kowceki, Warszawa 1997, pp. 305–328.

10–17, observers from the period also noticed certain negative aspects. Numerous opinions about this particular community include attempts at its general characteristic: “All the boys are younger than 18, since the older ones went off to fight in the war. In certain parts of the country, those boys, aged 10–17, are simply ruffians and pests. Please consider the 10 year–old boy smoking cigarettes and destroying his organism, while boys 12 to 17 years old drink vodka, becoming experts in the art of drunkenness. The effects are visible immediately, because in certain communes the young people form brigand gangs, which hurl rocks at passersby. Their victims are the same people who carry the torch of education, i.e. village teachers”<sup>45</sup>. Attention is drawn to slightly different aspects of behaviour by a villager from the region of Sanok: “A town youth, learning either in school or in a workshop, enjoys suitable surveillance and care. Meanwhile, the village youth, having completed two or three village classes, ends his education and is a ‘graduate’ of a sort; frequently, such a 13 or 14 year–old is left quite alone and grows up wild, like an unpruned tree. Instead of reading a newspaper or a good, instructive book during his leisure time, on Sundays and during the holidays, he buries his hand into his pockets, and with a dangling cigarette saunters down the road, proud as a peacock and pretending to be a ‘young gentleman’”<sup>46</sup>.

Young people were often accused of drinking and smoking, habits conceived as a veritable plague, while the accompanying scuffles and thefts were mentioned more rarely. Opinions concerning those instances were unambiguously critical.

“Dissipation” and “trysts involving young people of both sexes” were regarded as most negative; both concepts were granted rather arbitrary contents<sup>47</sup>. Such questions were treated as embarrassing, and even discussions in the press were criticised, suggesting that instead the problem should be dealt with by priests or the communal authorities.

Other negative phenomena included disobedience towards parents, chiefly mothers and older residents of the village. The growth of this phenomenon during World War I (described by some as a novelty that did

<sup>45</sup>Józef Petronel from Rzeszów, *Smutny objaw (Sad Symptom)*.

<sup>46</sup>Michał Zdybek from Jaćmierz near Sanok, *Młodzi przyjaciele! (Young Friends!)*, “Piaśt” N° 21: 27 May 1917, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>J. Piwowarczyk from Głowaczowa in the region of Pilzno, *Smutne objawy (Sad Symptoms)*, “Piaśt” N° 21: 22 May 1918, p. 11; cf. also ft. 50.

<sup>48</sup>Maciej Czula from Grabie, *Do naszej młodzieży (To Our Youth)*, in the section: *The Young Are Coming*, “Piaśt” N° 35: 27 August 1916, p. 16; attention was drawn to similar aspects by J. D., a correspondent from Kosztowa, *From communes and counties*, *ibid.*, N° 3: 20 January 1918, pp. 15–16; Władysław Pośminek from Dobrzechów, *Do rówieśników (To My Peers)*, *ibid.*, N° 21: 27 May 1917, p. 16.

not occur prior to 1914) was usually explained by the absence of the mobilised fathers and older brothers<sup>48</sup>.

This issue disclosed a certain difference of views within the rural environment. Demands were made for respect and obedience for the elders<sup>49</sup>, but it was also indicated that at times a bad example was given by parents<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, an increasing number of opinions declared that the problem of obedience cannot be resolved by methods of coercion and discipline. This complicated question of upbringing required taking into consideration the arguments and aspirations not only of the adults but also of the young people. Furthermore, attempts were made to reduce to proper dimensions the phenomena of "demoralisation" and "rowdiness", which numerous statements treated in an excessively generalising and exaggerated manner. Such a profound and objectivised interpretation was represented by a female correspondent who signed herself as "Góralka" (Highlander), and who published numerous articles in *The women's section*<sup>51</sup>.

It seems worth accentuating that the observers of the village environment noticed that the peasant girls succumbed less easily to the negative impact of wartime conditions. At the same time, the girls wrote more frequently to peasant periodicals, proposed interesting educational initiatives, and were bolder in challenging the stereotype opinions of their milieu<sup>52</sup>. A "girl from Siary", another reader of "Piast", opposed the excessive generalisation of negative phenomena among young people<sup>53</sup>.

A more thorough analysis of the contents of complaints about the youngsters' disobedience towards solitary mothers and the elderly appears to testify not only to the existence of negative stands but also to a *sui generis* crisis of heretofore methods and models of upbringing.

<sup>48</sup>"Polish girl" from Jawornik Polski in the region of Rzeszów, *Listy od Czytelniczek (Letters from Female Readers)*, *ibid.*, N° 50: 10 December 1917, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup>J. D. from Kosztowa, *Z powiatów i gmin (From Communes and Counties)*, *ibid.*, N° 3: 20 January 1918, pp. 15–16.

<sup>51</sup>"Góralka" (Highlander), *O wychowaniu (On Upbringing)*, "Piast" N° 38: 19 September 1915, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup>It was to them, rather than to the boys, that fathers and older brothers turned to in letters from the front. On the rising role of women, including peasant girls, during World War I, see: J. M o l e n d a, *Zmiany roli kobiety w rodzinie chłopskiej w warunkach I wojny światowej (Changes in the Role of the Woman in the Peasant Family in the Conditions of World War I)*, in: *Pamiętnik XV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich (Diary of the XV General Convention of Polish Historians)*, vol. II: *Przemiany społeczne a model rodziny. Materiały z sympozjum VI zorganizowanego przez Annę Żarnowską (Social Transformations and the Model of the Family. Material from Symposium VI Organised by Anna Żarnowska)*, Gdańsk–Toruń 1995, pp. 39–46; i d e m, *Postawy kobiet wiejskich wobec unowocześniania gospodarki chłopskiej w pierwszym dwudziestolecu XX wieku (Attitudes of Peasant Women Towards the Modernisation of the Peasant Farm in the First Two Decades of the Twentieth Century)*, in: *Kobieta i kultura życia codziennego*, pp. 191–218.

<sup>53</sup>Letter published in *The Women's Section*, "Piast" N° 28: 9 July 1916, p. 21.

Much light on the loosening or even severance of traditional family and inter-generation bonds as well as the striving of the young generation towards an independent status within the family and the village, is cast by an analysis of the contents of articles and letters issued in "Piaśt" and dealing with the expenses of the young people and the introduction of new fashions. Here, the opinions of the peasant environment, including the youth, were most numerous, and the topic — the most discussed. In 1916 alone, 26 women wrote on the subject, a fact seems to testify not so much to the mass-scale nature of the phenomenon, but rather to its novelty, a feature which always proves to be more stirring than commonplace everyday life.

Owing to their rank and extensive documentation both those questions and those connected with the impact of the town call for separate examination. At this stage, I shall limit myself to several initial conclusions.

The overwhelming majority of the participants of the discussions, especially the elderly, defended the heretofore model of spending money: savings were to be used for production, the purchase of land, and the improvement and enlargement of the farm. Money saved during World War I was to be spent additionally for rebuilding damaged buildings, for farm tools, and livestock. A growing number of peasant appeals, including those addressed to the youth, called for increasing expenses intended for education, subscriptions of newspapers, the purchase of books, and charity.

Wartime expenditure became increasingly important also due to the growing revenues yielded by more convenient opportunities for finding employment, as well as payments connected with assorted war benefits and aid. Despite greater expenses caused by farmers' debts, the average level of deposits on a single account in a Raiffeisen savings bank grew from 400 to 900 crowns<sup>54</sup>.

"Useful" purposes for spending money were contrasted with "improper" ones. Boys were criticised for "wasting money" for cigarettes, vodka, fun and "revelry". The girls, as well as the young wives, were accused of "luxuries and clothes", "tight dresses", "Viennese suits", "strange hair-dos" and "scented soap and perfume".

A characteristic feature of the opinions represented by observers from the period as regards the adaptation of new fashion was their diametrical

<sup>54</sup>In July 1918 Franciszek Piątkowski, an expert on the subject, informed that the 1,522 Raiffeisen banks had 340,000 members, with 180 million crowns of saving accounts, 3 millions — in reserve funds, and shares worth millions. He estimated that "in the domain of credit cooperatives we have caught up with other countries". F. Piątkowski, *Kasy Raiffeisena i ich znaczenie (The Raiffeisen Banks and Their Significance)*, "Piaśt" № 27: 7 July 1918, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>S., *Do kobiet z Podhala (To Women from the Podhale Region)*, "Piaśt" № 26: 27 May 1915, pp. 16–17. Ludwika Łazarska from Jordanów wrote in a similar vein in *The women's section, ibid.*, № 52: 26 December 1915, p. 19.

divergence. “Wieści z Podhala” informed: “Our usually thrifty highlander women are simply possessed by a frenzied purchase of clothes” [original emphasis — J. M.]<sup>55</sup>.

On the other hand, numerous voices demonstrate that opinions about spending money for fashionable apparel were exaggerated and unnecessarily publicised by the press; only in individual cases did peasant women succumb to new vogues. Such a minimalisation of the discussed phenomenon was a *sui generis* defence against accusations.

Only certain statements tried to reduce the question of fashion to proper dimension<sup>56</sup> by indicating the harmfulness of extreme opinions<sup>57</sup>; at the same time, they attempted a rational analysis. The cited Józef Rączy from Przybyszówka drew attention, e.g. to the need for eliminating growing misunderstandings within the family. After lengthy argumentation<sup>58</sup>, he concluded: “Husbands should be persuaded to abandon the view that members of the family at home are obligated to lead the life of outright pennants; such prejudices must be eliminated. Next, it is necessary for all women and girls, with no exception, to live in a truly thrifty and modest manner, and predominantly to avoid the introduction of new fashions [...] Need and luxury are entirely different matters: to dress and dress up is not the same [...] To wear shoes or boots does not mean wearing yellow or red shoes, just is wearing a kerchief differs from preening in a hat. The heart of the matter consists in the absolute avoidance of the introduction of new ideas into clothes, and in not wasting money for apparel without which one could manage for quite a long time. On the other hand, necessary fabric, and especially shoes, not only could but must be bought, even for the purposes of storing them”<sup>59</sup>. Even the more moderate declarations tried to delineate the limits of fashion, which the village “fashion followers” should not cross.

Their condemnation dominated opinions published by “Piast”. Mention was even made of the corporal punishment meted out by husbands and fathers to their fashionably dressed wives and daughters<sup>60</sup>.

The majority of the participants in a discussion about fashion treated changes in the attitudes of young people as an alien phenomenon, which

<sup>56</sup>Józef Rączy from Przybyszówka, *Jeszcze o strojach i zbytkach (Once Again on Clothes and Luxuries)*, *ibid.*, N° 23: 4 June 1916.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Józef Rączy: “Let the husbands understand this and be indulgent towards their wives at home. Don’t let them be angrily indignant as long as there is no cause”, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>“Piast” N° 22–23: 9 June 1918, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.* During World War I, mutual relations between the town and the village became increasingly all-sided, not only in the field of fashion. Owing to their rank and range they deserve to be discussed separately.

contaminated the villages from the outside. "In the past", the above cited correspondent from Piszczowa mentioned, "the situation in towns was bad, but now this evil is spreading to the village"<sup>61</sup>. Outside influence was also used to explain or even a justify the behaviour of the village "women of fashion"<sup>62</sup>.

The absence in wartime "Piaśt" of statements unambiguously approving town fashion, described by the villagers as holiday attire, is another attention-worthy fact. It is difficult to determine whether opinions of this sort did not reach the editorial board or whether the latter simply decided not to publish them. Pertinent articles, both in "Piaśt" and in *Kalendarz (Calendar)*, issued by its editorial board and also signed by leading politicians of *PSL-Piaśt*, indicate that both the party and its press opposed the popularisation of city fashion, with the sole exception of work clothes.

Reminiscences by Walenty Kunysz from Kraczkowa near Łańcut, who described<sup>63</sup> the acceptance of town clothes by the peasants at the beginning of the Second Republic, show that soldiers returning from war were fervent supporters of new fashions. It was also they who persuaded their wives and fiancées to dress according to the "city mode"<sup>64</sup>.

Walenty Kunysz suggested that at the beginning of the Second Republic the adaptation of the town style was rather universal in Central Galician villages. Letters published in "Piaśt" during the First World War show that the problem of village "fashion followers" appeared already before 1914. At the time, opportunities for the popularisation of fashionable apparel were limited. "Piaśt" explained that the "fashionable were restrained from such purchases only by the fear of their husbands"<sup>65</sup>. This obstacle disappeared the moment the farmers were mobilised.

Without delving into this rather simplified reasoning, it remains a fact that despite numerous protests city vogue spread across the countryside, especially among girls and young farmers' wives, although by no means did it dominate. It is characteristic that "Piaśt" did not present opinions about the acceptance of city fashion among young men, who, according to the above quoted reminiscences by W. Kunysz, were its true precursors in the

<sup>62</sup>Janina Grzechyni, *O organizacji kobiet u nas — a gdzie indziej (On Women's Organisations Here — and Elsewhere)*, "Piaśt" № 28: 9 July 1916, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup>W. Kunysz was demobilised on 28 September 1921. For two years prior to his marriage, he attended village weddings, whose number was considerable since, as he recalled, marriages were not made during the war. It was customary for weddings to be gate-crashed by all the young boys and girls from a given village, known as the "evening mob".

<sup>64</sup>W. Kunysz, *Wścibski i wrzicki. Pamiętnik chłopca galicyjskiego (Curious and Impressionable. A Diary of a Galician Peasant)*, introd. and prep. by B. Tondos, Warszawa 1973, pp. 121–122.

<sup>65</sup>Jan Klich of Brzeźów, *W obronie kobiet wiejskich (In the Defence of Peasant Women)*, "Piaśt" № 33: 13 August 1916, p. 19.

peasant environment. An exact quantitative estimate of the scope of the dissemination of town fashion during the First World War poses a rather difficult task. Nonetheless, it is highly noteworthy that, as a rule, even the opponents of the new fashion were inclined to minimalise its range, and provided, frequently contrary to their own intentions, numerous data about its popularisation.

The more extensive limits of fashion were discussed by Andrzej Średniawski in an article written probably in the second half of 1915 and published in *Kalendarz (Calendar)* in 1916. Similarly to Walenty Kunysz, this Galician peasant activist, at the time the most celebrated after Wincenty Witos and Jakób Bojko, admitted that not only girls and women but also men succumbed to the vogue of the “city gentleman”. This opinion, expressed in a factual tone, could be recognised as typical for the peasant elite connected with *PSL–Piast*<sup>66</sup>.

Another noteworthy fact is that the numerous statements about the permeation of town fashion, which some described as that of the “gentlemen”, and which was regarded by the peasants as holiday garb, did not include a single voice criticising unified town working clothes, at the time universally approved by the rural population.

Only a few participants of the discussion supported a return to clothes made of homespun. Such opinions were, however, voiced usually in the context of the insufficient amount of work clothes during the war years. Others even harboured the belief that the regaining of the state would denote the restoration of old customs and “Old Polish costume”<sup>67</sup>.

The criticism of the above mentioned negative phenomena perceived among the peasant children and youth aged 9–17 was usually accompanied by a presentation of a programme of reform. A similar procedure was followed in the battle waged against other negative phenomena among the peasants, conceived as part of the campaign of the “renascence of the people”, conducted on a great scale especially in “Piast”. This issue was pursued also in the earlier cited and copious article by Andrzej Średniawski in *Kalendarz “Piasta”*<sup>68</sup>.

The new phenomena occurring among the village young during the First World War contributed predominantly to a growing awareness of the

<sup>66</sup>A. Średniawski, *Odrodzenie ludu (Renascence of the People), Kalendarz “Piasta” na rok Pański 1916 (The “Piast” Calendar for the Year of the Lord 1916)*, arranged by Józef Rączkowski, Kraków [1916], p. 28–30.

<sup>67</sup>Franciszek Ślipek from Lipnica Wielka in the region of Grybów, *List do “Piasta” (Letter to “Piast”)*, № 6: 10 February 1918, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup>A. Średniawski, *Odrodzenie ludu*, p. 20.

need for greater concern for education and upbringing on the part of persons entitled to do so, especially the mothers. In a reference to articles about “the renaissance of the nation”, Marianna Haluchowa, a farmer’s wife, recognised “one of the most important duties [...] to consist of care for the upbringing of our youth” [...] <sup>69</sup>.

The author recommended that mothers devote their evenings to “teaching the older children to read” newspapers and books; at the same time, she outlined a specific model of bringing up a peasant boy. “What great joy for the father, upon his return from the war, either healthy or as an invalid, to see that his sons, although young, not only run the farm, but also think about education, undertake social work, read, and learn what should be done to improve themselves, to render life more pleasant and to slowly elevate the whole estate of the peasantry” <sup>70</sup>.

In response to an appeal made by Marianna Haluchowa, who called upon “other women” to express their opinions about the issues mentioned by her, “Piast” published at least several score letters and articles. This discussion, initiated in August 1915, lasted, with various intensity, until the end of the war. Its outcome proved to be extremely abundant. At this point, I limit myself to several most important conclusions.

In the first place, the female authors voiced the opinion that not only individuals, but all young peasants, both boys and girls, should be obligated to attend agricultural or other vocational schools after completing primary education, no longer on a voluntary basis as was the case up to then <sup>71</sup>.

The participants of the discussion stressed that secondary and elementary schools should not only educate but also bring up the pupils. An appeal was made for close co-operation between parents and teachers. A special role in the wartime upbringing of young people was to be played by the mothers, a motif most often mentioned in the articles and letters.

The authors also created models for teaching and bringing up peasant children and adolescents. Their most important elements, both for girls and boys, were:

- familiarity with the duties of a married couple, especially as regards the upbringing of children;
- good vocational training for pursuing the profession of a farmer;
- the habit of reading books and newspapers;
- involvement in the social life of one’s region, “the little homeland”;
- the development of a sense of civic and patriotic duties.

<sup>69</sup>M. Haluchowa, *O wychowanie młodzieży*, op. cit.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>See, e.g. A. Średniawski, *Odrodzenie ludu*, p. 32.

Those directives resembled the model of education and upbringing applied in agricultural schools in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia already before 1914. During the war, an increasing number of representatives of the villages demanded its expansion, so that it would encompass peasant youth as a whole. For the first time, it was postulated to introduce into the curricula of girls' schools such subjects on agriculture which up to then were taught only to the boys<sup>72</sup>.

Most attention was paid to the measures required for the realisation of the above listed purposes of educating and upbringing peasant youth.

The current tasks of educational cultural, economic and social associations were to include the organisation of assorted courses, lasting from a few days to several months, and intended for illiterates, together with comprehensive, agricultural and animal husbandry courses as well as those training experts for rural institutions and societies. Many such wartime initiatives were realised especially in the Kingdom of Poland<sup>73</sup>.

Further reaching plans foresaw the development of a network of agricultural and other vocational schools, which should be available to all peasant students after graduation from elementary school. Further reflections concerned the organisational structure of those schools, as well as their educational and upbringing programmes. Only several such institutions were set up in wartime conditions, but even more of those established prior to 1914 suspended their activity.

In accordance with the thematic range of the article, accepted at its outset, I omit the wartime dissemination of national and civic awareness among young male peasants, evidenced by their growing inclusion into military organisations and formations<sup>74</sup>.

Finally, I wish to indicate the civic and patriotic stands of the village girls, until now ignored in literature on the subject. Interesting data are provided by statements published in "Piast" and dealing with "the best ways of serving the Motherland".

This was the question asked by Katarzyna Szewczykówna in a letter of 5 September 1915, addressed to Jan G ą t k i e w i c z , the earlier mentioned

<sup>72</sup>For a more extensive discussion on the upbringing and education of girls in agricultural schools see: J. M o l e n d a , *Postawy kobiet wiejskich*, pp. 204–210, 214–215.

<sup>73</sup>I d e m , *Drogi aktywizowania chłopów u z a r a n i a P o l s k i n e p o d l e g l e j (Paths for the Activation of Peasants at the Outset of Independent Poland)*, "Pamiętnik Instytutu Macieja Rataja", fasc. 2, Warszawa 1995, pp. 46–47.

<sup>74</sup>This topic was examined predominantly by Tadeusz K r a w c z a k , Waclaw L i p i ń s k i , Jan M o l e n d a , Tomasz N a ł ę c z , Mieczysław W r z o s e k . See also works mentioned in ft. 36.

<sup>75</sup>J. G ą t k i e w i c z , *W jaki sposób najlepiej służyć Ojczyźnie (How to Best Serve the Motherland)*, "Piast" № 39: 26 September 1915, p. 15.

headmaster in Czarny Dunajec. At the beginning, the young author explained that her letter was inspired by his articles favouring questions concerning the village and the “Motherland”<sup>75</sup>. After introducing herself as the “daughter of a farmer from the commune of Odmęt”, 21 years old and of “good health and ready to work”, she asked for advice: “I work at home from childhood up to now, but it appears to me that this is not enough. It is my great wish to be of service for the Motherland, especially during this war. I imagine that if I were a boy I would be enlisted into the army; is there no way for me, as a girl, to help my brothers to defeat the enemy? Please inform me in what manner I could be of best help for our Motherland”<sup>76</sup>.

Jan Gątkiewicz published the entire letter, adding an extensive commentary. The contents of the letter were described as an expression of “love for the Motherland” and of the readiness for active participation in public life not only of a single girl but a much more numerous group of her peers, comparable with a similar stand of the young peasant boys serving in the Polish Legions. In response, Gątkiewicz presented, both in his own name and that of his several acquaintances to whom he showed the letter, a choice between “three recommendations — the army, care for the wounded, and national service”. Personally, he preferred the latter<sup>77</sup>.

The subject mentioned in the letter and the ensuing commentary produced numerous statements, some very extensive, published in “Piast” during the last months of 1915 and in the following years. All referred to, and expanded the motifs contained in the letter and commentary.

The cited statements indicated that the attitude of Katarzyna Szewczykówna was not unique, but a phenomenon which, under the impact of wartime experiences, encompassed ever larger groups of girls<sup>78</sup>.

The recurring motif of the statements was that it was possible “to serve the Motherland” not only on the battle field but also by means of a conscientious preparation and performance of family and professional duties as well as involvement in social work within one’s environment. This thought was expressed fullest by a priest, “curator of the Union of Polish Women”, in an article *To the One Who Asks for Advice*: “... not only young boys, fighting in the Legions and offering their life, blood and toil for the homeland love their native land, but also all those who at their posts fulfil their professional duties with zeal and devotion. The legionnaire defends the

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<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>W. Wójtowicz from Laskówka, *Jak najlepiej służyć Ojczyźnie? (How to Best Serve the Motherland)*, “Piast” № 49: 5 December 1915, p. 16.

honour of the homeland, and the nation is correct in honouring its past heroes, the legionnaires, and will honour its present-day heroes and praise them in songs, but honour will not suffice for the life of man or nation; we need bread, clothes, money, education and character, and thus a farmer, an artisan, a merchant, a teacher and a priest"<sup>79</sup>.

It was in this spirit that concrete advice was given about the way Katarzyna Szewczykówna, and girls resembling her, were to act, predominantly in their own home and environment, both at present and in the future. By way of example, the reverend curator, addressing K. Szewczykówna directly, wrote: "As regards your question, honourable reader, concerning the manner in which you may serve the Motherland, I say: 'stay in your village, carefully read newspapers and books, and encourage other girls to do the same. Tell yourself: I shall become an apostle of education, so that my village would glow with wise farmers' wives, so that backwardness and ignorance would recede, and so that each woman would be capable of bringing up her children in a model-like manner!' [...] Educated women may run a library, a shop, a cooperative, a savings bank, a dairy, and, most of all, may elevate our Polish-peasant homestead to become an image of culture, patriotism and lofty character"<sup>80</sup>.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)

<sup>79</sup> "Piast" N° 41: 10 October 1915, p. 16. Advice similar to the one given to K. Szewczykówna by the curator was also offered by women.

<sup>80</sup> "Piast" N° 41: 10 October 1915, p. 16. Antoni Szmiągiel, who presented himself as a bachelor, sent *List z wojny do Kasi Szewczykównej z Odmętu* (A Letter From the War to Kasia Szewczykówna From Odmęt), (*ibid.*, N° 46: 14 November 1915, p. 17), in which he pointed to similar tasks.