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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN
IN LIFE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

(From Studies on the Polish Rural Society)

Division of the human population according to biological sex characteristics carries significant consequences for the social life. These differences were a basis for the first significant class differentiation of the society. Members of men's and women's classes were performing separate complexes of social roles, carried out different duties and consequently held different positions within a given society participating also differently in its life.

Manner of this participation in the total society has been ensuing strictly from the position held in relation to each other by man and woman in the family. That is why, the social role of women in the rural environment and in the urban environment is usually analyzed within a framework of more comprehensive studies on evolution of structure and functions of the family.

Sociological studies on families completed in Poland so far allowed to reveal that under pressure of industrialization and urbanization processes, there was growing individualization of a small family and autonomization of an individual within the family. The latter phenomenon - according to B. Tryfan and J. Turowski - is mainly reflected in "emancipation of woman-wife and effected through her transfer to professional employment

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and passing beyond the intrafamily role¹. The above statement, concerning general evolution in the situation of woman in Poland, should be described more precisely with regard to the rural environment. Emancipation of the rural woman is expressed not so much in her participation in professional employment - since it is quite obvious, and results from productive functions of an agricultural family - but rather in enhancing her role in the very act of establishing a family, in enhancing her position inside the family in relation to husband as well as in her growing role outside the family, in wider society. The first emancipation sign involves a bigger role of the woman in choosing her future husband and in undermining a decisive role of parents in this respect. The second and third signs can be briefly defined as a growing authority enjoyed by the rural woman within the family accompanied by her "enhanced role as co-farmer and the family's representative in external affairs"². The above generalizations, afforded by numerous monographic studies, were formulated into the so-called theory of small family's individualization and autonomization of an individual within the family³. Simultaneously, the authors of these statements supported them by various reservations suggesting that the signalled processes were only in their initial stage and were taking place slowly encountering social resistance. E. Jagiełło-Lysiowa points at difficulties in realization of marriages "based on love"⁴; J. Przychodzeń states that "in all traditionally agricultural regions of the country characterized with settlement continuity, there was maintained a criterion of proximity of territorial origins in principles of selecting a spouse and selection of a partner from the same or similar farm group"⁵. Similar reservations with regard to woman's eman-

¹ P. Kryczka, L. M. Szwengrub, J. Turowski, Village and Town Sociology in Poland (in Polish), Warsaw 1971, p. 22.

² Ibid., p. 22.

³ Ibid., p. 17-39.

⁴ E. Jagiełło-Lysiowa, Village Girls and Marriage (Attitudes, Dreams and Reality) (in Polish), "Wiś Współczesna" 1965, No 6.

⁵ J. Przychodzeń, Territorial and Social Sele-

icipation within the family are formulated by J. Turowski, who states that "even a managing role of the woman in the contemporary agricultural family does not lead to a full partnership system in the family while excessive number of duties and roles does not allow women - despite mechanization of a part of all works and common availability of means of disseminating culture - to develop their own interests and aspirations, and expand their intellectual and emotional life"⁶.

The seventies in the Polish rural environment were characterized with a considerable growth of financial welfare of the rural population in relation to the sixties. That was not, however, growth equalling e.g. with respect to real incomes that obtained by the urban population. On the other hand, there was markedly shortened the distance between urban and rural households as regards their ownership of the so-called durable goods such as washing-machines, TV sets etc. It was accompanied by progressing mechanization of agricultural work and the first important socio-welfare benefits provided for the peasant population by the state (pensions) in exchange for passing the land over to the state. Simultaneously, and especially in the mid-seventies, outflow of the rural population to towns began to shrink. This migration had two interesting characteristics succeeding each other in time. In the first period (accelerated investment expansion) - the fifties and early seventies - mainly men looking for employment in construction and transport sectors were migrating permanently to towns. Accompanied by bigger mortality among men that led to shifting the burden of running farms to women. In 1975, "women represented almost one third of users of individual farms in Poland, while in the area size to 2 ha. as many as 92.2 per cent of all"⁷. Emigration of men was followed by intensified emigration of women mainly to the service sector and to the light industry. It is a result of

tion in Rural Marriages (in Polish), "Roczniki Socjologii Wsi" 1965, Vol. II.

⁶ Kryczka, Szwegrub, Turowski, op. cit., p. 23.

⁷ B. Tryfan, Rural Family in the Light of International Comparative Studies (in Polish), xeroxed copy.

women's desire to obtain a higher social and cultural status, which could not be ensured by farmer's profession and the rural environment either. Consequently, we are witnessing a situation today that young farmers face a deficit of a properly numerous group of candidates for their wives. Consequently, a marked "surplus" of women in older age groups and their "shortage" in younger age categories in the late 70's caused that the problem of rural environment's development, and thus - growth of agricultural production was largely a "female" problem.

Taking into account the statements formulated earlier on and concerning the theory of individualization of the small family and autonomization of the individual in the family as well as all changes which occurred in the rural environment in the 70's, there arises a question: has the observed trend towards women's emancipation been developed or checked under impact of old and new features of the situation?

I shall try to answer this question on the basis of analysis on participation of women in three areas of social contacts and relations, and namely in primary, indirect and societal contacts. Accordingly, an attempt will be made at verification of the assumed emancipation trends with regard to the woman's role within the family (primary interactions) and outside it (indirect and societal interactions). On the other hand, I shall omit here the problem of emancipation concerning the moment chosen for establishing the family.

Participation implies here a way of realization of the social role by a set of specific behaviours taking place within the family (primary interactions), social organizations (indirect interactions) and local community (societal interactions). Description of social participation should enable not only a partial verification of the thesis about a progressive emancipation of women within and without the family but also determine whether and to what extent intensity of participation in these fields is convergent or divergent in relation to one another? Two initial assumptions are made simultaneously. The first one is that the initiated emancipation process of rural women has been checked, and the other one that in the late seventies we could observe incoherence in levels of social participation of

rural women. It means, first of all, that intensive participation in the sphere of primary interactions excludes high degree of activity in the sphere of secondary and societal interactions, and the other way round. The data source for this paper has been provided mainly by empirical data obtained through questionnaire surveys conducted by a research team composed of rural sociologists from the Institute of Sociology in the University of Łódź in 1977 and 1978. The survey encompassed 1664 married couples living in 9 rural administrative communes in different parts of Poland. It was a statistically representative sample for the rural population with regard to its age and educational structure and socio-professional membership. The sample of interviewed women included 1664 persons between 18 and 65 years of age. Moreover, there were utilized conclusions afforded by the author's several years' participative observations in three villages belonging to one of central Poland's administrative provinces as well as conclusions from other sociological studies. One reservation should be made here, and namely that this report cannot be treated as a comprehensive and precise approach to the complex problem discussed here.

No matter what influence is exerted by rural women on decisions concerning foundation of a family and free choice of a spouse, one thing is certain - their role as a founder and future manager of an agricultural farm is much lower than that of a man. This is confirmed by data regarding the transfer of agricultural farms to successors alone. Our studies proved that from among all rural couples declaring possession of a successor as many as 75 per cent declared that the successor would be their son and only 5 per cent pointed at daughters. Moreover, I noticed a greater inclination to passing farms over to grandchildren being sons of daughters than to these daughters themselves. This fact is closely connected with a prevailing partilocal system of settling down. The woman usually moves over to the farm of her husband and his parents and not conversely. Consequently, the women already at the moment of her start to realize her role of a wife is controlled not only by her husband but especially by his parents. And although she is a family member she comes, nonetheless, from outside this family.

What is more, with this partilocal dwelling system there is closely connected a network of family candidates for marriage. Our studies revealed maintaining frequent and diversified contacts with families of close relatives on the husband's side and less frequent contacts with families on the wife's side. Accordingly, it can be said that the rural woman (a peasant woman) both at the time of assuming her role of a housewife, mother, and spouse and in the course of realizing this role is submitted to multilateral social control by her husband's relatives. Her position and behaviour are in most cases evaluated a little lower than position and behaviour of her husband, who anyway is the son.

In conflict situation between husband and wife, which I had an opportunity to observe in the country, it was the woman who was usually blamed rather than the man. Even when it was evident that the husband should be blamed, it was argued that "the woman should give in".

The partilocal dwelling system preserved in Poland along with still preserved three-generation families represent undoubtedly a factor largely restricting emancipation of women within the family.

Another problem is realization of the partnership principle in relation to the husband in different activities undertaken for the agricultural farm. The point here is whether there continues to be maintained a division of activities into "male" and "female", and to what extent important decisions with regard to the farm and the family are made in a unilateral or bilateral way? Division of activities into female and male within a farm has not been eliminated and generally speaking it cannot be fully eliminated. However, proportions and quality of these activities have changed. Due to diverse ties existing between agricultural farms and formal institutions and organizations the time budget of the peasant family, and thus also division of duties are, to a growing extent, divided into: (a) arranging formal matters connected with the farm, and (b) working time on the farm. The former activities absorb a growing amount of time and are mainly done by men. In fact, the woman is an advisor and even the side formulating a position to be taken by her

husband in offices, however, it is the husband who continues to be a main representative of the family in external affairs. This, in turn, leads to charging women with a greater number of activities, which were done by the husband previously. Accompanied by a declining assistance provided by children as labour on the farm, the woman becomes its chief multifunctional worker. The burden of household and productive activities carried by rural women is much higher than in the case of men. This situation is, however, differentiated according to the educational background of the married couple and their socio-professional membership. It appears here that a greater burden of e.g. household duties carried by women although generally prevailing in all categories, declines along with a higher educational background and higher professional status of the respondents⁸. Participation of rural women in the social life takes place primarily through their family-type activity.

Rural women almost as a rule do not belong to political, cultural and other organizations. The only exception here are Circles of Village Housewives, which associate nearly 60 per cent of all women living in villages. Membership in other social organizations does not exceed generally 5 per cent. It is worth underlining here that membership in Circles of Village Housewives provides a possibility for women of obtaining production means and acquiring skills for effective running of their households, which is likely to be a reason of their common participation in this organization. Thus, their organizational membership is strictly connected with interests of the family and the farm.

For their most part, these are women who do not work on agricultural farms that belong to political and cultural organizations. Their involvement ensues either from professional roles performed by them (e.g. teachers) or from the fact that they do not have their own families at present. This kind of involvement allows many of them to fill in their free time, which in the case of other women is taken up by their work in

⁸ B. Gałęski, Households (III). Division of Activities in Family and Utilization of Services (in Polish), "Wiś Współczesna" 1975, No 5.

the household and on the farm. Still, while belonging to these organizations they are usually only their members seldom holding any managerial functions. This remark does not refer, of course to strictly female organizations.

There can be also observed poor involvement of women in local representative organs of power and state administration, which in Poland include rural commune people's councils. In the total number of councillors in these councils women represented a very small share in the 1973-1977 term of office. Both during plenary sessions and in works of particular commissions women do not belong to those being most active. As it is put by B. Zawadzka "among the most active councillors there are absent persons holding managerial functions, very young people: the number of women is quite small as well"⁹. The activity of women at village meetings looks similar - they more often play the role of audience than of actors participating in the spectacle taking place.

Summing up the above discussion, it can be said that the family and the household represent the main field of social activity for peasant-women and the exclusive field of activity for nonpeasant-women. Even if they participate in work of an organization they do it mostly with view to benefits it may bring for their family and farm. Nonpeasant rural women are a little more active in works of other organizations than Circles of Village Housewives although the difference in this kind of involvement between peasant- and nonpeasant-women is here insignificant. Equally insignificant is the role of women in the life and representative organs of the entire village or commune community.

In other words, studies completed in the seventies indicate that outside their family emancipation of rural women is rather a problem of the future than of the present time. What is more, such a situation does not encounter any disapproval on the part of rural women. While enumerating their favourite jobs and occupations they would most often mention just the activi-

⁹ B. Z a w a d z k a, Rural Commune Representative Organ (in Polish), "Problemy Rad Narodowych" 1978, No 41, p. 47.

ties connected with the household and the farm (work connected with running the household would rank first - 37 per cent followed by work on the farm and in the garden - 17 per cent). Thus, it should be agreed that our initial assumption i.e. active participation within the family generally excludes active participation outside it, was right. The latter one is a domain of women without families with children and women performing special professional roles which predestine them to active involvement outside their family. Simultaneous active involvement in both directions seems to be fully impossible, and that is why in most cases bigger involvement in one type of activity is accompanied by weakening of the other, and conversely. J. Chałasiński was right saying that "Home as a cultural environment makes it necessary for the husband or wife to manage it. For many reasons it is rather a woman's than man's function. This function cannot be performed satisfactorily by a woman professionally employed on full time basis outside her home"¹⁰. Similarly hopes cherished for full emancipation of the rural woman within her family by journalists and sociologists do not look so favourably in the light of the above data as it might be expected.

The most disputable matter here is the problem of evaluation of the situation presented in this paper. It seems to me that the contribution of the woman to development of a community and the society as such through her proper realization of family functions is so indispensable and irreplaceable that the priority assigned to this role of the woman should be unquestionable.

¹⁰ J. Chałasiński, *Woman. Home. Culture*, quoted after: *Transformations of Polish Family* (in Polish), Warsaw 1975, p. 173.

Paweł Starosta

UCZESTNICTWO KOBIET
W ŻYCIU WIEJSKIEJ ZBIOROWOŚCI TERYTORIALNEJ

Podział populacji ludzkiej według biologicznych cech płci posiada doniosłe konsekwencje dla życia społecznego. Różnice biologiczne były podstawą pierwszego istotnego klasowego zróżnicowania społecznego. Członkowie klasy mężczyzn i klasy kobiet pełnili odmienne kompleksy ról społecznych, wykonywali odmienne zajęcia. W efekcie zajmowali odmienne pozycje społeczne w ramach danego społeczeństwa i w odmienny sposób uczestniczyli w jego życiu.

Podzieli, ale systematycznie, różnice biologiczne zaczynają tracić na znaczeniu na rzecz dyferencjacji ekonomiczno-społecznych. Tempo powyższego procesu jest odmienne w różnych środowiskach. Wyraźniejsze sekwencje ról żeńskich i męskich utrzymują się nadal w środowiskach tradycyjnych, podczas gdy w środowiskach zurbanizowanych ich odrębność i "czytelność" jest znacznie mniejsza.

W środowisku wiejskim trwale są nadal tradycyjne wzory uczestnictwa kobiet w życiu społecznym poprzez ich aktywność w polu interakcji pierwotnych, a z drugiej strony dokonały się makrostrukturalne przekształcenia: polityczne i bytowe. Przełamały one zamkniętość lokalnych układów życia i wprowadziły doń nowe pola interakcji: wtórnych i społecznościowych. W efekcie powstała sytuacja wielości dróg uczestnictwa lokalnego również dla kobiet wiejskich.

Powstaje zatem interesujący problem, do jakiego stopnia te trzy sfery uczestnictwa lokalnego są dla kobiet wiejskich zbliżone, a do jakiego rozbieżne? Czy, innymi słowy, intensywne uczestnictwo w polu interakcji pierwotnych zbiega się zgodnie z intensywnym uczestnictwem w polu interakcji wtórnych i społecznościowych, czy też nie? Właśnie to zagadnienie oraz jego uwarunkowania są przedmiotem analizy w niniejszym tekście.

Przyjmuje się równocześnie tezę o niespójności poziomów uczestnictwa społecznego kobiet wiejskich w poszczególnych polach interakcji społecznych. W szczególności intensywne uczestnictwo w polu interakcji pierwotnych wyklucza wysoką aktywność w polu interakcji wtórnych i społecznościowych oraz odwrotnie.