

*Andrzej Kaleta*

## **A Century of Humanistic Sociology and the Biographical Method**

### **Abstract**

The paper presents a synthetic résumé of the writings of Florian Znaniecki and Józef Chałasiński, with a particular focus on their most fundamental works: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* and *Młode pokolenie chłopów* ('The Young Generation of Peasants'). The author analyses the theses discussed in the books, stressing their contribution to the development of sociology world-wide, particularly in terms of rural sociology and the so-called Polish Method. The article discusses theoretical approaches and methodological solutions introduced by these two scholars, while also drawing attention to changes in the reception of the two cited works.

**Keywords:** biographical method, the Polish Method, Florian Znaniecki, Józef Chałasiński

A hundred years ago, in 1918, a modest Boston publishing house of Richard G. Bader<sup>1</sup> published the first two of the five volumes of *The Polish Peasant in*

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* was originally meant to be published by the prestigious Chicago University Press, which even printed the first two volumes in 1918. Following the infamy that affected W. I. Thomas – not inconceivably as a result of allegations concerning his moral values, fabricated by the FBI in retaliation for his progressive social views and a pacifist attitude – the president of the University of Chicago,

*Europe and America* (hereinafter *The Polish Peasant ...*)<sup>2</sup>. They were the effect of scientific cooperation between an American, William Isaac Thomas, and a Pole, Florian Znaniecki. Over just a few years (1914–1920) of joint research on the formation of one of the groups of contemporary American society – Polish immigrants of peasant origin ... *one class of modern society in all the specific complexity of its life* (Thomas and Znaniecki, 89) – they created the only work of its kind, integrating sociological theory *of at least a high, if not the highest class, with empirical research, on a scale never before seen in sociology* (Szacki, 63). Skillfully combining a social history of both nations with the biographical experiences of Polish peasants, as well as mutually redefining their views on the essence of society and its culture,<sup>3</sup> they introduced to sociology new theoretical concepts, methodological

---

with the tacit consent from colleagues from within the so-called industry, deprived him of work and canceled the publishing contract, reselling the rights – including the first two volumes – to the Boston publishing company. L. A. Coser (*Masters of Sociological Thought*, New York, 1997, p. 533) characterized the whole story as ... *one of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of American universities* (Dulczewski, 164–165; Gallino, 60–61).

<sup>2</sup> A year later (1919), volume III was published by the same publishing house, with the last two (IV and V) appearing in 1920, prepared for print mainly by Znaniecki (Dulczewski, 166).

<sup>3</sup> William Isaac Thomas (1863–1947) received a thorough university education (Tennessee – classical philology; Germany, Chicago – social sciences). While working on *The Polish Peasant ...* he was a distinguished American sociologist with established accomplishments, who, together with Robert Park takes one ... *from the office into the field* (M. Janowitz, Introduction to *W.I. Thomas, On Social Organization and Social Personality*, Chicago, 1966; quoted in Szacki, 61). Above all an empiricist, his engagement with theory was limited only to the scope necessary to direct and order the results of his research on the interaction of biological and socio-cultural factors in the determination of human behavior. One of the subjects of his multifaceted scientific interests was the question of Polish immigrants in the United States, which – during one of his many trips around Europe – prompted him to seek out Znaniecki, who at the time (1914) was the director of the Society for the Care of Expatriates in Warsaw and editor of the journal *Wychodźca Polski* [The Polish Expatriate] (Szczepanski, 22, 33; Szacki, 61).

Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) also had a thorough academic education – Warsaw, then, after being expelled from the University of Warsaw for participating in anti-Russian student speeches: Geneva, Zurich, Paris, Krakow – where in 1910 he received a doctoral degree on the basis of a dissertation titled *The Issue of Values in Philosophy*, which was also his first book. In contrast to Thomas, his temperament was mainly of a philosopher and theoretician (Szacki 21, 61).

ideas, and empirical materials, thereby posing a challenge to the problems with which the discipline was unable to cope in the earliest period of its development (Szczepański, 31–32),<sup>4</sup> or sometimes even today.

In 1938, twenty years after the publication of *The Polish Peasant ...*, a work of equal magnitude (2,276 printed pages) appears in Poland,<sup>5</sup> a direct and fullest reference to the methodological message of the American prototype. Written by Józef Chałasiński,<sup>6</sup> a student of Znaniecki's, and titled *The Young Generation of Peasants: Processes and Issues of the Formation of the Peasant Class in Poland* (hereinafter *The Young Generation ...*), it is considered to be one of the greatest achievements of Polish sociology to this day.<sup>7</sup> Znaniecki himself points to its importance for the world of sociology,

---

<sup>4</sup> The period in which *The Polish Peasant ...* was written – writes Jan Szczepański (Znaniecki's student) in the Preface to the Polish edition – was difficult for sociology, which was criticized, on the one hand, for a lack of its own research subject [... *elements, which for it are people, are too different, too changeable, too capricious, in a word too complex in themselves*], and, on the other hand, for a lack of effective research methods [... *almost every work in sociology offers a new method, making sociology a science with the most methods and the least results*]. In addition, many different theoretical systems clashed with each other: in Europe, Marxist historical materialism and Spencer's evolutionism with a sociology that postulated – under the influence of Dilthey, Rickert, and other philosophers – a fundamental distinction between natural and cultural phenomena; in the US, psychological sociology, which was a sociology that sought its premises and principles for the analysis of social phenomena and processes in psychology. Yet the main goal common to all of them, which was the construction of a general theory of human society, went unrealized, as none of the theories had ... *methods for analyzing individual facts, in order to use empirical research to build theories that could be verified in other studies, which severely frustrated sociologists* (Szczepański, 31–32).

<sup>5</sup> The main source of all the information about the structure of *The Young Generation of Peasants* contained in the present study is the second edition of the book, published by Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza (Warsaw, 1984), which was a reprint of the first edition published by Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza "Pomoc Oświatowa" (Warsaw, 1938).

<sup>6</sup> Józef Chałasiński was born on February 17, 1904, near Lublin. He died in Warsaw on December 5, 1979. He belonged to a group of the most outstanding Polish sociologists of the second and third quarters of the twentieth century. Those interested in further studies of his scientific figure should refer to a study by Włodzimierz Winclawski, published in *Eastern European Countryside* 2007/13 (Winclawski, 169–178).

<sup>7</sup> *The Young Generation of Peasants* was ranked 8th on the list of the most frequently cited works in Poland in the years 1981–1995, which was drawn up on the basis of the four leading Polish sociological periodicals. Together with Znaniecki's *The Sociology of Education* (10th), the book was one of only two published before 1939 (Winclawski, 169).

stating in the Preface to *The Young Generation* ... that ... *in sociological literature there is no work based on an equally rich autobiographical material concerning a specific social category of individuals* (the young generation – AK) ... and further that ... *the scientific conclusions, which the author himself derived from this data, provide this work with importance in the development of sociological thought* (Znaniecki, ix and xii).

**William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki:**  
***The Polish Peasant in Europe and America***

Although it seems that the vast majority of sociologists on every continent have come across *The Polish Peasant* ... at least during their university studies (especially the *Methodological Note*, if nothing else), it is unlikely that more than just a few have managed to read the book in its entirety, as it numbers (a trifle) over 1500 printed pages.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, before we try to point to its significance for sociology, we offer a précis integrating its main themes.

The subject of *The Polish Peasant* ... is the process of transformation of basic social groups – what Charles H. Cooley called primary groups (family, peer group, rural community) – that constitute, as it was assumed at the beginning of the twentieth century, the foundation of every society. This issue has always been particularly popular with American sociologists. This was largely due, on the one hand, to the historical role of the primary groups in the process of colonizing the American continent, and, on the other hand, to urban growth in the first decades of the twentieth century, mainly as a result of the processes of internal (from villages) and external (from other continents, including Europe) migration, resulting in the disintegration of the foundations of traditional social ties. This disintegration was observed both in the American province (rural communities) and in the newly formed metropolitan clusters. It was necessary to counteract this worrying phenomenon as quickly as possible, by initiating regenerative processes following an earlier analysis of the principles of organization,

---

<sup>8</sup> The first and, thus far, only Polish edition, which was not published until 1976, has 1,528 pages, most in very fine print (Thomas and Znaniecki). It is the main source of all information about the structure of the individual parts of *The Polish Peasant* ... contained in this study.

disorganization, and reorganization of primary groups, especially neighborhood ones.

The authors of *The Polish Peasant ...* adopted the assumption that the model properties (in the convention of the Weberian type of the ideal) of neighborhood groups are exhibited, almost perfectly, by the traditional peasant society, transferred to the American continent by Polish peasant-immigrants. Based on the analysis of their letters and diaries, attempts were made to describe the mechanism of the socio-cultural transformations of immigrants and their impact on the life of social environments – both the ones from which they came, as well as new ones to which they emigrated – in order to detect regularities that governed these transformations. Determining these regularities was to allow for the use of a rational social technique and acting in a socially desirable direction (Dulczewski, 155–156).

Thomas and Znaniecki reveal the theoretical-methodological details of the whole undertaking in the *Methodological Note* (54pp), which opens the first volume (*The Organization of the Primary Group*, 346pp), and at the same time the entire five-volume collection.<sup>9</sup> The following part (*Introduction to the First and Second Volumes*, 141pp) contains a synthetic analysis of social changes taking place in the traditional Polish rural community. The authors capture it from the perspective of the most important social groups and institutions: the peasant family and marriage, the class structure of the rural population, the rural community, economic life, religious and magical attitudes, as well as worldview and aesthetic interests; they show how the community is transforming from a social group dominated by community ties into a one dominated by unity, mainly due to the break in the special and cultural isolation of the village. The third integral element of the theoretical and methodological core of the whole work is a brief discussion of the peasant letter as the basic source of empirical materials used in *The Polish Peasant ...* (*The Form and Function of the Letter*, 9pp), which precedes the selection of letters between immigrants and members of their families in Poland, with short explanatory introductions (*Correspondence Between Members of Family Groups*, 139pp).

The second volume (400pp) – bearing the same title as the first (*The Organization of Primary Groups*) – consists of a selection of correspondence

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Methodological Note* is preceded by a two-page *Foreword*.

between members of individual family groups that indicates the distribution of family solidarity and personal relationships outside of marriage and family.

The third volume (*The Diary of an Immigrant*, 307pp) contains a comprehensive (246pp) diary of one of the immigrants (Władysław Wiśniewski), with a theoretical introduction (*Introduction*, 50pp) and a summary (*Conclusions*, 11pp) dedicated to diaries as autobiographical material.

In the fourth (*Disorganization and Reorganization in Poland*, 204pp) and fifth (*Organization and Disorganization in America*, 217pp) volumes we deal, first of all, with the theoretically systematized analysis of the disorganization and reorganization of rural communities in Poland, and the organization and disorganization of immigrants' lives in America.<sup>10</sup> Both show the mechanisms of social change taking place both in the traditional rural community and in immigrant communities in America. The two volumes also include methodological explanations regarding various types of documents (press articles, local magazines, statutes, chronicles, reports, court protocols, etc. – what is nowadays called “official documents”), which constitute an empirical basis for the analyses in the last two volumes.

Despite the fact that there already existed in the United States ... *a rich theoretical tradition of the so-called armchair sociology, while, on the other hand, social surveys and first studies in the field of rural sociology were being developed ...* (Szacki, 63), we must once again emphasize that Thomas and Znaniecki's study was recognized as a breakthrough for sociology. This was due to many of its scientific attributes, four of which – at least in light of the literature on the subject – seem to be decisive.

Jerzy Szacki draws attention to the first one by pointing out that Thomas and Znaniecki were the first to combine something that contemporary sociology in general treated separately, that is, the construction of theory and empirical research<sup>11</sup> ... *and, in addition, they offered certain postu-*

---

<sup>10</sup> In the final (fifth) volume, the concept of Americanization is formulated, among others, showing the lack of foundation for the American policy of striving to ... *melt immigrant groups in one melting pot ...* according to the Anglo-Saxon pattern of cultural pluralism (Dulczewski 169–170), which, in light of current discussions on the issues of migration, is another proof of the universality of many conclusions found in *The Polish Peasant ...*

<sup>11</sup> Johan Magde does not quite agree with this view. In his study *The Origins of Scientific Sociology* (London, 1970) – devoted to the fourteen most important works in the field of

lates which, although not absent from sociology, were not used in practice (Szacki, 64):

- sociology is to be a scientific knowledge of society, and, therefore, it cannot focus on the limited and unique experience of the individual by isolating its undertaken problems from the whole of social life;
- the basis of sociology is methodologically grounded research, organized by a specific concept of the social process, in which all facts are considered in relation to other facts, that is, culture as a whole, based on the assumption that the influence of conditions on individuals is a complicated process of mutual influence;
- the main goal of sociology, as well as all other sciences, is causal explanation, constituting the basis of social technique<sup>12</sup> ... *giving people power over social processes which they previously achieved over nature* ... (Szacki, 68); this despite the fact that in sociology the principle of causality occurs in the form of social causation, constituted differently than physical causation<sup>13</sup> (Szacki, 63–72);

thus creating the foundations of a sociological system called humanistic sociology, in opposition to naturalism dominating sociology at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The second reason finds extensive justification in the preface to the Italian edition of the first volume of *The Polish Peasant ...*,<sup>14</sup> written by

empirical sociology created in 1897–1939 (including *The Polish Peasant ...* – chapter 2, *Peasants and Workers*, pp. 52–57) – he points out that the first sociologist theorizing on the basis of solid empirical material was Émile Durkheim. Especially clear traces of this method of practicing sociology can be found in his famous work *Le Suicide: étude de sociologie* (Paris, 1987). Others followed, with Thomas and Znaniecki leading the way.

<sup>12</sup> In more contemporary parlance, social technique is applied sociology, which realizes practical functions, as well as the natural sciences, in relation to which ... *social sciences are behind, and not by their very nature incapable of attaining the degree of accuracy proper to the natural sciences* (Szacki, 68).

<sup>13</sup> Social causality includes an objective and a subjective component, expressed by two separate but complementary components of social theory, in the form of sociology which deals with values (objective, cultural elements of social life), and social psychology which focuses on the analysis of attitudes (subjective characteristics of members of a social group) (Szacki, 70–72).

<sup>14</sup> An Italian edition, titled *Il contadino Polacco in Europa e in America*, was published in Milan in 1968.

Luciano Gallino, in which the author indicates the essential significance of the work for the development of sociological theory, including the key theory – undertaking issues of the relationship between the social personality of the individual, the place it occupies in the social structure and culture – that is, the theory of social action. According to the Milanese sociologist, Thomas and Znaniecki contributed to its development to a greater extent than Weber, Mead, or Freud ... *presenting how each concrete action results from the transformation of a given attitude according to a given structural and cultural situation* (Gallino, 67). What is more, even today ... *it is rare to find sociological work that, even implicitly, would not recognize that the analysis of social structures cannot ignore the knowledge of the results of socialization in terms of the distribution of basic attitudes in society, and that the same economic, legal, or political relations produce radically different results in terms of social activity, depending on the personality to which they are applied* (Gallino, 70).

In both colloquial views and serious scientific analyses concerning the influence of *The Polish Peasant ...*, the most important issue for the development of sociology is the novelty of the book's methodological and methodical layers. Let us be reminded that Thomas and Znaniecki used a new type of empirical materials: subjective autobiographies (letters and diaries) and objective documents (protocols from various institutions, including judicial ones, letters to Polish Newspapers, notes in parish documents, the chronicles of Polish-American societies, etc.). This resulted from the already prefigured theoretical preferences of both scholars, whose position was that the study of social reality ... *should take into account its subjective side, the consciousness of the acting individual* (Szacki, 64). The authors considered such documents as an excellent type of sociological material, allowing for the possibility of not only describing facts, but above all of explaining the internal, psychosocial mechanism of the process of transformation. Without denying the legitimacy of numerous opinions claiming that the introduction of personal documents into research was a great discovery for contemporary sociology that signaled a new direction in empirical research and a hope for developing a general social theory (Szczeptański, 34–35; Szacki, 64, 78), it seems that in this case we are dealing with a shortage of rational judgment. The manner in which autobiographical documents were used in *The Polish Peasant ...* was subjected to thorough and critical

analyses,<sup>15</sup> in which it was argued ... *that despite the abundance and diversity of content, published documents have little meaning as elements confirming the hypothesis formulated by the authors* (Gallino, 66).

Finally, the fourth circumstance associated with the considerable influence of Thomas and Znaniecki's work on the development of other areas of sociology: not without many important reasons, it is still considered to be the theoretical and methodological foundation of rural sociology, especially one practiced in Poland between 1918 and 1939, also known as its *golden age*.<sup>16</sup> Numerous citations of and references to *The Polish Peasant ...* in the works of its leading representatives, and above all in the already mentioned *Young Generation of Peasants* by Chałasiński, seem undisputed. A similar impact, although on a much smaller scale, is mentioned in the context of family sociology, for which the analysis of the processes of change in the primary group and in the social institution of the traditional rural community was a significant help in shaping its research agenda. The introduction in *The Polish Peasant ...* of issues of social technique as a practical dimension of sociology, in turn, was a milestone in the development of applied sociology. Particularly of that associated with social policy, for which Thomas and Znaniecki sketched out a scheme of the formation and the functioning of the mechanisms of disorganization in primary groups, treated as a starting point for launching activities to combat social pathologies.

Finally, we cannot fail to mention the importance of the work in question for the global reception of Polish sociology. *No one else's surname* – writes Szacki in reference to Znaniecki – *has been associated so closely, and*

---

<sup>15</sup> In 1938, at a symposium organized by the Social Science Research Council to assess the contributions of *The Polish Peasant ...* to the social sciences Herbert Blumer (in a study titled *An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* [New York, 1939]) concluded, among other things, that the relationship between the analytical layer of the work and the documents was weak and not subsumed by any schema, but where this relationship existed, the documents fully confirmed the authors' conclusions. In 1945, a book appeared showing the results of using personal documents in social sciences in America [L. Gottschalk, C. Kluckhohn, R. Angell, *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology*, New York 1945], including its critical assessment (Szczepański, 36; Gallino, 66).

<sup>16</sup> A very detailed discussion about this important period in the development of rural sociology can be found, among others, in Winclawski (2012) and Vonderach.

*in the eyes of so many people, with Polish sociology. And, further ... he is one of those Polish scholars whose significance can be reasonably discussed within the universal history of the social sciences ... because of [...] what he brought to the sociology of the world in its crucial period* (Szacki, 7–8); not only but mainly, let us add, thanks to the co-authorship of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.

### Józef Chałasiński: *The Young Generation of Peasants*

The empirical basis of the four volumes of *The Young Generation of Peasants*<sup>17</sup> – included, let us recall, by the co-author of *The Polish Peasant ...* among the most important works in the history of sociology<sup>18</sup> – also consists of autobiographical materials in the form of 1,544 autobiographies (from several to several dozen pages long), which were submitted to a competition organized in 1936–1937 by the journal *Przysposobienie Rolnicze* [Agricultural Training], under the scientific supervision of the State Institute of Rural Culture.<sup>19</sup> Similarly to the work of Thomas and Znaniecki, it consists of an analytical part (theoretical and methodological considerations concerning the attitudes and values of young villagers, considered as an important element of the then-forming Polish society) and documentation (forty-nine full autobiographies and numerous fragments

---

<sup>17</sup> Volume I: *The social background of the movements of rural youth in Poland* (326pp), preceded by a *Foreword* by prof. Florian Znaniecki (pp. iv–xviii); Volume II: *The world of life, work, and aspirations of rural youth circles* (553pp); Volume III: *The role of rural youth circles in socio-cultural transformations of the countryside* (601pp); Volume IV: *Concerning the peasant school* (581pp) along with the *Annex* containing documentation from the diary contest (pp. 559–581).

<sup>18</sup> *The Young Generation ...* has been included, among others, in the German lexicon of the top 750 sociological books. See Chalasiniski, Józef, in *Lexikon der Soziologischen Werke*, ed. Georg W. Oesterdiekhoff, Westdeutscher Verlag: Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 114–115.

<sup>19</sup> A non-university research institute in the field of sociology, launched in Warsaw by the decree of the President of the Republic on September 30, 1936. Its director was Józef Chałasiński, who managed it from 1936 to 1939. the institute conducted sociological studies of the Polish countryside, striving for a multilateral, comprehensive description of the peasant social layer – at the time, a little over 60% of the Polish population – and its place in the social structure of Polish society and participation in the creation of national culture (Winclawski, 172).

of biographies and autobiographies illustrating the issues undertaken in the analytical part).

In the first volume, Chałasiński analyzes social movements of young people in Poland, considering ... *socio-cultural sources and factors in the development of these movements in light of the historically shaped structure of the village in Poland and in Polish society* (Chałasiński, xxiii). Analyzing the conditions and ways of life, as well as relations between the older and younger generations of Polish villagers in the period following the restoration of independence as a result of the resolutions of the First World War (1918), the author points to their new dimension. Its characteristic feature is the activity of rural youth – poorly demonstrated in earlier historical periods – based on the group's aspirations to take up a worthy place in the society of sovereign Poland, obtaining finally the status of citizenship that was previously reserved only for representatives of the so-called elite (formerly mainly nobility, then also landowners and intelligentsia).

While in the first volume Chałasiński analyzes the genesis of social movements of rural youth from the perspective of the archaic class-layered structure of pre-war Polish society, in the second volume he discusses the issue from a regional dimension. The author shows a close relationship between the emancipatory aspirations of the young generation of rural residents with the specificity of economic and cultural differences between eastern and central (former Russian partition), western (former Prussian partition), and southern (former Austrian partition) areas of interwar Poland.<sup>20</sup>

The third volume of *The Young Generation ...* is devoted to the local circles of rural youth and the importance of these organizations for initiating and stimulating the processes of developing a social identity of the young representatives of the peasantry. Chałasiński puts forth conflicts arising from the clash of the emancipatory aspirations of young people, slowly but systematically releasing their aspirations for autonomy from the guardianship of the historically dominant older generation of peasants, which itself was strongly influenced by tradition represented primarily by the institutions of the Church and the State. In the more psychological

---

<sup>20</sup> In the years 1772–1795, the sovereign Polish state ceased to exist due to the agreements between its neighbors: Austria, Prussia, and Russia (known as the invaders), which divided its territory. Poland was newly reborn in 1918.

dimension, we are dealing here with the collision of opposing types of social personality: *a peasant citizen with a Polish Catholic*.

The object of interest in the final volume of *The Young Generation ...* is the rural school and its role in shaping the attitudes and values of rural youth, as well as the course of empowerment of the peasant class. Among the subjects under consideration is not only the process of rural socialization (conflict between family and school environments, socio-cultural roles of a student and a shepherd), but, above all, the complicated issue of rural intelligentsia and its role in bringing changes to the countryside. On the one hand, Chałasiński describes and analyzes in a sociologically deep manner the role of teachers in creating and animating social movements of young people. On the other hand, he shows the complicated fate of the young peasant intelligentsia (children of peasants who, thanks to their own abilities and motivations, as well as many other so-called successful management of fate, obtained a better education in the city), in particular problems with returning to their native environments. The source of these problems can be found both in conflicts with primary groups (family, old peer group, rural community), resulting from the youth's new social roles of rural intelligentsia, as well as in having to redefine anew their own social identity.

The last chapter of the fourth volume, titled *Peasants as a Social Layer*, as at the same time a summary of the gigantic work whose central issue is, let us remind ourselves, the formation of the peasant layer in the interwar Poland (1918–1939). Chałasiński considers this process as one of the most important ones for the then-contemporary state and society, because it results in the transformation of the social structure, with all of its weaknesses and imperfections. It was these transformations that resulted in yet another loss of independence, this time as a result of the war declared on Poland by Hitler's Germany on September 1, 1939.

The outbreak of World War II, as well as political changes in Poland after 1945, significantly limited the scientific discussion of Chałasiński's work (Winławski, 173–174), although there was by then no doubt that we were dealing with a book important not only for the methodological foundations of sociological research using autobiographical materials, but also making a significant contribution to sociological theory ... *whose theoretical meaning could have only been assessed by a few sociologists in Poland* [working at that time – AK] (Znaniński, ix).

*Improved at the highest level ...* manner of proceeding with autobiographical material was precisely defined by Znaniecki, who indicated that, in contrast to the questionnaire technique and the interview, the diary offers a chance to reach a different type of factual data, enabling the construction of a more accurate picture of social relations. About no other large group of people – wrote this great sociologist – do we have the knowledge comparable to that obtained about the young generation of peasants in Poland, based on a meticulous analysis of the youth autobiography made by Chałasiński and his associates (Znaniecki ix, xii).<sup>21</sup>

*The Young Generation ...* is also a significant contribution to several important areas of sociological research. Apart from the most hermetic (in the sense of being difficult to understand beyond Poland) historical-sociological analysis of the formation of the Polish society and the state in the interwar period, one should emphasize the more universal findings in the following matters: the social structures (different categories of rural youth, taken into account from the perspective of the different roles and aspirations of the peasant layer); social development (evolution of the peasant layer); social movements (etiology and factors of social movement of rural youth); and the theory of socialization. Within the latter, still valid are concepts of the development of social identity in rural institutions of natural and direct education, as well as mechanisms of socialization shaping social personality excessively adapted to the needs of specific social environments (Kowalski, 142).

Even more significant appears to be the contribution to the development of at least two subdisciplines of sociology: the sociology of the village (concretization of the concept of a rural community), and, above all, sociology of the youth, also known today as juvenology.

Referring to Karl Mannheim, Chałasiński ascribes to the analyzed young Polish peasants the status of an independent social group that integrates old and new values in its behavior; one that is oriented toward present and future roles; that fulfills the task of mediating the dialogue of the more-or-less conservative circles of society and the village community with the global society. However, *The Young Generation ...* brings to sociological theory of

---

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately – we should add – knowledge that is poorly recognized in the so-called sociological world, because *The Young Generation ...* has never been completely translated into any foreign language.

youth much more important threads, because it constitutes ... *a study of the social movement of peasant youth, which consciously strives to transform class structure by introducing new criteria of human values, creating new patterns, new personality types* (Znaniński, 13). Thanks to Chałasiński, youth sociology received new premises for a theoretical analysis of the essence of intergenerational relations, relations between descending and ascending generations of peasants, considered on the example of the youth, for whom the weakening of the cultural isolation of the countryside and entrance into the orbit of an increasingly modern state meant the loss of what Znaniński called the social charm of the traditional village, in turn heightening rebellious moods against the “descending” generation and the social order that it represented. The inability to channel these rebellious moods by creating new but socially legitimized opportunities to realize the individualistic aspirations of the youth opens a way toward antisocial activities, also known as pathologies. The quintessence of this process – today referred to as the reorganization of intergenerational relations in an industrial society – is captured by the statement from the first volume of *The Young Generation: ... Whoever is removed from a positively evaluated activity, or who, under certain conditions, loses the possibility of engaging in such social action, satisfies the longing for meaning on the path of destructive activity* (Chałasiński, 243). Znaniński recognized this as an explanation of not only the phenomenon of social pathology among the youth, but also of the genesis of destructive mass movements, exemplified in the historical period under analysis by fascism and communism, and perhaps, in the realities of the modern world, by terrorism.

### Post Scriptum

Both *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, as well as *The Young Generation of Peasants*, ironically brought their authors as much personal scientific satisfaction as disappointments.

After publishing *The Polish Peasant ...*, ... *Thomas and Znaniński's paths diverged definitively and, although each of them later created separate, no less valuable works* (Gallino, 59), undoubtedly in the common awareness of sociologists their names are forever associated with this one, joint publication.

We have already signaled (see footnote 1) Thomas's personal drama, who, as a result of a moral scandal during his work on the book, was

deprived of a professorship in Chicago. He was never granted a permanent university post, and, forced to move to New York (where he was dutifully followed by Znaniecki), only occasionally joined in the final editorial work ... *giving Znaniecki completely free reign* (Dulczewski, 166). In the following years – likely due to the growing interest in their joint work both in the US and abroad<sup>22</sup> – there began an endless and at times disparaging discussions of both scholars' intellectual contribution to the book. There have been many attempts to “measure” the merits of each one, forgetting, or simply not realizing, that in *The Polish Peasant ... individual concepts and formulations so closely complement one another that it seems to the reader to be a work of one author, and it is impossible to separate the contribution of each of the co-authors* (Gallino, 59). It is worth emphasizing, however, that Znaniecki's role was largely depreciated,<sup>23</sup> and he himself did nothing to conceal his distance to the work on *The Polish Peasant ...* First of all, he did not consider it the peak of his intellectual capabilities, which were related less to empiricism and more to sociological theory, *to which he managed to refer in the “Methodological Note,” adapting ... some elements of his philosophy of values*. Furthermore, he was disappointed with American society, in which he did not find ... *an atmosphere of stimulating intellectual*

---

<sup>22</sup> In 1937, *The Polish Peasant ...* was included on the list of 6 books in the field of social sciences (not only sociology, but also in anthropology, economics, history, political science, psychology, and statistics) selected by The Science Research Council as the most well-known in the USA. By 1939, there were around 30 reviews of the book in English and 10 in other languages (Dulczewski, 176).

<sup>23</sup> We deliberately omitted this thread as, in our opinion, it deserves the least attention. We refer interested readers to the balanced position presented by the Italian sociologist Luciano Gallino: *Even as late as a dozen years ago, in the works on the history of sociology, there were consistent opinions attributing Znaniecki a secondary role. Characteristic is, among other things, the view presented by Barnes, who in his well-known publication titled “Introduction to the History of Sociology” states that Znaniecki's participation in the development of The Polish Peasant ... consisted mainly in the role of translator, while his creative contribution was limited to the problem of the concept of value, whereas most of the methodological study was to come from Thomas. In recent years this view has been rejected, emphasizing the participation of the Polish co-author, which he rightly deserved. In light of Znaniecki's later works, in which he showed himself as one of the greatest scholars in the field of sociology, his contribution to the methodological and theoretical part of The Polish Peasant ... is unquestionably impressive* (Gallino, 61–62).

*interests* (Szacki 42), nor did he ever get a chance of obtaining a university position that would correspond to his intellect and ambitions (Szacki, 26).<sup>24</sup>

*The Young Generation of Peasants* also brought its creator a lot of satisfaction, but ... it too was not without disappointments, perhaps even negatively affecting Chałasiński's fate as a scientist.

First of all, as we have already signaled, the book's reception was interrupted by historical circumstances (first, the war of 1939–1945, followed by the grim period of Stalinism in 1945–1956), and thus ... *a work that is widely regarded by us (in Poland – AK) as 'having no equal in the world' has not been honestly researched to this day* (Winclawski, 175).<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the book has become more of a political than a scientific event, which usually impairs the sociologist's role as a scholar and practitioner of sociology as a science. It contained an ideological substrate that was too clearly outlined and considered controversial by the social elites. Its young creator (Chałasiński was only 34 years old) was asking ... *the question of whether Polish society, which put so much effort into digging itself out of the civilizational backwater, in which there is insufficient change in its traditional social structure and social mentality, which experiences more intensely than anywhere else the effects of global economic crises, which is surrounded left and right by hostile totalitarian states, which – finally – has a conflicted political elite, can find in itself forces able to overcome the stalemate, lead the country on the road of progress, and join other democratic, dynamically developing European countries.*<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, despite the generally progressive pronouncements of not only *The Young Generation*, but also of his many other publications – seemingly consistent with the assumptions of Poland's socialist doctrine – Chałasiński did not accept Marxism as a theoretical basis of sociological research. This was accompanied by his ardent identification with Znaniecki's sociological school, which expressed a resistance to any ideological

---

<sup>24</sup> Znaniecki was even more disappointed by the American Poles who ... *were unable to perpetuate the positive traits of Poles in their old homeland, but, to an absurdly exaggerated degree, accepted from the American society all of its negative traits* ("Intelektualna Ameryka – napisał Europejczyk" in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 1977, vol. XXII, no. 4, pp. 39; quoted in Szacki, 25).

<sup>25</sup> Winclawski quotes the opinion of Jan Szczepański, another prominent Polish sociologist also from Florian Znaniecki's school.

<sup>26</sup> W. Winclawski, p. 174–175.

pressure. Chałasiński's adopted attitude marginalized not only his position in the system of contemporary science, but also made him less susceptible to the newly formed postwar Western style of sociology (adopted in Poland in the 1960s), characterized by ... *a narrow empiricism and the dominance of questionnaire surveys. Separating himself categorically from those tendencies, Chałasiński condemned himself to marginalization in the sociological environment. He surrounded himself with a small group of enthusiasts of the autobiographical method, developing the diary movement in Poland, clearly neglecting both methodological reflection as well as theory. This led to a clear loss of creative expansion. He ceased to function as an intellectual and a scholar ... At the end of 1974 [nearly forgotten, especially by the younger generations of sociologists – AK]<sup>27</sup> he retired, and died five years later (Winclawski, 171–172).*

## References

- Chałasiński, J. 1984 *Młode pokolenie chłopów. Procesy i zagadnienia kształtowania się warstwy chłopskiej w Polsce*, Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Chałasiński, J. 1976 'Polonia amerykańska' in: *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Dulczewski, Z., Znaniński, F. 1984 *Życie i dzieło*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.
- Gallino, L. 1974 *Refleksje nad dziełem o polskim chłopie w Ameryce. Kultura i społeczeństwo July–September*.
- Kowalski, S. 1975 'Znanińskiego socjologia wychowania' in: *Florian Znaniński i jego rola w socjologii*, Poznań.
- Szacki, J. 1986 *Znaniński*, Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna.

---

<sup>27</sup> References to Józef Chałasiński and his work began to appear more widely immediately after his death. In 1980, the youngest adepts of the newly revitalized sociology at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, organized a nationwide scientific conference "Józef Chałasiński: Sociologist and Humanist," which was repeated (always in December and always in Toruń) in 1984, 1989, and 1994. The first two meetings culminated in post-conference publications; a bio-bibliographic guide "Introduction to Chałasiński" was prepared for the third one. Despite the fact that more than a dozen other works devoted to Chałasiński were published after 1980, his achievements, including *The Young Generation of Peasants*, still await a serious synthesis.

- Szczepański, J. 1976 'Dzieło W.I. Thomasa i F. Znanieckiego w rozwoju socjologii' in: *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Thomas, W. I., Znaniecki, F. 1976 *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.
- Vonderach, G. 2015 *Die Erfoschung landlicher Lebenswelten. Streifzuge durch die Geschichte der landlicher Sozialforschung*, Aachen: Sharker Verlag.
- Winclawski, W. 2007 *Józef Chałasiński J. A Classic of Polish Sociology. Eastern European Countryside* 13.
- Winclawski, W. 2012 *Polnische Landsoziologie in ihrem Wandel. Land Berichte* 3.
- Znaniecki, F. 1984 'Przedmowa' in: J. Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów. Procesy i zagadnienia kształtowania się warstwy chłopskiej w Polsce*, vol. I., Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza.