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GIRLS, BOYS AND COMMUNITY: FAMILY AND YOUTH IN XIX CENTURY RURAL FINLAND

Research on the history of everyday life has focused on the role of memory. For example, memory serves as a useful reference in the examination of the labour performed by children and their status in the family hierarchy. Unfortunately, there is scant systematic information on child labour. The status of children, however, has been widely studied and the term «history of mentalities» has been used in this connection.

The history of mentalities deals often with ordinary people's attitudes toward their own everyday life. As a scientific field or approach, it focuses on a series of fascinating topics, which have not been studied much earlier due to the scarcity of sources. Such topics are varying attitudes toward childhood and family life, youth, ageing, the study of eccentric, criminal and exceptional behavior, as well as the study of manner and social life. The historiographical interest in childhood is not a new phenomenon. Moreover, the passage from childhood to adulthood, i.e. youth, has emerged in the focus of historical research.

The following examples of the status and practices of youth in households are primarily from 19-th century eastern Finland. Traditionally, families in these regions specifically welcomed sons, as they were known to be useful work force later on. The grown-up daughters would marry and move in the husband's home and thus were not permanent help to the household. «Daughter-in-law in the household, daughter in another family», was a saying in eastern Finland¹.

Sons and daughters were an essential work force in an agrarian family. They either stayed working in their parental household or left for the service in another farm. The question of who stayed and who left was not entirely dependent on

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gender. Sometimes sons also left in order to live and work in their bride's parents household.

«God does not provide for the lazy». The agrarian community's pillar in upbringing children was the farm and the family living and working on it. With the help of some judicial material there searcher of social history can obtain some clues to the course of family life. However, the information on children and young people is fairly scarce and scattered in different references.

It was natural for the children of the household to form a major part of the work force, particularly with farm-owners families. When the children were still too young, or when there were not sufficiently family members to cope with all the farm work, the household had to look for non-family work force. As we examine the status of hired men, it is worth keeping in mind the different conditions the servants were experiencing in the western and eastern parts of Europe. In Western and Central Europe it was rare to use persons youth as living-in servants, where as in the farming regions of Eastern Europe it was typical to see large numbers of servants who had already formed their own families².

The more grown-up youths could be used for various agricultural tasks. For example, the youngsters were often taken along to tending the cattle. I have specifically analyzed judicial sources for my research. The district court records clearly show that growing children were considered to be cheap, almost free labour a shepherd boy or a girl was compensated for his or her labour in the form of food and training. The employing household would not necessarily pay any wage³.

A small child did not instantly bring bread into the household, but needed care and security from the adult members of the community. A Swedish study concludes that in the old agrarian society the under 18-19 years olds would consume more than they could produce with their work contribution. On the other hand, children of different ages would take care of each other with in the families. The farm-owner's own children formed a natural part of the labour force, and the concept of childhood, as we know it today, was not part of these people's thinking. Daughters were trusted with child careduties⁴. After having taken part in the farm work and gaining strength, the children gradually became full members of the working community. The vitality of the extended family was base don't his group of growing children.

Children's importance as a future resource increased in the 19-th century as labour-intensive work increased. For example, the number of live stock could be increased if there were children or young people in the household to tend

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cattle⁵. They became a source of work force. Overall, it is worth analysing what advantages the use of children or the growing youth offered to the households. Children's resource — both physical and mental attributes — were connected to the kind of work contribution that was required by the agricultural working environment. Many farm duties called for physical strength, which the children obviously did not have. This was a common knowledge. Moreover, there were also tasks which required experienced knowledge and skills, which again could not be expected from children and young people. Children were usually initiated into the working life by including them in various chores. It became evident that children possessed increasing physical strength as well as knowledge and skills that only developed with age. Most importantly, children and young people had a special kind of «capital», free time, with which they could compensate for their otherwise limited resources. This resource did not require lengthy training⁶.

Youth interaction and having fun it was common in eastern Finland to hold autumn feast after the summer's work was completed⁷. The neighborhood youth would also gather for spinning, which gave an opportunity to merrymaking.

Engagement was preceded by certain rites (e.g. «tuppijuhlat» or sheath knife feast and «tarakalla ajo» or riding a bicycle with a girl on the rack), which gave a chance to young bachelors to court young women and explore their generosity. The tradition of boys meeting girls at night, a kind of «nightly session», developed particularly in the regions where girls would in the summer time sleep alone in a separate farm building a way from the rest of the family. This tradition evolved gradually into a strictly regulated form of social etiquette. A boy would talk to a girl through the door of her outbuilding. If he managed to be allowed inside after several attempts, he might have also been allowed to spend part of the night there as well⁸.

The favorable attitude of the parents and kin toward the night-time courting is evident in folklore. The elders clearly condoned the nightly adventures: «Although the older people were disturbed in their sleep when a flock of boys tramped through the main room into the girls' chambers, fussed about and talked nonsense for hours on end, not one word of complaint was uttered by older members of the household»⁹.

Eros, youth and village community. What was the attitude in the agrarian community to eroticism and sexuality? Historical research has expressed interest in illicit intercourse, illegitimate child birth and sexual offences although as sassing emotional field have been proven difficult. It is no easy task

to grasp the structures which would enable in perpetration, by means of historical research, of emotion and patterns of thinking, which prevailed in agrarian communities. Sexuality was a particularly «private» domain in the life of a young person and the 19-th century only saw the very first initial step so fits verbal expression. As literacy became more common, it gradually enabled the literary observation of the first-person experiences. Social historical research has examined marriage as a particular structural element of «family strategy», by which the agrarian community and the peasant household secured lively hood and continuity. The peasants valued the opinions of family and kin as well as the economic aspects of marriage¹⁰.

19-th century peasantry attempted to control the moral behavior and married life of its members. «Among the peasantry it is common that the mothers never talk to their daughters about the so-called menstruation. They think of it as something shameful to talk about with their daughters and they are careful not to mention anything like that. As the young girl then begins to menstruate, she will be soon astonished and confused that she will nearly die»¹¹. Fertile women, especially young women, were controlled by monitoring the regularity of their menstrual cycle. Mother's moral code made them excellent controllers of their daughters¹². Another controller was the Church. The Lutheran Church would own the rites of passage—it practically absorbed the individual. Children were given a Christian name in baptism and in first communion, and people were buried according to church rituals.

The opportunities for the young people. Marriage was often seen as an opportunity to rearrange the household resources in the agrarian community. Starting a new family did not only change the lives of the two young persons, it also reflected to the lives of their future children and their parental families. Wedding festivities was an opportunity to make the rights and duties of the new relatives known in public. This rite of passage was perhaps the most dramatic turning point in the lives of the marrying young couple. They entered a new status, that of the married couple. It must be emphasized that in societies that relied on nature's resources for livelihood starting a new family was not merely the concern of the individuals. In the agrarian community, the fields, livestock and other hereditary forms of ownership and economic resources were vital necessities. In such communities the parents and kinship ties had tight control over marriages and the choice of spouse¹³.

The spouse candidate's ability to work was highly regarded in the agrarian way of life. His or her labor force appeared to be the prime resource that he or she was expected to bring into the household. Equally important were health and wealth when the prominent features of a young person seeking to marry were being evaluated. The ideal bridal characteristics were «wealth and kind appearance and physical strength», as the primary schoolteacher Johannes Hayha emphasized in his writings¹⁴. The engagement was equal to marriage and the first commitment by the families involved. In some cases the intended marriage came into nothing (they have been documented in the

records of the district court sessions): The parents had to stand trial in the court for broken engagement actions. Preceding the marriage plans, the bride and bride groom candidates were sometimes employed in the respective in-law farms for months. If the engagement broke off, the bride and bridegroom candidates collected wages for the weeks and months during which they had worked without pay¹⁵.

The «white» pages of the history of youth. The Swedish historian Matts Jacobsson has studied young people as a potential resource which moved, or may have moved for service in another household. It is difficult to know when exactly a young person reached independent control of his or her life. Historical research has often focused on the individual boundary marks or turning points in life course. Confirmation or the first communion was a threshold into maturity and adulthood. Before this stage in life, it was out of question for girls and boys to go to dances or get involved in any other form of courtship. Oral tradition has it that in Saaksmaki a young girl was very strictly forbidden in the following manner when she had wished to go to a dance before having been confirmed: «There is no going anywhere before you have licked the pastor's fingertips». The pastor's «fingers» were not «licked» before he had administered the first communion to the confirmands¹⁶.

On their way to church, the young ones would wear their Sunday best, which for boys required a pair of trousers. In peasant Finland, the confirmation and the first communion represented the end of childhood and the debut into the adult life. However, social historians have indicated that marriage was the final threshold into adulthood. In accordance with their new status, the parents had an obligation to provide for their children. Marginalized women had exceptional life courses, but a mother of an illegitimate child also met the end of her youth when it was time to give birth to her child, as it became her responsibility to care for and raise the child without a husband¹⁷.

It is very difficult to analyze from the sources when exactly a young person who was dependent on his or her parents made the transformation into an «independent adult». There are examples of mutual dependency even after the child had moved away from home and started a family of his or her own. In the 19-th century, family and kinship ties represented a security insurance against various catastrophes and accidents. The conflicts between parents and children have been recorded in the court records. They show that in an extended family the authority of the farmer-father and the farm wife-mother prevailed in many areas of life for a long time.

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