

Viktoriia Voloshenko (*Institute of Religion Studies – a branch of Lviv Museum of Religion History, Ukraine*)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1286-7870>

[antgrej@gmail.com](mailto:antgrej@gmail.com)

## STEREOTYPE OF POOR PEASANTS OF DNIEPER UKRAINE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES: BETWEEN IDEAS AND REALITY

**Abstract:** In the article, the author analyzes the transformations of the stereotype of peasant poverty of Dnieper Ukraine<sup>1</sup> in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries; examines the spaces of its formation and the image of the reality of peasant poverty enshrined in contemporary Ukrainian historiography; proves that this stereotype conceals both a real phenomenon and a cultural construct generated by it. The emergence of the stereotype was a social reaction to the economic conditions of peasants, and was entrenched in publicism and fiction. Its replication contributed to the formation of the corresponding peasant auto-stereotype. The emotionally colored rhetoric of describing “miserable” peasants was used to draw attention to the severity of this problem or other social, political, or economic issues; to mobilize the population around the government or opposition forces within groups; to implement civic initiatives; and to take into account the specifics of the worldview of the imagery of the writers who addressed this topic. With the Bolsheviks’ rise to power, this stereotype was politically instrumentalized to the utmost. The deconstruction of the Soviet topos of poverty perception in contemporary Ukrainian historiography is accompanied by an update of the conceptual apparatus. Despite the absence of a special study on this topic, the works of Ukrainian historians highlight 1) the structural factors of peasant poverty; 2) the local and family dimensions of peasant impoverishment; and 3) scenarios for getting out of poverty. Ukrainian scholars show that for peasants, poverty could be not only a problem but also an incentive for radical change. On the other hand, peasant ways of preventing poverty may have been inaccessible to those whose condition could already be characterized as “poverty”. Moreover, poverty preven-

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<sup>1</sup> Dnieper Ukraine – conventional name of the part of Ukrainian territory included in the Russian Empire. Its components: Right-Bank Ukraine (Kyiv, Podillia and Volyn hubernias [regions]), South of Ukraine (Katerynoslav, Tavria and Kherson hubernias), Left-Bank Ukraine (Poltava and Chernihiv hubernias; in this study, this area is considered together with Sloboda Ukraine – Kharkiv hubernia).

tive measures could act as catalysts for deepening poverty. Ukrainian scholars also point to the conditional nature of peasant poverty and the difficulty in determining criteria for its assessment.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian peasants, poverty, impoverishment, historiographic image, stereotype, land hunger, resettlement, rent, hired labor, education

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## INTRODUCTION

In the public opinion and periodicals, and sometimes in the scientific researches there still exists the stereotype (i.e. “fixed and common belief that generates a certain standardized collective experience, as well as the images of the world and society imposed (dimmed) on the individual in the process of education and communication” (Zashkilniak, 2009: 7–8) about the “miserable” peasants of Dnieper Ukraine in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It makes one think, on the one hand, about the historical sources of its origin and transformation, use for “internal group integration and mobilization” (Zashkilniak, 2009: 17, 20). On the other hand, the concept of the poor villagers is attractive as “historiographical myth” and “historical stereotype” in which “the elements of the outmoded historical images” are substituted by new senses with time (Zashkilniak, 2009: 23, 34). From this point of view, it is important to examine the tendencies of reflecting the realities of peasant poverty in contemporary Ukrainian historiography, with an emphasis on study of the structural features of poverty and impoverishment situation, as well as the scenarios of the poverty trap reduction used by peasants and proposed by the state and society.

In the context of the article volume, it shows selected bibliography. From the translated works of the foreign scientists the article refers only to the works of George G. Grabowicz (1998), Daniel Beauvois (2020), and William Noll (1999) are widely cited by the Ukrainian historians.

## SPACES OF FORMING IDEAS ABOUT THE POVERTY OF UKRAINIAN PEASANTS

The ideas about the “miserable” Ukrainian peasants were formed based on the actualization of the “peasants’ question”. The projects of the nobility with regards to its settlement go back at least to 1780-ties (Lytyvynova, 2011). Later, the discussion of the problems of peasant farming intensified in the context of public awareness of the need to abolish serfdom, and after 1861 – the necessity to eliminate the negative consequences of the implemented Peasant reform. In 1860 the open letter of Taras Shevchenko to the editor of “*Narodnoie Chteniie*” (“People’s Reading”) led to the social resonance. In his appeal to the public the poet emphasized the problem of the emancipation for his relatives and described the details of his own “awful” past as the serf (IR NBUV, 95, file 9: 11). The change in the tone of pro-government politician Mikhail Katkov’s publicist statements is indicative. In 1864 he studies the economic problems in terms of Russian problems in the international scene (Katkov, 1864). Instead in 1881 he says about the “poverty” of the villagers as a separate problem which is discussed “within last several years” (Katkov, 1881).

The theme of the peasant poverty as a part of “the peasants’ / agrarian question” worried the Russian officials (Kornovenko and Sviashchenko, 2015) and oppositionists of different ideological spectrum (Donchenko, 2020), that led to its replication in mass-media, popular literature and publicism (the main means of stereotyped ideas spreading (Zashkilniak, 2009: 19–20). The increase of the prints with mention of the peasants’ poverty in 1905–7 was connected with the revolutionary events, temporal liberalization of the social life, beginning of Stolypin agrarian reform in 1906 (initiated by Petr Stolypin, the Prime-Minister). According to Leo Tolstoy (1907: 4), by that time governmental and conservative figures tried to solve the “land issue” in order to save “the privileges of their own position,” and “revolutionaries” supported “the people’ anger” to join them to the revolutionary activities. Writer’s demonstrative indifference to politics in fact showed the support of the state, which he recommended to reform by implementation of taxation, as if beneficial both to the peasants and to the millionaires. His remark about the influence of the propaganda on the adoption of the imposed stereotypes

of the evaluation of their situation by the peasants is rather interesting: "The people under oral and newspaper influence more and more feel old, painful injustice of being deprived of their right to use land" (Tolstoy, 1907: 4).

The replication of the stereotype of "miserable" peasants continued to have a political context. Dmytro Chornyi states that regional pro-governmental elite acted within the limits of the party postulates, and "the particular peasant" wasn't interesting for them. Till 1914 in the columns of Kharkiv periodicals appeared "simplified essays" under slogan "Defects of the village" with the pictures of "miserliness" (Chornyi, 2007: 253–254).

The ideology of the Ukrainian movement was socio-rooted too. In the middle of 1840s, the members of Kyrylo-Mefodiivske bratstvo (Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius) studied the question of the peasant's emancipation in the context of the idea of messianism of "the most depressed" and "the most democratic" Ukrainian people in the struggle against Russian tyranny. Starting from 1860s Ukrainian activists connected the struggle of the peasants for land with the struggle for the national emancipation (Hrytsak, 2019: 76, 126, 128). Interlacing of the social and national issues also defined the activity of the Ukrainian party movement (of 1900), mobilization activity of which increased in 1905–1907 (Fedkov, 2007: 68–157).

Replication of the ideas of the poor peasants was not only in the political sphere but also through the educational projects. Their initiators fixed the status of the peasants' poverty as the starting point for changes. They recommended to increase the level of the peasants' education (general, professional, economic, national, etc.) by involving them in school, public and cooperative life, etc. In addition, the members of the editorial staff of the newspaper "Rillia" ("Arable Land") underlined that the villagers are "oppressed and miserable," and until they are "ignorant and barbaric" they called on them to enter the cooperatives and "benefit from the better culture" (To the Readers, 1912). The popularizer of the cooperatives Vasyl Domanytskyi stated that "not in the land itself the strength is" but "in the real education". The villagers may be relieved of the "material poverty" by implementation of the "rationally organized farming". The similar images are used by the modern researcher Nataliya Tokar to describe his motivation: the impulse for V. Domanytskyi was "economic helplessness of the village, neglected in its main needs" (Tokar, 2004: 221–222).

The emotional coloring of the gloomy description of the "initial" state of the "sad" Ukrainian villages (with their "homegrown poverty," "misery," and "poverty") in the early 20th century media is noteworthy (Voloshenko, 2011: 478–479). One of the sources of this method of description could be the specificity of the reception of T. Shevchenko's image system. G. Grabowicz argues that "the world of the Ukrainian village" was "the basis and main artistic background of all the plots" of the poet, but this world was not shown "in its entirety, with its light and dark colors". T. Shevchenko depicts it in the form of a "system of mythological thinking" that differs from both "objective, known reality" and its "collective" version (for example, folklore) (Grabowicz, 1998: 68). The main folklore motifs of his poetry "are exclusively minor in character". In it, the "conceptually unformulated collective ideas and feelings" found in folklore are manifested in certain types of characters and images – "pictures". Presented outside of social action, they are not a language, but a "set of elements" that are animated by the mythological structures of the poet's thought (Grabowicz, 1998: 69–70). For T. Shevchenko, the criterion for the mythological perception of Ukraine is the "way of existence," which is manifested "in visions of ideal equality, ideal human community". He models Ukraine as "oppressed, helpless," whose state of being is determined by the "position of a victim" (Grabowicz, 1998: 78, 80). Reflecting on the real and ideal social orders, poet contrasts the "ideal community" of the "poor and defenseless," "disadvantaged and powerless," "marginalized, oppressed members of society," and the "social structure and hierarchies" ("the world of power and rank, law and subordination," "the institutionalized system of exploitation and oppression") as the "kingdom of evil" (Grabowicz, 1998: 82, 90, 92, 101, 108). "People from the bottom of society," "humiliated and insulted," including the poor, become his special concern. Poet also sees himself "as a marginal personality, as an eternal outsider". The "deep model of human relations" created by him is "universal", not "realistic" or "socio-economic". "Oppression" conveys "a state of marginality that combines lack of legal status, suffering and coercion, weakness and dependence" (Grabowicz, 1998: 116, 118, 121).

The peculiarity of the Ukrainian situation was that foundation of the Ukrainian periodicals and more liberalized publishing of the popular editions became possible only from the end of 1905 after cancellation of the validity of the restrictive censorship ordinances in 1863 and 1876. Before the main Ukrainian media platform for the general Ukrainian

readers was fiction. The theme of "the poor villagers" met the demands of the critical realism of "the true" picture of "the peoples' life". The ties between Ukrainian writers and Ukrainian movement also contributed to this. As an example, "the poet of the woman grief" was Hanna Barvinok. When demonstrated "the peoples' life" she emphasized on the pictures of the women's "distresses" (IR NBUV, 27, file 1051: 1-2). Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi showed "unhappy picture of the peasants' life:" serfdom, lack of land, "bondage from the landlords," "wandering in hiring," "exploitation of the poor people by the rich". These should be "the pictures true, but *cleaned, enlightened by the high idea, regenerated in the soul* (marked in the source, – V.V.) of the writer". These images were intended to "agitate, inculcate, teach" (IR NBUV, 27, file 888: 41-42, 46, 54). Borys Hrinchenko chose depiction of the "peoples' grief, extreme poverty of the people and neediness," "difficult peasant life" as one of the motives in his works (IR NBUV, 27, file 860: 5-6, 8).

Such notes were intensified by correspondences in Ukrainian periodicals (till 1905 in the newspapers and magazines of Galicia, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire). For instance, supporting "the peasant poet" Musii Kononenko, contributor Horlytsia noted that the writer is of "popular origin" and he is an expert in "their hard luck" (Horlytsia, 1889). At the same time Ukrainian activist Mykhailo Komarov underlined that some time ago (most probably before joining the community of the Ukrainian figures) the poet might not think about "the fate of the people" in connection with the personal fates of those who "faced the misery" (Komar, 1887: 35-36).

Rhetoric of "difficult peasants' fate" was gradually adopted and replicated by the peasants. The perceived stereotype helped them when looking for identification and their place in the social life. By mentioning of T. Shevchenko, the villager-correspondent of the "Rillia" wrote: "His antecessors didn't pay attention to the village, they didn't see that misery, but for Shevchenko peasant's misery was his own misery" (M-ov, 1911: 227). When working in 1910-1913 in Poltava *zemstvo* (self-government body) Mykhailo Ivchenko, the native of the peasantry, called the peasants as "good owners", but specified "their extreme poverty, ignorance, their thirst for knowledge," feeling that he himself was "bone from their bone" (IR NBUV, 27, file 1095: 19, 23). In 1920s novice poet from village Dubativka Oleksa Matiienko wrote about his "misery village" (IR NBUV, 27, file 413: 4) but already in the tideway of the



Bolsheviks binary opposition of “bidniaks” (“the poor peasants”) and “kurkuls” (“wealthy peasant exploiters”; “kulaks” in Russian).

Replication of the stereotype of “miserable peasantry” reached apogee under Soviet Union regime. Soviet ideology based on the myth of “worker’s power”. In society “the culture of poverty” was cultivated (Semyvolos et al, 2019). In media there was the statement about the “poor and ignorant” peasantry in the period of “feudalism and capitalism” where their status was to make more prominent the “achievements of socialism”. In historiography selection of the arguments in favor of this thesis should back up ideologeme of the permanent “class struggle” which led to establishment of the Soviet power. Oksana Kryzhanovska notes that the Soviet historians paid attention “mostly on the process of impoverishment of the Ukrainian villagers,” “high level of exploitation” (Kryzhanovska, 2020: 30).

Contemporary Ukrainian scholars had to overcome the Soviet connotations of the stereotype of peasant poverty (however, this does not mean that the results of thorough research by Soviet scholars on the problems of peasant economy and social life are not valid [Bondar, 2011]).

Ideological glut of idea of the poverty caused the search of other analytical categories for characteristics of the financial conditions of the Ukrainian population. Volodymyr Molchanov tests the concepts of “welfare” and “standard of life” caused by “the level of development of the productive force and dominant relations at production,” depended from the influence of politics and ideology. In addition, he pays attention to such features as quality and cost of residence, cloths, fool allowance (Molchanov, 2008; 2010; 2011). O. Kryzhanovska stresses on “shifting of the accents from depiction of the peasantry as distressed, exploited” “main occupation of whose was constant struggle for better fate” in favor to the everyday life of the peasantry, their culture and mentality (Kryzhanovska, 2017: 254, 262–3). In the context of peculiarities of the peasant mentality the problems of the villagers’ economics were studied by Yurii Prysiashniuk (2007).

Valeriy Smolii raises the question of determination of “the objective parameters for definition of the farm prosperity,” “the level of prosperity or poverty of the peasant” as the important perspective direction of study. The scientist states that these parameters depended not only on the external factors (weather conditions, frequency of natural disasters),

but also on the size of the plot of land, number of draft-cattle, number of the employable members of family, possibility to engage cottagers; belonging to difference religious communities (Smolii, 2011: 5).

This question is closely connected to the continuous searching of the conceptual device for the classification of the peasantry groups under property characteristics, since that time ideologically concealed Soviet definitions of "bidniak," "kurkul" and "seredniak" ("middle," "peasants of average means") became the political instruments for transformation of all villagers-owners into "the enemies" of the Soviet power. Today the term "kurkul" is changed by more neutral definitions like "wealthy villager," "rural owner/ businessmen," "farmer". A variety of special works are dedicated to study of status of this group in the 19th – first third of the 20th century (Lazurenko, 2003; Lazurenko and Paskalenko, 2011; Romaniuk, 2012), this theme also attracts in the context of the wider researches of the era (Reient, 2004: 202). W. Noll in his study of the transformations of the peasant culture in 1920–30s insists on use of the peasant self-name "khaziain" ("owner," "successful villager"). "Khaziains" were formed from the majority of the adult men, some of them were richer than others, but this didn't segregate them from other villagers (at the same time the feelings of envy occurred) (Noll, 1999: 22–23).

The number of researchers stresses that the border of "the fall into poverty" was the villager's loss of the contact with his own production and/ or reaching the edge of survival. Analyzing the views of the economists of the early 20th century Volodymyr Kovalenko draws attention on the approach of Nikolai Danielson to distinguish only two layers of the peasants: owners of at least some kind of farm and the propertyless ones who stopped working at their plots (Kovalenko, 2004: 169–171). Yaroslav Hrytsak believes that the peasants themselves considered the family as the wealth one if they didn't suffer from distress and hunger in the period till the gathering of the new harvest (Hrytsak, 2006: 246–247).

At the same time in the contemporary researches appear the definition of the different types of the farms at the turn of the 20th century such as "poor", "middle" and "wealthy" (Kryzhanovska, 2020: 42). As an example, Vasyl Orlyk and Viktor Pavlenko calculated the cost of the inventory (premises, cattle, tools and instruments, furnishing, clothes) for each category of the farms as of 1874 based on the village Mliyiv, Kyiv hubernia. According to their calculations, to gather inventories



at the amount of 146 rubles (valid for “poor” farm), the villager should continuously work for hire within 4–5 years (Orlyk and Pavlenko, 2020, 43–44).

It’s important to note, that the researchers of the material condition of the villagers say about the difficulties in evaluation of the poverty level (Voloshenko, 2004; Kohatko, 2015: 42; Semyvolos et al., 2019: 11). Thus, V. Molchanov points out that it was rather problematic to measure profitability of the farms: different types of the farming works had different cost (Molchanov, 2019, 293).

A certain paradox of the contemporary Ukrainian historiographic situation is lack of the special studies of the problems of peasant poverty in the 19th – early 20th centuries (at the same time there are works with the analysis of poverty study in the modern Ukrainian society (Semyvolos et al., 2019; Kohatko, 2015). Despite the absence of such studies, the history of economic and social life of the villagers, forming 84.81% of the total population in the Dnieper Ukraine as on 1914 (Reient, 2004: 194), is constantly in the focus of researchers’ attention, and their works contain a modern image of the factors of peasants’ impoverishment and the trajectories of their search for ways to fight with the poverty.

## HISTORIOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF REALITY OF THE PEASANT POVERTY

Based on the studies of the contemporary Ukrainian historians it is worth determining the process of deprivation of land among structural features of the peasant poverty. Even in 1843 in Poltava gubernia 88.2% of *the state* peasants (the groups of the villagers that depended on the State and not on the private landlords as *landlords’ peasants*) were landless (Vasylenko, 2025: 7). Peasant reform of 1861 became the catalyzer of the “land hunger”. As a result of its implementation the villagers faced the difficulties connected with the sizes and quality of the allocated land plots, “cherezsmuzhzhia” (mixing of peasant and *landlords* land stripes), etc.

Nominally peasants’ farming increased only on the Right-Bank Ukraine, where the Russian government tried to decrease economic in-

fluence of the Polish *landlords* (Shandra, 2024: 205). In other Ukrainian *hubernias* peasant plots were decreased in average by 28% (Molchanov, 2011: 98). At the conditional norm of 5 *dessiatine* of land per farm (one *dessiatine* equals to 1.09 hectare) about 1 600 000 of persons got from 1.5 till 3 *dessiatines*. 344 000 peasants gained their freedom but without land or with the plots of land up to 1.5 *dessiatine*, on the Left-Bank Ukraine landless peasant farms reached 21%. In all Ukrainian *hubernias* 9% of the *landlord's* peasants were emancipated without plots. On the Right-Bank Ukraine two thirds of the villagers of this group got the plots which didn't allow them to survive without additional earnings (Kryzhanovska, 2006b: 363). About 440 000 former *house-serfs* (groups of the peasants serving in the *landlord's* houses) were also emancipated without plots of land (Vasylenko, 2025: 8).

In the context of the demographic boom of the difficulties with the land provision the problem of the agrarian overpopulation was provoked. Starting from 1861 and till beginning of the 20th century rural population of Ukraine increased by 86%, but the area of the peasant lands increased only by 31% (Reient, 2004: 194), this led to reducing the size of plots and property fragmentation. From 1860 and till 1900 the average level of the plot in the right-bank and left-bank *hubernias* decreased by 2 times (Kryskiv, 2014: 170). In the end of the 19th century in Poltava *hubernia* there were 68.2% of small farmers and landless peasants, in Kyiv *hubernia* – 67.0% (Shandra, 2011: 230). In 1914, more than 2 000 000 of the poorest farms had in average only 2 *dessiatine* per yard (Vovk, 2002: 53). From 20% till 40% of the Ukrainian villagers had small farms where bread and other goods were produced only for feeding the family and the cattle. Lack of land wasn't so sensitive only in the South of Ukraine (Reient, 2005: 157, 161). At the end in 1901 excess of labor not used in the farms reached about 8 400 000 persons in the Ukrainian *hubernias* (Kryskiv, 2014: 162).

Fiscal policy being harmful for the peasants influenced their impoverishment: high payments to the state and *landlord* exceeded income of the farms that led to the accumulation of the debts. In 1864, in Kyiv *hubernia* profit of 1 *dessiatine* of the plough-land amounted to 1.61 rubles, and payments for it reached 3.26 rubles. At the end of the 19th century on the Right-Bank Ukraine the average comprehensive income was about 30.83 rubles and the amount needed to meet the main necessities of life (food, cloths, repair, tax payments) was to be 48.84 rubles (Kryskiv, 2014: 132, 182, 197). "Due to the chronic insolvency" annual-

ly the villagers failed to pay no less than 10–20% of the defined amount (Kornovenko et al., 2021: 54–5).

Trying to solve the land problem in 1882 the Russian government founded the Peasants' land bank aimed to give loans to the villagers to purchase land, but the desired effect wasn't reached (Kryzhanovska, 2006b: 364). This opportunity could be taken only the wealthier peasants (Beauvois, 2020: 569). At the same time land purchasing was rather difficult due to increase of the land cost. On the Right-Bank Ukraine from 1863 till 1902 the prices on land increased by 3.5 times (Kryskiv, 2014: 148, 197). In Poltava hubernia from 1897 till 1908 the land cost increased by 2.1 times (Shandra, 2011: 230). The condition under which the payment for a small plot was 2 times more than for the big one was unfavorable for the poor farms (Kryskiv, 2014: 197).

Stolypin agrarian reform permitted the villages to join the scattered plots of land into one plot, easily to buy additional lands. But its implementation accelerated peasants' dispossession of land, caused "emergence of a large contingent of the unemployed" (Reient and Serdiuk, 2006: 397–398).

A significant reason for the peasants' impoverishment in Right-Bank Ukraine was the unsettled problem of *easements*. Lack of pasture lands became especially noticeable for the villagers and this led to decrease of the forage reserve in the animal farming (Beauvois, 2020: 567) and decrease in number of the livestock. In 1861, there were 35.7 head of the cattle per 100 people and in 1908 – 26.6 heads (Reient, 2004: 199). Only the number of pigs that did not need pasture lands was growing in accordance with the needs of the population (Beauvois, 2020: 567). Lack of the livestock led to insufficient dung of the lands and this reduced efficiency of the farms (Kryzhanovska, 2006a: 382).

Access to the pastures was very important in the context of the role of the animal farming in the income structure of small peasant farms. On the eve of the First World War in Vasylykivskyi povit (district) of Kyiv hubernia the farms with land area up to 4 dessiatines received 87% of all money income from animal farming, and in Zvenyhorodskyi povit – 73% (Reient, 2005: 164).

Peasants' ability to cultivate the land directly depended on the availability of horse power. However, as of 1888, in Right-Bank Ukraine there were 49.3% of the horseless farms and 5.1% of the farms with one horse (Beauvois, 2020: 567).

Among the reasons of the low yields was “low culture of the agriculture” (Kornovenko et al., 2021: 56): concentration on cultivation of the grain crops which occupied 90% of acreage; domination of the three-field system; weakness of the plough cattle; use of the old production methods (Kryzhanovska, 2006a: 381; 2006b: 364).

At the local level Ukrainian villagers could get into “the situation of poverty” due to natural disasters and crop failures, which “had a particularly destructive effect on small-scale farming” which didn’t reserve capital (Kulikov, 2005: 122–3). The rural population was also “the most vulnerable group” to hydrological disaster (Kompaniets, 2023: 23).

Sudden devastation of the farms or reduction of peasant budgets caused such family and personal reasons as livestock deaths, robberies (Orlyk and Pavlenko, 2020: 44), horse theft, fires (Beauvois, 2020: 562). M. Ivchenko remembered with horror how “all our property carefully and needily gathered by whole generations” was burned down (IR NBUV, 27, file 1095: 6). Peasant farms critically depended on availability of the working hands. Their situation was negatively affected by the death or temporary disability of the working family members due to illness (Shandra, 2011: 230), alcoholism (from 1861 and till 1907 alcohol consumption increased by 10 times in the empire (Chelyshev, 1907: 9, 12) or military mobilizations. During the First World War about 4 000 000 men were recruited from Ukraine (Kornovenko et al., 2021: 55–56).

Studies of the Ukrainian historians include not only the evidences of reasons of the Ukrainian villagers’ impoverishment. They can also be used to trace the dynamics of the rural behavior in response to the challenges of the “land hunger” and related poverty.

Survival scenarios were not based on the passive “adaptation to political and economic conditions” or “self-restriction in food” (Molchanov, 2019: 289). Poverty encouraged self-organization and joint social mutual assistance in overcoming the consequences of fire, natural disasters, bad harvest, etc., as in cases when to escape starvation the villagers organized public ploughing, made additional warehouses (Molchanov, 2019: 290). Some peasants applied to governmental institutions for loans in cases of ruin or reduction in the size of their farms (Kulikov, 2005: 122–123).

At the same time the peasants resorted to the active forms of the self-rescue. True, they “in their main bulk” considered the land as the source of prosperity (Shandra, 2011: 230) and rested their hopes of improvement of their position on it.

Limited in land buying peasants resorted to its renting. In 1905, the most rented land areas were in the South of Ukraine where rented lands amounted to 20.1% of the total peasants' land us including own plots. At the left-bank hubernias this figure was 13%, at the right-bank hubernias – 5.6%. But only one eighth of the rural farms could rent the land, from 50% till 84% of the rented lands were concentrated in the hands of "the more affluent peasants" (Kryskiv, 2014: 135, 200–201). The part of the poorest peasants that didn't have cattle and instruments didn't rent the land but they let their own plots on lease (Kryzhanovska, 2006b: 365).

"The not wealthy peasantry" preferred monetary lease of small plots which provided "insignificant but relatively constant incomes" (Reient, 2006: 368). In 1901, this way of rent payment accounted for 96.5% cases in the right-bank and 70.7% cases in the left-bank hubernias (Vovk, 2005: 131). Increase in rent fees became the aggravating circumstances. Within the period of 1901–1912 it was increased by av. 1.9 times (Shandra, 2011: 230). Besides, only the long-term rent could be profitable. One year rent often was connected with the sub-lease of the intermediates under higher prices (Vovk, 2005: 130).

For the sake of land, the peasants became migrants. In 1860–80s the state legislation kept peasants from mass migration. Peasants' mobility in the Right-Bank Ukraine was limited due to fear that decrease in Orthodox population encourage the Polish to strengthen their positions in the region. As for the landless peasants of the Left-Bank Ukraine, from 1881s the officials recommended to settle them in the southern Ukrainian hubernias (allotment of the lands to the migrants in these hubernias was stopped in 1896) (Kryskiv, 2014: 161, 169–171).

From 1860s the peasants thwarted bans by unauthorized migrations to the South of Ukraine: under the guise of the trip to earn money they found the plot of land in the new place and at home confidentially and as a rule unprofitably they sold the property, gathered into groups and at night started to the new places of residence. In 1860–90s 188 994 persons migrated from the right-bank hubernias to the South Ukraine, but the scale of the unauthorized relocations was higher than published and could reach 78% of the total number of the migrants (Kryskiv, 2014: 166, 168–169).

From 1880s Ukrainian transmigration movement to the free lands of Siberia, the Far East and Kazakhstan intensified. Within 1885–1900 there arrived 406 900 migrants from the Left-Bank Ukraine (Shandra,

2011: 230–233). In 1897–1905, 12 184 persons migrated to the east of the empire from Volyn hubernia and out of 30.2% left without permission. The government had to react on this and in 1889–1898 issued 126 relevant laws and directives (Kryskiv, 2014: 171, 173–174); founded Transmigration Department (1896–1905). Zemstva joined the process of transmigration coordination. From 1906 peasants' migration to the east of the empire was within Stolypin agrarian reform. In total till 1914 about 2 000 000 – 2 500 000 persons from Ukrainian hubernias moved in this direction. The government and zemstva relied on migration of the landless peasants and small farmers. In 1908, three quarters of all land plots for resettlement were allocated to these categories (Shandra, 2011: 232–234).

For the peasants the migration was both protection from the poverty and its cause. The part of the migrants was losing the status of the organized migrants and as a result couldn't use the state privileges (like trip allowance, receipt of the land plots, setting up house) due to hurry or delay with departure within the stipulated time; wrong issue of the trip documents; change of the place of residence. In 1910, from 29% till 50% of the migrants from the left-bank hubernias failed to reach the allocated land plots. At new lands the peasants "often lived in poverty" or had to be hired by "more successful fellow countrymen" or returned back owing also to illness and death of the family members (Shandra, 2011: 231, 233–236). Upon their return, they became carriers of diseases: from 1906 till 1913 the number of patients in Ukrainian hubernias increased by three times (Vovk, 2003: 36). Out of 290 000 re-migrants of "Stolypin wave" 41.1% of persons returned due to the lack of suitable land, 24.8% – due to "lack of material means" (Shandra, 2011: 236).

Not all peasants could afford migration start. In 1909, in order to settle in Siberia the migrant from Ukraine was to have 450–700 rubles (Makarova, 2005: 125). And only those who had money could return back to the native villages (Kryskiv, 2014: 174).

In the hope of improving their financial situation, peasants resorted to various forms of protest. E.g., in Kharkiv hubernia from 1902 till February 1917 there occurred 1162 of the peasants' demarches (Herasymenko, 2003: 97). In 1905–7, at the Right-Bank Ukraine there were fixed 3924 cases of stabbing with the use of force, at the Left-Bank Ukraine – 1688 (Beauvois, 2020: 581, 587). Yurii Kononenko and Sergii Kornovenko next to Vladimir Danilov considered this movement in the context of



the concept of “the peasants’ revolution,” chronological frame of which, according to them was the period from 1902 till 1933 (Kononenko and Kornovenko, 2016). D. Beauvois believes that these peasants’ demarches were like “the jacquerie sometimes with proto-socialist coloring,” and were accompanied by the rumors about secret decrees on the distribution of the manor lands (Beauvois, 2020: 581, 587).

The ideas of many peasants boiled down to as follows: “it is easier to take away and to divide” the land than to intensify the production (Bondar, 2010: 16). Even at the turn of 20th century in the prints there occurred the thoughts that redistribution of the state, church and private lands among the peasants could not solve the problem (Katkov, 1881; Demchynskyi, 1907). Volodymir Kulikov counted that in Kharkiv hubernia land increase could reach 3.3 dessiatines per farm but it was quickly “eaten” due to growth of population (Kulikov, 2004: 172).

Expanding the circle of the social solidarity the representatives of the “educated community” tried to contribute to modernization of rural agriculture in peasant farms. Innovations took root slowly: it was important for the peasants to be sure in their “positive” results (Prysiashniuk, 2007: 415). The researcher of the cooperative movement, Ihor Farenii, described the practices of the peasants’ resistance to innovations and the peculiarities of the gradual accustoming to the cooperatives by the villagers till 1910s (Farenii, 2008: 347–371, 415). At that time, in 1910s, peasants’ demand on agricultural machines, agricultural implements and fertilizers increased, small-scale farms tried to compensate lack of land area by planting the most profitable non-grain crops (Reient and Serdiuk, 2006: 404). Agricultural productivity increased thanked to “active help of zemstva, that promoted advanced agricultural experience, offered agronomic assistance, established warehouses of the agricultural implements”. The peasants adopted new technologies, set-up gardens and apiaries, raised poultry and livestock for sale (Shandra and Arkusha, 2022: 135–136). After revolution of 1905–7 agricultural classes and industrial schools were opened for the peasants (Vovk, 2003: 35–36).

Peasant self-organization in searches of escape from the poverty also manifested in search for additional sources of income.

One of the traditional ways to cover deficit in the farm economy was engagement in handicrafts and *promysly* (crafts; “type of small manufacturing industry with predominance of the manual labor” and unlike the handicraft it was focused on the wide market (Nyzova, 2008: 535). In the

Crimea more than a third of rural households were looking for additional income and started to work in the *promysly* (Kryzhanovska, 2006b: 366). In 1899 no less than 3% of Ukrainian villagers were engaged in the *promysly* (Reient, 2006: 369). In 1910–1913, in this sphere 443 000 persons were working (Nyzova, 2008: 535). At the same time, “only the richest peasants” could expand their business by taking loans from banks. “Poorer producers” had to take out loans from moneylenders at high interest rates (Lazanska, 1999: 98).

The important source of the villagers’ incomes was sale of their own work force. In 1906, it was stated in journalism that such earnings “from time immemorial” helped “the poorest peasants to endure landlessness and other troubles easier” (Vasylenko, 2025: 4).

The peasants were hired to perform agricultural works; a significant wage labor market was in the plantations of the sugar beet, in some estates thousands of hired men were working (Desiatnikov, 2003: 93). The villagers also earned money at companies engaged in processing of the agricultural goods (Reient, 2006: 369). Truth, “the local processing industry was poorly developed” (Shandra, 2011: 230), in the end of the 19th century in the local industry of the Right-Bank Ukraine only 4.98% of the labor force could be engaged (Kryskiv, 2014: 165).

As of 1917 in six right-bank and left-bank *hubernias* wage labor was used in 3.1% rural farms and 61.4% manor farms (Desiatnikov, 2003: 93). Due to small wages in the *hubernias* every spring many peasants were looking for jobs in the regions where there was a seasonal demand for workers. More than 80% peasants worked in Ukraine, others went to Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, South Caucasus, the Volga regions, Siberia, reached European countries, the USA and Canada (Reient, 2002: 53; 2004: 195; 2006: 269). Only in 1906, from Ukrainian *hubernias* 5282 people arrived to the USA (Vasylenko, 2025: 10–11).

In Ukraine the main labor markets were located in Katerynoslav, Kherson and Tavria *hubernias* where from 1883 till 1902 the area under grain increased 1.5 times, up to 30% of the expected wheat harvest was lost due to shortage of workers, and seasonal wages were 1.5–2 times more than in other Ukrainian *hubernias* (Kryskiv, 2014: 181). In season 550 000 – 600 000 hired workers came to the South of Ukraine to gather the harvest (Molchanov, 2011: 100). In the end of the 19th century, 1 700 000 – 1 800 000 hired workers were engaged in the agricultural works. In 1861–1900 the number of the documents taken by the peasants to leave for work increased up to 9 751 000 pcs (Lazanska, 2003: 533), but many peasants

went without any documents (Vasylenko, 2025: 7), their migration “gained spontaneous character” (Kryskiv, 2014: 182–183). For “the poorest part of the peasantry” the terms of employment were the worst. When concluded the contract they were interested in receipt of all or a significant part of their earnings. The contracts were concluded at the period of the tax’s payment or in winter “when food supplies were running out”. Therefore, such hired workers “didn’t earn money, they worked off the received money”. Employers took advantage of their helpless and set the wages below the market ones (Kryskiv, 2014: 184).

In 1860–80s only 10% of the season workers were not connected with agriculture but from 1890s “this proportion began to change” (Kryskiv, 2014: 189). The peasants were receiving income from supply of the handicrafts and food goods to the cities, delivery of the raw materials and wood to the plants, delivery of the grain to the fairs and the seaports (Reient, 2006: 369), in the cities they were engaged in the carrier’s business and cargo transportations (Chornyi, 2007: 198). They were hired to build roads and bridges (Vasylenko, 2025: 7), railways and military fortifications, worked as sailors and harbor pilots in the Dnieper (Kryskiv, 2014: 180), in the ports of Kherson gubernia there was a significant niche for “lumpen representatives of the peasantry”. In the left-bank cities the posterity of the Cossacks, who were formally the part of the peasantry, was engaged in the entrepreneurship (Vodotyka, 2013: 133–136).

To a lesser extent Ukrainian peasants chose steel plants, mines and diggings as their place of work (Vasylenko, 2025: 7). Even in Kyiv sugar factories the workers of non-local origin prevailed (Shandra, 2011: 230).

More and more often the scenarios of the poverty overcoming were associated by the peasants with obtaining of education. From 1868 till 1910 the number of pupils’ contingent in Ukraine increased by 6.4 times (Drach, 2003: 30). From 1901 till 1911 in gymnasiums of the right-bank and left-bank gubernias the representation of the peasants and Cossacks increased from 8.7% till 19.6% (Mylko, 2017: 206). The peasants tried to give education to their children despite the economic difficulties (Drach, 2003: 32) and “discriminative position of the Ministry of Education” with its declarations about “harmfulness for the poor layers of gymnastics education” (Mylko, 2017: 198). According to the evidences of contemporaries some peasants made every effort to get an education. In overcoming the obstacles associated with the poverty they relied on help of the family, civil society organizations and individuals, engaged in self-education,

earned money on their own to continue study. In the early 20th century, the educated peasants more often were looking for opportunities for intellectual self-realization in teaching and journalistic activities, agronomy, writing, etc. (Voloshenko, 2023: 13–15).

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the stereotypical perceptions of the “miserable” peasants of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries conceal both the real phenomenon of peasant poverty and the cultural construct it generated.

The stereotype arose as a reaction to the economic conditions of peasants’ lives, and was entrenched in publicism and fiction. Contemporaries, for whom the diversity of manifestations of peasant life was routine, used the emotionally colored rhetoric of describing the poverty of the village to draw attention to the severity of this problem or other social, political and economic issues; to mobilize the people around the government or opposition forces within groups; to promote public initiatives to improve the general level of education and economic culture of peasants; as well as to take into account the peculiarities of the worldview of the writers’ imaginative system. Beyond the background of the emergence of such a way of representing peasant life, it is noteworthy that certain rhetorical formulas for fixing reality resonated with peasant assessments of their own situation and contributed to the formation of a corresponding auto-stereotype, leaving the question of peasant perceptions of poverty hidden behind the layering of learned ideas and words.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, the stereotype of peasant poverty was politically instrumentalized to the utmost, and its use was scaled up and turned into a cliché.

The deconstruction of the ideological exaggerations of the Soviet topos of poverty perception in contemporary Ukrainian historiography is accompanied by a rejection of the notion of the Ukrainian village as a territory of total and insurmountable poverty; of poverty as an exhaustive characterization of “miserable and suffering” peasants, always ready for uprisings.

The oversaturation of the Soviet social and historiographical space with clichés about peasant poverty affects contemporary research: Ukra-

inian historians are revising the odious definitions of the categories of peasantry, updating the conceptual apparatus, but so far avoid problematizing the study of the poverty of Ukrainian peasants of this period as a separate social and cultural phenomenon. At the same time, they highlight a number of important issues in their works: 1) structural factors of peasant poverty (problems of providing peasants with land, pastures, livestock and agricultural machinery, consequences of the demographic boom, state reforms, fiscal policy); 2) local and family dimensions of impoverishment; 3) scenarios for getting out of poverty – from peasant hopes for land redistribution to individual activism, attempts at self-organization and expansion of social interaction circles (when renting land, looking for additional income in various sectors of the economy, organizing temporary migrations, resettlement and protest movements, using educational and cultural opportunities). The analysis of the problems of peasants' economic life conducted by Ukrainian scholars shows that for peasants, poverty could be not only a problem but also an incentive for radical change. On the other hand, peasant ways of preventing poverty may have been inaccessible to those whose condition could already be characterized as "poverty". Moreover, poverty preventive measures could act as catalysts for deepening poverty.

Ukrainian scholars point to the conditional nature of peasant poverty and the difficulty of finding objective criteria for its assessment, given the heterogeneity of the peasantry and the differences in the situation of peasants in different Ukrainian regions, at the level of individual villages and farms, and in different historical periods. The multidimensionality of the problem of peasant poverty requires both its systematic analysis and microhistorical research, which is a task for the future.

**Viktoriia Voloshenko**, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Docent, Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Religion Studies – a Branch of Lviv Museum of Religion History. Recipient of a grant from the National Science Centre (Resolution Director of the NCN no. R-2022/01/3/HS3/00160 on the Program for scientist from Ukraine to continue scientific research in Poland). She worked as an adjunct (research) at the University of Gdansk from October 3, 2022 to October 2, 2023. Scientific interests: cultural history of Ukrainian peasantry, study of reading, popular print culture study, problems of national identity and historical memory.

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