

**“THE ONE-CHILD PEST IS NOW AFFECTING THE
BODY OF THE SLOVAK NATION” (BAZOVSKÝ 1929):
ON RESTRICTED REPRODUCTION IN SOUTHERN
SLOVAKIA IN THE FIRST HALF
OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

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Abstrakt

Štúdia sa venuje vnímaniu špecifického zvyku regulácie plodnosti (stratégia jedného dieťaťa) na juhu stredného Slovenska v 20. a 30. rokoch 20. stor. Analyzované regióny mali prevažne evanjelických (luteránskych) obyvateľov. Prvá časť práce sa zameriava na názory, dôvody a možné riešenia problematiky tak, ako boli navrhované v časopisoch, výročných správach a záznamoch z vizitácií. Evanjelickí kňazi na Slovensku v tom čase varovali pred vyludňujúcimi sa farnosťami. Vtedajší vzdelanci sa pozreli s rastúcou úzkosťou na vyludňovanie a nárast jednodetných rodín. Pretože závažnosť javu klesala po druhej svetovej vojne, utlmili sa aj reakcie. V druhej polovici 20. storočia, sa stal najmä predmetom pre etnografický výskum regulácie plodnosti alebo „systému jedného dieťaťa», čomu sa venuje druhá časť štúdie.

Kľúčové slová: vyludňovanie, jednodetný systém, demografia, etnografický výskum, luteráni, Slovensko

Abstract

The paper discusses the perceptions of a specific restricted fertility habit (a one-child system strategy) in south-central Slovakia in the 1920s and 1930s. The specific regions under analysis had a predominantly Slovak Lutheran population. The first part of the paper concentrates on the opinions, reasons and possible solutions to the issue proposed

in periodicals, annual reports and canonical visitation notes. Lutheran pastors in Slovakia warned against the declining parishes at that time. More generally, intellectual personalities of the 1920s and 1930s looked with growing anxiety at the process of depopulation and the rise of single-child families. As the importance of the phenomenon declined after the Second World War, reactions became muted. In the second half of the 20th century, it became mostly a matter of interest for ethnographic research on fertility reduction, or “the one-child system”, which forms the subject of the second part of this paper.

Key words: *depopulation, one-child system, demography, ethnographic research, Lutherans, Slovakia*

Introduction

It is fascinating to see how everything relates to everything else in the context of a reflective approach. Research on family and family structures, which constitutes one of the areas of interest for Marta Botiková, partly corresponds in our paper to the biographic approach which forms one of the research focuses of Anna Hlôšková.

The choice of the topic for this paper and for the related research was accompanied by several coincidences. Initially some years ago there was an initiative by Mojmír Benža and his efforts to elaborate on a questionnaire survey on restricted reproduction conducted by Božena Filová from 1967 to 1971. In a biographical interview in the spring of 2014, Filová provided material as well as valuable advice and information. We opted for the interdisciplinary approach in the processing of the material, and this paper represents a combination of the views of a human geographer and an ethnologist. The paper focuses on a single issue: the perception of the one-child phenomenon by contemporary observers from various areas and how it later became the subject of ethnographic research in the second half of the 20th century; it draws on the inspirational data obtained from the biographical interview with Botiková.

On one hand, this topic appears to be a matter of the past and perhaps a closed matter; however, it has turned out to be highly interesting considering the current debates on restricted fertility throughout Europe with regard to migration and population ageing in different countries. The rhetoric of some demographers and researchers currently dealing with this topic from other perspectives very much resembles the way of writing about the “suicide of Hungarian peasants” (Bónis, 1941) in the early 20th century. On the other hand, we feel confident to affirm alongside Botiková that the consequences of the expansion of the system of restricted reproduction can be noticed within the Slovak regions in question even today.

What are we talking about when referring to the restricted reproduction/“single childedness”/one-child system?

To begin with, we would like to explain that the term “single childedness” comes from the Hungarian *egy gyermek rendszer* (Vásáry, 1989, 429), which can be translated as a “one-child system”. The question is: Why are we talking about a “system” as such? The point is that having a smaller number of children born in families was not an accidental decision, and this decision did not relate to the parents’ own state of health. It was a practice spread across the community, a certain kind of an ethos, and a set of practices and rules which the members of the community followed. It could briefly be characterised as reproductive behaviour, the result of which, in the ideal case, was supposed to be a single child. Since this behaviour was not limited exclusively to the birth of a single child, we consider it more appropriate to use the term “restricted reproduction” as defined by Botiková (as Sigmundová, in 1983).

There are different explanations for the causes of this phenomenon in Slovakia and Hungary as part of the common Hungarian monarchy (e.g. Andorka, 1979, Botiková, 1997 and Vásáry, 1989), according to which the need to regulate population growth was related to the abolition of serfdom in the 19th century accompanied by restricted possibilities for acquiring land. At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the fertility rate in Slovakia was on the rise (Svetoň, 1958). Unlike in western parts of Europe, the rate in Slovakia was related to the lengthy extinction of feudal relations and the conditions of a natural economy with a large labour force demand within a large agriculture sector. In spite of this, literature from this period contains references – for example, by Ján Čaplovič (Urbancová, 1970, 304), Samuel Kollár (Urbancová, 1970, 237) and Božena Němcová (1957, 293) – to the small number of children in families in southern Slovak regions.

One of the most vibrant and well-described fertility reduction phenomena comes from the Cerovo community. At the beginning of the 20th century this was described by the Czech ethnologist Karel Chotek, who noted that this biggest “sin” concerned, unfortunately, not only Cerovo. “In this village, they don’t want to have more children, just one or a maximum of two – they laugh at those having larger families – and to avoid new births, the foetus is expelled by violent means. Vegetable means are used in some places in Slovakia. In Cerovo this method is particularly known to women who expel the foetus from the womb of a pregnant woman by means of a massage usually three or four months before birth.” He paraphrases the words by a local minister who said: “This sin is so deeply rooted here that individual or pulpit rebukes do not work. According to the local minister, this sin would only die out with the last deceased citizen of the Cerovo community” (Chotek, 1906, 10). The presiding bishop, Jur Janoška,

warned the local parishioners during his pastoral visit in 1933 to “be responsible for sustaining Lutheranism in the village”, as the number of Catholics was increasing (Kanonická vizitácia v Honte, 1933, 89).

A common factor in these observations by contemporaries is the fact that the negative perception of the system of restricted reproduction and its consequences had the nature of describing a local curiosity without investigating the causes of this phenomenon. Besides the causes of the occurrence and persistence of the restricted reproduction model, the religious confession of the population affected by this phenomenon is also of interest. According to the sources and the results of questionnaire research by Filová and field research by Botiková (1983, 1997), this model also existed among the Catholic and the Orthodox populations, albeit to a smaller extent. Because of the extension of this model among the members of Protestant churches, it was the voices of the members of the Lutheran intellectuals in particular that rang the alarm.

When fields and cattle marry – the Lutheran Church in Slovakia and the one-child system in the 1920s and 1930s

One of the key elements of a social group is to maintain its reproduction and a sustainable number of members. Especially in the case of minorities, attempts to keep numbers intact can sometimes be difficult to maintain. These issues can become more perplexing in the position of diaspora or enclaves surrounded by another social group. A similar status could be noted in the case of non-Catholic denominations in Slovakia after the Patent of Toleration. Several denominations coexisted within a single space, of which the Catholic Church was the largest one; however, the relationship particularly between Catholicism and Protestantism was not always peaceful. At the time when Czechoslovakia was founded, the relationship became more complicated and reached its highest point of development in the 1940s. The feeling of Lutherans of being in a minority position was much stronger at that time, and the church had to evolve strategies to sustain its qualitative and quantitative position. Any changes in their number and membership decline were perceived with particular concern. Statistics became important when discussing these issues in the annual councils and sessions of the Lutheran Church.

One of the most common causes of membership decline in several deaneries was the larger number of funerals than baptisms and hence the low or zero population increase. As early as 1911, the Lutheran pastor Karol Langhoffer reported from northern Slovak regions in the period between 1880 and 1900 that “Evangelical Lutherans do not increase much in number of births; here, the percentage is

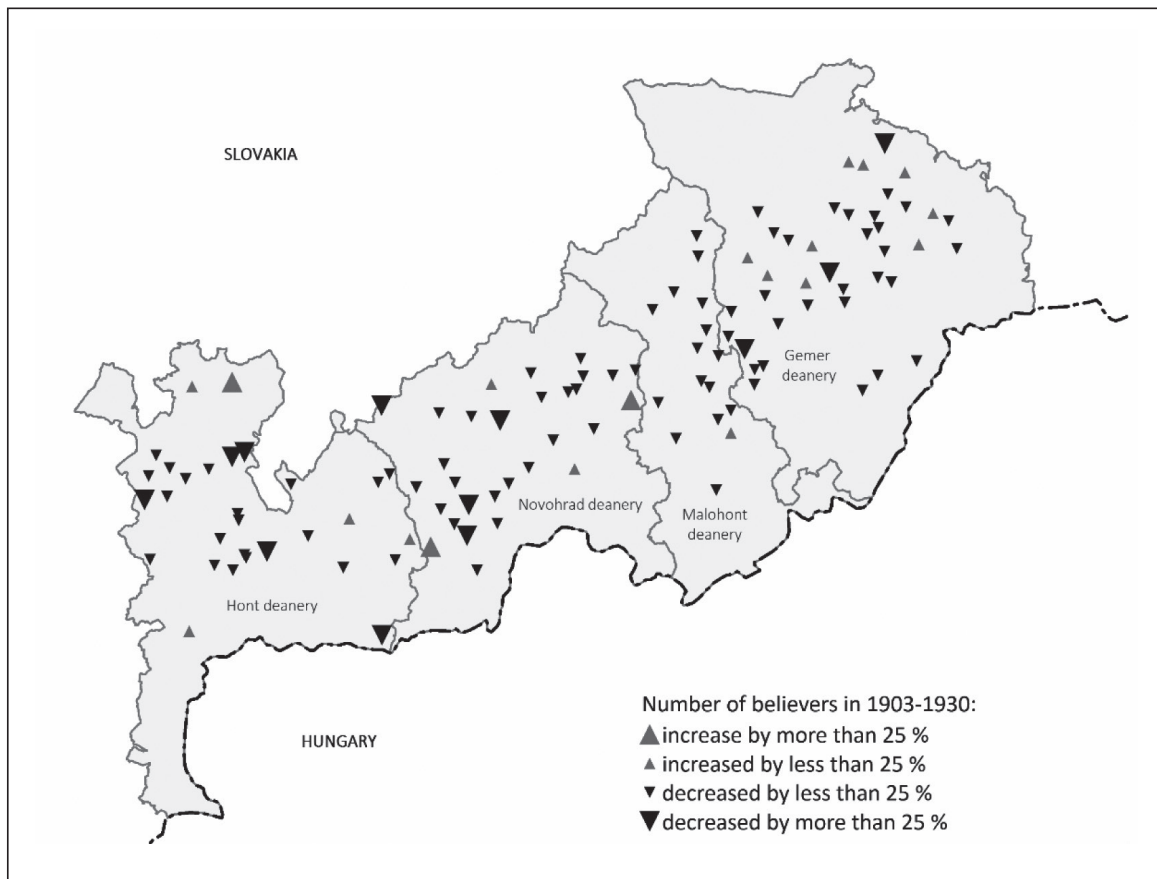
lower in comparison to other churches and denominations” (Langhoffer, 1911, 20). In the 1930s it became a topic for the whole of society and had unwanted consequences: “The decline in births has reached a catastrophic dimension even here. While this ‘cancer’ has affected other nations, and we have observed it with a certain level of spitefulness, today it has become rooted in our circumstances; we suddenly do not like to talk or write about it” (Adamiš, 1936, 326). Lutherans largely contributed to this decline: “It is widely known that we Lutherans are taking a considerable part in this decrease; after all, we have many congregations that are dying out, with more people dying than being born” (ibid.). In the period of the escalated relationship between the Lutherans and Catholics in 1939, this was perceived very painfully: “Our share will probably decrease, and the re-Catholicisation of Slovakia will continue thanks to the Lutherans themselves” (“Význam populačnej otázky...”, 1939, 158). The future position of Lutherans, historically salient and “many times so powerful or even dominant, will diminish and disappear by our own fault” (Význam populačnej otázky, 1939, 158).

From the beginning of the 20th century until the 1930s, the restricted reproduction system was gradually no longer perceived as an ethnographic curiosity but rather as a pathological phenomenon and crisis of society, and not only from the perspective of Lutheran intellectuals. Dozens of works exist written by Hungarian contemporaries alongside a smaller number of Slovak works on demography, healthcare, the economy and journalism (known as “literary sociography” in Hungary) (Vásáry, 1989, 431). According to this literature, “It was entrenched particularly in Ormanság, a region of distinct ethnicity and folk culture in southern Transdanubia, but was also considered to exist in several hundred villages in what was called ‘the dark belt of one-child-system villages’.”

A detailed overview of papers by contemporaries on the occurrence of the restricted reproduction phenomenon in the first half of the 20th century within the Hungarian environment is offered in a study by the ethnographer Ildikó Vásáry (1989). The authors based their papers on various sources: observations, personal experience, civil registries, censuses and records from meetings of municipal councils. The most successful observers were usually doctors, priests and teachers who lived in those villages for many years and who in some cases had attempted to conduct long-term field research and anthropological studies in the modern sense of the word.

According to Ildikó Vásáry (1989), this restricted demographic phenomenon became the symbol of coping with constitutional and social changes after the end of the First World War for more than two decades. Hungarians felt vulnerable, besieged and at the mercy of the fate predicted by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1909, 268-269).

The general interwar climate in Europe and the Trianon Peace Treaty also affected the other side of the border.



Map 1.

Changes in the number of parishioners in Lutheran congregations in the Hont, Novohrad, Malohont and Gemer deaneries between 1903 and 1930

Where?

On the Slovak side of the border, the situation was studied by historian Branislav Varsík. The situation was considered particularly alarming under the influence of the discourse on the highly pro-natality population policy of interwar Czechoslovakia.¹ The tendency to support families was even stronger during the period of the Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945).²

From the geographical viewpoint of the Lutheran Church in Slovakia in the 1920s and 1930s, four deaneries (Hont, Novohrad, Malohont and Gemer) constituted core regions with an extended one-child system. The number of

¹ For the nationally motivated moral and material support for families and parenthood, see Koubek, 1980.

² Škorvanková, 2014.

Lutherans in Slovakia dropped by 2.4 % between 1903 and 1930, while the decrease in these regions was by 8.9 %. Among these deaneries, Novohrad saw the highest decrease (-9.3 %), and only four parishes increased in number. Overall, there were only 19 parishes out of 121 which grew in the number of believers. However, these population dynamics cannot solely be explained by the one-child system; migration flows also represent a strong explanatory factor, although they were smaller compared to other regions: “[I]n Hont, Novohrad and Malohont the number of believers is decreasing rapidly, yet the number of out-migrants is considerably lower than elsewhere in Slovakia” (Adamovič, 1931, 556). A statistical comparison can depict surprising conclusions, as in the Cerovo parish, whose “one-child pest” described above increased by 7 % between 1903 and 1930. A later analysis from 1938, offering data from between 1931 and 1936, states that in Hont, “The situation is catastrophic and there are only three parishes out of 28 with a natural increase” (Adamčík, 1938, 321). It was predicted that in a few years, “Many congregations with less than 400 souls will come to an end” (ibid.), and it was stated that there was “not a single congregation in Hont where this pest is not rooted to a greater or lesser extent” (ibid.). According to the Novohrad deanery’s annual report for 1939, “The cancer of the one-child system has not been reduced at all ... 43 more souls died than were born ... in the Dolný Tisovník parish, there have been no baptisms for four years” (Zápisnica konventu ev.a.v. sen. novohradského..., 1939, 14). The same sense of mourning is present in the annual pastoral report in 1941, “The Novohrad deanery had 50 more funerals than baptisms; in the Hont deanery 66 fewer were born than those who died” (Zápisnica generálneho konventu..., 1941, 17-18).

According to Varsík, this phenomenon had been observed among the Hungarians, and in particular among Calvinists, back to the beginning of the 19th century. From the second half of the 19th century, it emerged among Slovaks living on the ethnic border with Hungarians in Palóc in southern central Slovakia. He compared the situation in the neighbouring regions:

“The situation of the Slovaks is worse in the Hont and Novohrad regions, where the one-child system has become firmly established among Evangelicals and where Slovaks are neighbours to mostly Catholic Hungarians with populations even larger than Slovaks. Hence, it is no surprise that Slovaks from Levice up to Rožňava, despite being quite conscious in these regions, have not only seen no gains, but have even lost against the Hungarians throughout the past century. On the other hand, the vitality of the Slovak element is much greater in western and eastern Slovakia, where the Slovak element and resistance against massive Magyarisation on the ethnic Slovak-Hungarian border in the Bratislava, Nitra and Zemplín counties were growing. Here in central Slovakia, the strong population flows, descending from the mountainous areas of Detva, only sufficed

to replenish the thinned-out Slovak population up to the ethnic border without crossing it.”

This discourse started to be affected by fears that the new inhabitants would adopt this local habit over time or that it would spread to surrounding regions.

“For us Slovaks, it is certainly not pleasing that this depopulation process was first rooted in southern Slovakia, which, from the national point of view, would need the highest natality rate so that the potential surplus population could naturally move towards the south through the ethnic borders up to the state border, thus reinforcing the Slovak minority population. Thus, it is time to launch a systematic struggle against this one-child system, as people seem to have become slaves of this bad habit to such an extent that they would not be able to break away from it and that the entire original population of these municipalities would slowly die out” (Varsík, 1931, 225).

What is common in the reactions by Hungarian and Slovak authors within “literary sociography” is that they are aware of the change and of the fact that at the end of this change – a certain kind of a population shift – the community would once again acquire balance. The question is whether they wished this balance to look as it “threatened” to look like. For instance, Hungarian authors were not afraid of the Ormánság region becoming an unpopulated wasteland; what they were concerned about was that this region would not be inhabited by Hungarians in the future. Likewise, Slovak authors were not afraid of the southern Slovak regions expecting a similar fate; given the sensitive nature of the relatively young Slovak-Hungarian border after 1918, they were rather worried about changes in the ethnicity of their inhabitants.

Why?

There were several possible explanations that church representatives used to explain why their believers were prone to sustaining such a family system. Dr Ľudovít Bazovský claimed that, “People have obtained forests, grazing lands, meadows and fields after the land reform. They yearn for earthly property but do not want to raise children” (Čo povedal..., 1929, 4). In 1939 it was stressed that there were two main factors of “depopulation”: the materialism of the parents and comfort. “To have as many children as I can sustain and leave them property ... although population control is a matter of personal freedom, it has to meet the interests of society and societal networks. This is the duty towards the state, the church and the nation.” (K boju proti depopulácii, 1939, 192) V. Hudák (1938, 231) repeated the general opinion on this issue: “Causes of depopulation are not economic; neither do they diminish with improving wealth. But it is a matter of

morality and a restoration of the worldview.” The reason for the dissemination of depopulation, especially among Protestants, could not be explained by the absence of private confessions of faith like in Catholicism (Šándor, 1944, 184-185). Even when a Protestant pastor tried to rebuke his parishioners, they responded: “Why do you care, reverend? It does not matter if there are more or fewer of us; you will still receive your tithe” (Skaza slovenského juhu, 1933, 79).

Bishop S. Osuský also perceived spiritual or moral issues as salient causes for depopulation. Citing J. Cibulka, he stated: “Material or economical deficiency is not the main issue because it takes place mostly in richer families” (Osuský, 1943, 8). The main issue is the “culture of materialism” that “releases marital bounds ... this disease extinguishes human emotions, removes womanhood from women and alienates them from family, makes them susceptible to kill their own children before they are born, takes away idealism from youth and leads them to low bodily temptations ... (8, 9) ... neither modern urban, rural nor hamlet couples perceive a child as a gift or a blessing from God” (14). Another issue was the changing position of women in society and family: “A modern woman is interested in everything: she should not wear one dress for a longer time, she should play sports and smoke. However, she does not have to be a good wife or mother or a good housewife” (10).

The most important strategy was to keep the property undivided and pass it on one child only, so as not to threaten the social and material status of the heirs. Then, “The parcels and trenches unite, and many times nobody cares if there is love between the newlyweds. They will get used to each other, say the parents, uncles [and] aunts” (Šándor, 1944, 185).

How can it be solved?

Most authors claimed that this problem had broader impacts and that the solution was not simple. Warnings about the decreasing numbers of parishioners and the unfavourable balance of baptisms and funerals were usually the only way to raise the attention of the church and the general public. “We call, we rebuke, but with no effect” (“K boju proti depopulácii”, 1939, 191). There were several proposals intended to solve, or at least ease, the impact of depopulation. One of the proposals was immigration, which, however, had two sides. On one hand, pastors noticed that brides coming from the northern parts of the country easily succumbed to the “evil power of public opinion in these communities” (Adamčík, 1938, 323). The other potential (yet never realised) source of populating the depopulated communities was through the immigration of Slovaks living in the Great Hungarian Plains who were undergoing a notable

assimilation process (Adamčík, 1938, 323). More exact proposals can be found, for example, in reports from annual church assemblies. These included a special form of education, more rigorous and diligent work by pastors, the establishment of a special committee, the unconditional excommunication of abortionists (Zápisnica konventu ev.a.v. sen. novohradského..., 1939, 5), a special form of taxation for one-child or no-child families and the provision of allowances to families with five to ten children (Pršanský, 1942, 428). One of the last resolutions addressing this issue was adopted at the annual session of Lutheran pastors in Zvolen in 1950. The resolution called for intense missionary and educational activities including pamphlets, articles and even plays. Pastors even proposed not to allow single pastors to serve for longer periods in parishes in regions with depopulation problems as such pastors would not be good role models for their parishioners (Rezolúcia evanjelických kňazov..., 1950, 367).

The demand to solve these problems arises from fears of the impacts of the continuing depopulation process in certain communities. Intellectuals from the Lutheran Church expressed several warnings that described this process from the point of view of economic issues, psychology and church practice.

Beware of Catholics!

One of the most recurrent issues that emerged along with the depopulation problem was the increase in the number of Catholics in formerly purely Lutheran communities. In a wider sense, the relationship between Lutheranism and Catholicism reflected the situation in Slovakia at the end of the 1930s. Generally speaking, the leaders of the Lutheran Church and intellectuals were concerned that the depopulation process would lower the position of Lutheranism in Slovakia's culture, politics and on the religious scene. Therefore, even a minute change in the sensitive equilibrium in certain communities was reflected very expressively. The general equation of the increase of Catholics in some Lutheran communities consisted of these variables: if there were no heirs in families that sustained the one-child model, these families would sell their properties to incoming Catholic settlers from northern parts of Slovakia. In general, these families had more children and, therefore, their number grew much faster than the number of Lutherans. As early as 1931 the character of these families was reflected on: "Catholic 'mountaineers' are growing in number because stingy Lutherans would rather sell their property to a stranger for 50 – 100 crowns than to their natives ... There is no introspective faith ... the traditionality of faith is astounding ... although the educational level is 50 % higher than in the Liptov or Turiec regions, we can barely take advantage of Lutheran or

national consciousness!” (Problémy nášho evanjelického juhu, 1931, 66). “Our brothers in the nation – the Catholics – are not afraid of children; they do not offer doctors 5000 – 10,000 crowns for abortions like our ‘dear ones’ do. They rather purchase land for their citizens. But from whom do they purchase it?” (Rozhl’ady, 1943, 35). The growth of Catholicism in formerly Lutheran regions was already institutional: “Catholics are already founding new monasteries ... in the fields near Lutheran villages, they are erecting wooden or marble crosses consecrated by three priests or even four monks” (Problémy nášho evanjelického juhu, 1931, 66). Repercussions against the growing numbers of Catholics could be observed in the Cerovo parish, where any potential sale of family land had to be approved by the local church council (Zápisnica ev.a.v. seniorál. konventu..., 1938, 29).

Empty churches and schools

The declining number of parishes that still subsidised their pastors and the schooling network was one of the biggest economic and existential threats. J. Adamiš warned against the restructuring of classes and schools: “What will we do with redundant school buildings and with teachers? The issue of buildings is simple: we will use them for other cultural purposes. But what then will we do with teachers that were elected for life?” (326-327). “50 years ago, there were almost no Catholics in Poltár (except maybe shepherds); today, around half of the children in school are Catholics, so the congregation itself aspired for the nationalisation of their school” (Adamovič, 1935, 69). More disappointing, however, was the fact that there emerged parishes that claimed difficulties due to decreasing numbers of parishioners: “Two years ago the parish in Nižný Skálnik in Malohont became vacant. A church with a famous history. And now, it should come to an end ... there are too few of us, and we cannot pay the pastor anymore ... and we should support the attempts to merge with the neighbouring parish” (Problémy nášho evanjelického juhu, 1931, 66-67).

The psychological and social aspects of one-child families

Besides economic aspects, demography was not out of sight of intellectuals in the 1930s. One of the most significant signs that accompanied the depopulation process and one-child families was the model of early nuptiality: “14 – 18 years old children cannot raise children, as they are not grown up themselves ... as they marry too soon we can barely talk about love, they easily start to hate each

other ... quarrels and divorces appear ... infidelity and adultery are the order of the day ... on one side due to mutual dislike or due to the fact that women can help themselves with abortions” (Skaza slovenského juhu, 1933, 76). Marriages at such a young age were due to obtaining a “helping hand” in the house (Skaza slovenského juhu, 1933, 79), and children “marry as they leave the school, are they mature enough? And then, what ignites with young fire burns out easily” (Kanonická vizitácia v Honte, 1933, 88).

The solution came on its own, or the phenomenon stopped being interesting

The population problem slowly disappeared from the pages of important Lutheran journals as well as works by “literary sociography” authors after the Second World War. One of the last notes comes from the beginning of the 1950s. Later on, more important and crucial problems prevailed both in church (e.g. the advent of socialism and church oppression) and society (the population boom after the 1950s and the nationalisation of land and cooperatives), which put aside both the issue of the one-child system and the problems of partible inheritance.

These became the subject of ethnographic research as part of the study of inheritance and property division, and on the forms of the family in rural areas. This issue, however, was not among the preferred topics of ethnographic research in that period. Filová, a former pupil of Karel Chotek, describes in her doctoral thesis the “unsatisfactory situation” in ethnographic research on social and family life (Filová, 1966, 1). Her research in this area also related to the drafting of works as “short popular-scientific historic-ethnographic outlines of the social and family life of the Slovak people” (1966, 2).³ She was fascinated by the topic of restricted reproduction (or “jednodeťák”, as she named it).

Research was carried out in the municipalities of 14 districts in southern and eastern Slovakia between 1967 and 1971 with the support of the Slovak Ethnographic Society and the Ethnographic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS). It was based on completed eight-page questionnaires with questions concerning the demographic and confessional character of municipalities aiming to identify localities with restricted reproduction. The questionnaires also provided a general picture of the structure of families in these

³ Narody mira, 1964, FILOVÁ, 1968, FILOVÁ, 1975; FOR MORE DETAILS, ALSO SEE BOTIKOVÁ, 2013, 8FF.

localities. The municipalities were identified on the basis of their geographical position or confession (i.e. Calvinist or Lutheran).

The questionnaires, which were accompanied by a letter, were distributed to the identified municipalities in two phases. Once these were returned, Filová prepared an opinion on every single questionnaire, shortly summarising its content and quality; she then proposed an appropriate financial reward for those who filled in the questionnaires.

On the basis of direct and indirect questions, Filová deduced whether restricted reproduction existed in the municipality or not and whether any impacts of this phenomenon could be observed during the research period. She asked, for example, about the number of children in the past, the present situation of new settlers from more northern parts of Slovakia and about the current number of children in classes. Filová explained the assumed occurrence of the system of restricted reproduction as being due to the decline in the number of Protestants in a municipality and the decrease in the number of children of school age in a municipality after the Second World War. The responses to the questionnaires from some municipalities suggested that the issue of the one-child system had not been dealt with before the research itself.

The plan was to continue with a second round of questions sent to selected localities followed by field research. Due to her duties as the director of the Institute of Ethnology of the SAS (1958–1989), she had no time left to dedicate to her beloved topic and process the collected materials.

The number of children in the family was among the issues examined during the preparation of the Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia, namely maps Nos. 3 and 4 (1990, 66). The research questionnaire was prepared by Ján Botík and Katarína Apáthyová-Rusnáková,⁴ who edited the part titled “Family Community” (1990, 66-70). In the textual part of the atlas, she claims that the practice of 12 to 16 births in regions without conception control “was the result of the effects of religious teaching, especially Catholic [teaching] ... The regulation of the number of children was historically first established in Protestant environments” (1990, 66). The information has more of a descriptive than an explanatory nature, outlining certain relations between the system of restricted reproduction, religious beliefs and ethnicity without leaving place for a deeper analysis.

Short references to restricted reproduction can be found dispersed in the monographs of different municipalities⁵ and regions⁶, but intensive and

⁴ For more details, see BOTIKOVÁ, 2013, 19.

⁵ BOTÍK, 1969.

⁶ Kandert, 1988, 433, HORVÁTHOVÁ, 1988, 472 FF., ŠVECOVÁ, 1988.

systematic research can be mainly attributed to Botiková. She based her study on domestic and foreign demographic and historical literature. We must not forget the contemporary context of similar research in foreign environments, where the mid-1970s saw a growth in the processing of quantifying sources also in connection with the faster development of computing technology and its application in higher research spheres.⁷ A similar direction can be observed in the works on the family structures in the past by Botiková.⁸

She also used the information obtained from her field research conducted predominantly in the municipalities of Cerovo, Čelovce, Dačov Lom, Ladzany, Lišov, Mochovce and Sikenica. Her original interests were related to various other topics – as a “girl from Dunajská Street in Bratislava” (M. B. interview) Botiková was fascinated by the rural environment and used every possible opportunity to conduct field research all over Slovakia. In the late 1970s she focused on the relationship between the Slovak and Hungarian inhabitants in the regions near the language border of these two groups in southern parts of Slovakia as well as on the family structures in the same regions where the “one-child system just pops up like a jack-in-a-box” (M. B. interview). She combined the archive research of censuses and other population registers with long-term ethnographic field work in the already mentioned villages: “When all of your life you hear ‘You are just a fairy-tale writer’, I was looking for ‘hard’ data to support the interpretation of the material” (M. B. interview). The results were summarised in the book *Tradície slovenskej rodiny* (1997). However, the aforesaid question of why remains open: “There is a connection between restricted reproduction and the economy, but whether it is really a matter of merely the economy, or what it is related to, we cannot yet say. In my opinion, there is not a clear answer about which of the factors will present the trump card in a single moment in a particular environment” (M. B. interview). It seems that a cluster of possible reasons that influenced the origin of the restricted reproduction system still presents a challenge for future research.

⁷ We can mention, for example, the works by Peter Laslett written during his stay at the London School of Economics, or the works by Michael Mitterauer as part of the Wiener Datenbank zur Europäischen Familiengeschichte (1974 – 1984). Available at: <http://www.univie.ac.at/Wirtschaftsgeschichte/famdat/index-gr.html>.

⁸ Sigmundová, 1982, Sigmundová – Hrabovská, 1986.

Conclusion

This specific demographic strategy among the Slovak Lutherans peaked in the 1930s. During that period pastors, teachers and intellectuals, foremost from within the Lutheran Church, presented various proposals to society for solving the problem. Generally speaking, they tried to put the “one-child pest” into a broader theological and psychological context of moral decline, fashion waves, secularisation (formerly called irreligiosity) and materialism. Pastors, however, did not succeed with emphasising morality and faith, and no pro-populationist proposals or acts, including the possibility of migration of families from more fertile Lutheran communities or public education in the form of pamphlets, papers or even plays were carried out to a larger extent.

Another aspect that did not go along well with the general church line was the threat of the decreasing power of Lutheranism at a time when society was turning out to be more politically Catholic. The declining power of Lutherans in the population could be an argument and an excuse for the dominant position of Catholicism in Slovak society.

Moreover, the ethnic aspect also came to the fore. If we were to return to the introductory parts of this paper, what the responses of contemporaries from among the intellectuals observing and responding to the restricted reproduction system have in common with present-day rhetoric is the fact that they are aware of the change in the development of society and that at the end of this change – a certain kind of a population shift – the community would regain its balance. The question again is whether they wish this balance to look as it “threatens” to look like.

After the Second World War, this topic stopped being interesting for Lutheran pastors, historians and “literary sociography” in general, and can only be found in academic papers both on the Hungarian and Slovak sides. The restricted reproduction system became the subject of research within the ethnographic study of the family and of the traditional inheritance system in the rural areas of Slovakia, having largely benefitted from the work by Filová and Botiková.

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