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THE FAMILY OF THE TRADESMAN AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

MONIKA VRZGULOVÁ

PhDr. Monika Vrzgulová, CSc., Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

key words: tradesman family, women

Tradesmen (craftsmen and tradesmen) in urban Slovakia in the first half of the twentieth century formed a specific subculture, which was an inseparable part of the character of a town. In everyday communication the tradesmen expressed their values and attitudes by their work as well as by their non-economic activities. This paper deals with one of these values – the family, demonstrating disproportion between a recognized value as an ideal, and its practical realization. In addition to the family life of the tradesman, the position and status of women is the center of attention. The tradesman’s wife in the first half of the twentieth century was limited by certain social conventions although her public role in urban society was changing due to macro-social processes in the country. This study presents women from tradesman’s families in the wider context of middle-class women and their activities in the public life of the town.

Tradesmen as a social group were not a homogeneous unit. Their range was diverse and was changing during the studied period according to political, economic and social circumstances. This social group included a wide spectrum from small craftsmen and tradesmen who did not employ other people to the owners of big manufactories or building companies and repair shops, workshops and shops with about 20 employees. It may seem that such a diverse group could hardly find a common platform to formulate common interests and values. But if we realize that the main feature that connected this heterogeneous urban group was the ownership of certain tools and the means of production, and at the same time
the owner's aim to extend the family enterprise (company, firm, business), then identification of the main, basic values in the hierarchy is not so problematic.

Values formed the social behavior, actions and thinking of the social group. The basic values of tradesmen and craftsmen as expressed in their everyday activities were the ownership of the place of family trade, the origin (position, prestige), independence and self-realization, the character and capability of the person (professional and social), and local-patriotism.

The content of these values was changing under the influence of macro-social processes as a result of social-historical development (changes in political regimes and ideologies, modernization processes, industrialization and urbanization).

The family was always the highest in the value hierarchy of tradesmen and craftsmen. In their everyday activities they stressed their relation to the family, but they considered it firstly as a basic unit of economic production and evaluated it accordingly. The choice of spouse, the division of tasks in the family, upbringing of the children and the whole of family life were realized in both private and public life, and they were totally determined by work in the family company being either the workshop or shop. Everyday reality for all family members was closely connected with the activities of the family business.

The importance of the family in the value orientations of tradesmen is proved by the fact that it was inconceivable for a man who decided to run a family business to be single—without a wife.¹

My father always used to tell me that a tradesman can not be without a wife because a good wife is like four good employees for a tradesman (J. S. 1917).

The choice of the right spouse was therefore very important. It is not possible to determine any single criterion for making the decision, but we can outline certain criteria that were taken into account. The criteria for the right choice was usually embodied in a person called 'good company'. 'Good company' was the individual who embodied certain ideals.

That meant that he was already financially independent. Or he had a good future. He had studied or had a chance to inherit from somebody or something like that. What was important was the money, origin, property and future (A. M. 1909).

I was also supposed to marry a 'good company'. My father said that (at that time he was quite successful and had three apprentices. He tried to persuade me. There was a big mill in Košeca and they had a pretty girl there. And my father kept saying: You know, I should somehow try to negotiate with the miller. Do marry that miller's girl. Oh, father, I do not like this idea. What are you talking about, do you know how much money is there? What a life you will have! So these were so called good companies that two quite well off people got together and that was that. They used to do the same in the cities. (J. K. 1912)

In addition to the criteria of wealth and origin, skills and education were also taken into account when choosing a partner.

In the first half of the twentieth century women had open opportunities to study and it was natural that girls from the middle-class and urban families took advantage of it. Secondary education in humanities was most popular. Teaching was considered the most appropriate occupation for a woman. A number of girls graduated also from Business school or Business academy, and there was even a co-educational Grammar school in Trenčín. Post-graduate schools, offering education specially for women (house-keeping, cooking etc.) were also popular.²

Most women after graduation from vocational schools worked in local companies as typists, accountants and shop-assistants. Having a job they demonstrated their desire for
independence and economic security or it was a financial situation in the family that made them work. After getting married most women naturally stopped working and stayed at home if the economic situation of the young family was good enough. By this approach they automatically followed social convention that pushed a woman into the role of a housewife expected to keep house, look after the children and comfort the husband.

Most important for a woman was to know how to cook and look after the children. (J. K. 1912)

At that time every girl wanted to get married whether she continued working or not. Once the child was born, she stayed at home and looked after the family. (A. M. 1909)

Man in the urban environment was usually the only bread-winner in the family. His wife was economically dependent on him.

It was natural that it was the man who was expected to take care of his wife and children. Depending on his earnings the wife either had to do all the housework herself or she could keep a maid. In the latter case she had more time to dedicate herself to charities, interests, reading or lectures. (A. M. 1909)

The situation of women in tradesmen’s families was different. The tradesman’s wife divided her time between the family and the family business. A young tradesman could hardly cope without a wife. She was an essential part of the workforce for him and it was very welcome if she was also educated. In that case in addition to her work in the workshop or selling in the shop, she was also responsible for the family business agenda and accountancy. At the same time she kept house, looked after children and apprentices if they lived in the family house. In a young family the wife was fully employed. Later when they could afford it, they employed a maid to help in the kitchen or with the children. The woman could then fully dedicate herself to the family business.

I was about ten-twelve years old, my mother had to keep house herself, we had no maids, we had almost nothing. We had an oval kitchen and a room next to it. And my mother had another two students to feed in addition to we three children. My father did his trade in the room. The students and I were living in the kitchen. My parents with the girls were living in the room, there was a curtain to divide the room. There was a machine in the front of the room where my father worked, and the bedroom was on the other side. And all goods, the leather, were under the beds. And my mother had to cook, when we came back from school at twelve, everything had to be prepared, and then she had to wash and tidy the kitchen. And then she helped my father to sew. She was a trained dress-maker that’s why he married her. They sewed until ten or eleven every evening. You cannot imagine how much that woman had to manage. (J. K. 1912)

We did not have any maid, any warehouseman, we had nothing. We did everything ourselves. My father, my mother, the apprentice and myself – four people. My mother was selling in the shop, we were doing all repairs and mounting... all day long... at six we closed, drew the blinds, and were working until ten. We came home and my mother was then doing accountancy until one or two o'clock in the morning. We had a shop then, also a workshop and from 1939 to 1947 we did wholesale so there were three different kinds of accountancy. We had someone at home to do the cooking for us. (J. S. 1917)

The tradesman’s wife worked, unlike other middle-class women of the period. Her working and family lives were closely interconnected. It is questionable whether by working in the family business she achieved some kind of self-realization or whether it was just a duty. Women viewed their status and role in the family and at work according to the social conventions of the period and they understood many habits as unchangeable norms that
were not even to be discussed. Tradesmen’s wives working in the family business were considered as just ‘wives’ by society, the business and family representative was the man—the business owner. Women in the tradesman’s family were so busy all the time that there was no time left for any pastimes. Women from other urban families usually devoted themselves to charities and club activities. local (male) society highly valued this kind of female participation. Tradesmen’s wives who did not have time to take part in social activities suffered disproportionately. This they stressed in their own self-evaluation and consequent placing in the social structure.

_They were a Trenčín elite, but I would not go there. There were women who distinguished themselves from the others—who I am. It was more of a female problem. Men were indifferent to the issue. They don’t say: See who I am. I have five crowns more than you! They can also afford more._ (B. S. 1908)

_I would not go to the Tatras, nor would I attend any balls. I would go to the cinema or picnics in the country with the children. But cafes were not for me._ (M. K. 1913)

The situation and self-evaluation were different in the case of women who owned the business. These were mainly single women or widows although it that was not always the case. More often it was women who for various reasons had become bread-winners. The economic situation of their families was usually poor and determined their position in the social structure of the city. Despite their inability to keep up with the normal social demands put on women of their class because as women they had to stay at home to look after the children and despite the fact that they did not enjoy the normal prestige associated with their work, local society nevertheless evaluated them positively as they successfully took on the male breadwinners role.

_My mother was a war widow, father was executed by the Hungarians. She was in Ružomberok at Párička—it was an old publishing company of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, they had also a paper-factory. Then after the war she left for Liptovský Mikuláš to Transcanic. When she came to Trenčín in 1925, she was not new to the field. But she was a war widow, she started without any money, from zero, as we say. She was given a tobacconist’s shop with stamps and stationary. Later she had a shop—a bookstore at the Protestant Evangelical Church. People really liked her; she gave them various discounts and slowly year after year she built up the business._ (V. Ch. 1915)

The tradesman’s family in the period under study could, in addition to the couple and their children, include also a certain number of apprentices, helpers and maids. The number depended on the success and economic situation of the tradesman. Families of shop-keepers used to employ helpers and maids more often than the families of craftsmen. Shop-keepers’ wives had more opportunities for self-realization than women in workshops where special vocational skills were required. That is why in shop-keepers’ families it was necessary to employ maids who kept house and looked after the children while the wife was working in the shop.

In the first half of the 20th century, the old ways of education and upbringing of young craftsmen in the families of craftsmen-master prevailed. Young apprentices of the craft obtained theoretical education in special apprentice training schools or business academies, but practical education took place in the workshops of craftsmen. Trade associations defined which craftsmen could accept apprentices for training and in what number. Education in craftsmen’s families was the only form of practical education, which led to the obtaining of a qualification necessary for the opening of a business of their own (LANGER 1990: 10-12). Apprentices were accepted after making a contract between the master-craftsman and
the apprentices’ parents. In addition to the main commitment of the craftsman – to teach the apprentice the craft, all other conditions concerning clothes, board and lodging were specified in the contract, as well as various payments, salaries, insurance etc. The contract included the details of the length of education from three to four years. All teaching conditions were identified in the contract, which on the one hand meant the commitment of the master-craftsman to look after the apprentice’s needs, while on the other hand the parents paid the apprentice’s expenses and paid the master for the education (KALAVSKÝ 1990:75). Each apprentice worked under different conditions according to the contract. Because he lived in the family of the craftsman, he took part in its daily running.

The apprentice had to be the first to get up every day, to tidy up the workshop, to sweep, fetch wood or coal, and to make a fire. The relationship between the apprentice and the house-lady was individual. My mother did not put upon the apprentices. His duty was to bring wood, to make a fire and that was it. There were masters who left their apprentices to work hard and look after the baby at the same time. Also some boys from the grammar schools became apprentices but they were well-educated and were not put upon. (J.K.1912).

The apprenticeship was a period of socialization for the future craftsmen and tradesmen. By living in the family as family members, the apprentices naturally acquired the values of this social group.

The main characteristic of the tradesman’s family was penetration of working life, and private and public space. Especially in the case of shop-keepers, the private sphere was closely connected with the public one because the accommodation was situated either next to the shop or above it. Although opening and closing hours were fixed, the shop-keeper was always there for a customer. Therefore, it was good if all family members could participate in running the shop because they were not only cheap labour but also a flexible one. Older children of school-age were living in the middle of their parents’ work and - if it did not require craft skills - they partly helped in the family business. The tradesmen tried to give their children education to ensure prestige and higher social status. This means that it was not always the case for the craftsmen’s children to be trained in the craft. On the basis of an evaluation of the various crafts, a hierarchy was created. That is why parents often wanted their children to continue in the family business, but to specialize more in the craft, obtain greater skills and thus achieve higher status. (KALAVSKÝ 1990: 72).

The social group of tradesmen was internally very heterogeneous and hierarchical and was characterized by a high level of social mobility. Big differences often divided members of the group, which consisted of highly specialized craftsmen, professionals, shop-keepers and company-owners with a long family tradition, but also former workers and farmers who after failure in their previous job started a business of their own. It was especially these outsiders who usually became victims of economic instability and went bankrupt. We can say that tradesmen and craftsmen represented the world on the move. From a geographical point of view many tradesmen and craftsmen living and working in the urban environment were immigrants from the countryside. Thus with regard to a change of social status and job during one’s life we can talk about intergeneration mobility. This change of social status between generations is called intergeneration mobility (CROSSIC-HAUP'T 1995: 64-86).

Though tradesmen considered the family the most important in their value hierarchy, it did not always correspond to reality. Everyday life of tradesmen was characterized by an absolute absence of privacy and intimacy in their marital and child relationships in tradesmen’s families, the upbringing and education of children (a basic family function)
was not a matter for parents (as required by social conventions, but one for grandparents, servants or governesses. Active social contact outside the family business were much more a special occasion than a common event. Usually the family could spend some time together only during the holiday once a year if the economic situation and the father's work made it possible.

Once a year he (the husband, M. V.) took some days off and the whole family went to the Tatras. We used to stay in Stary Smokovec and hiked every day. When we sometimes managed to go out, for example to see a castle in summer - it was a holiday. Actually, he did not know what the children were doing. (M. K. 1913)

Sunday afternoon - it was our only leisure time. We were free for a half day... We came home, had lunch, took the car and went to advertise our business - we used to distribute leaflets in the villages... If we did not spend too much time there, my father had a fishing gear so we went trout-fishing - that was our leisure time. (J. S. 1917)

We were always busy at work serving customers, marking the bottles, packaging... In the evening we were both tired, sometimes my sister came with her husband and we just sat talking and then went to bed. And it was the same every day from morning onwards. That was our family life. (B. S. 1908)

The tradesman's family as one of the main values in the hierarchy of this social group was an important phenomenon with special features that determined the life of each member. By its presence in the local community it interacted in everyday social communication and influenced urban culture. After 1948 official policy in harmony with Marxist Leninist ideology tried to suppress tradesmen and craftsmen as an objectionable social group and so minimize their social and cultural impact within society. Despite this, the existence of the family unit (presenting in fact an independent economic entity) and its active role in society in the first half of the 20th century left a visible and significant trace in the social memory of the community.

FOOTNOTES

1 This fact is a sort of residuum from the period of guilds when apprentices connected the idea of marriage with the idea of independence, it was like a rite of passage from the position of an apprentice to a fully respected 'master' (CROSSICK-HAUPT 1995: 88).

2 For example in Trenčín there was a Higher Girls School founded by Živena. Girls from urban families and rich rural families developed skills in handicrafts here, received musical, literary and art education as well as the knowledge necessary for house-keeping.

3 From 1918 to 1948 there were more than 60 women in Trenčín who held a trade license. (In official documents of the Regional Tradesman's Association we learn about these women only in connection with the awarding of licenses for women did not attend official meetings and negotiations.) Women were running various kinds of business, mainly dressmaking, hairdressing, millinery and textile, fancy goods, or needlework shops or restaurants. The following list, made with the assistance of the local historian Vojtech Brebenec, is not complete, but it demonstrates the spectrum of women's professional activities in Trenčín in the first half of the 20th century. ANDOROVÁ, Amália, needle and lace work, women's and children's clothes, Sládkovičova 1 (later Reháková and Grebenitsová)
ANDROVIČOVÁ, dressmaker, Hlavné nám. 38
ANITA, milliner, Hviezdoslavova 28
APPLETOVÁ, B., restaurant, bowling
BAJČÍKOVÁ, Mária, general provisions, Istebník
BARTÁKOVÁ, dressmaker, Nám. Sv. Anny 8
BINGOVÁ, Laura, dressmaker, Hotel Janík
BRTKOVÁ, Mária, women's and men's fabrics, textiles
CAPRNDOVÁ, Justina, laced bodices and underwear
ČERVENANOVA, M., hairdresser.
ČERVENKOVÁ, Hildegarde, widow, pharmacy Mater dolorosa, est. in 1919, chief pharmacist
Ala Ferenyi, Hviezdoslavova 18
DIAMANTOVÁ, Viola, cosmetics institute, Banková 2
DURZOVÁ, Helena, SIAM – women's and children's clothes, Mestská veža
FASTOVÁ, Beata, women's salon – dressmaker, Vajanského ul. 26
GABI Salon, dressmaker, Ďurčekova ul.
GOPPOLOVÁ, Júlia, milliner, Hlavné nám. 16
GUTTMANOVÁ, haberdasher's, Hviezdoslavova ul.
HAASOVÁ, textiles, Hlavné nám, Mestská veža
HEVESIOVÁ – tobacconist, Dolné nádražie
HOLČÁKOVÁ, Anna, laced bodice, Vajanského 8
HOLOUBKOVÁ-URBASIOWNA, Mária, photo-studio, Hlavné nám. and Farská ul.
HORNOVÁ, delicatessen, Sv. Trojica – Hlavné nám.
HORYLOVÁ, dairy, Hlavné nám. (Mestská veža and Piaristický kostol)
CHOVANOVA, Mária, bookstore and stationary, Vajanského ul. 12
IVA, needlework
JANSOVÁ, Ružena, general provisions, Hviezdoslavova 32
JANSZAYOVÁ-DRELICKOVÁ, Illy (Helena) – photo-studio, Hlavné nám., Farská ul.
KAČIČOVÉ sisters, Farská ul. 5
KASRILOVÁ, Anna, general provisions, Meinl store
KELLEROVÁ, Milena, widow, furniture and upholsterery
KIAČOVÁ, Terézia, hairdresser, Hlavné nám. ((Mestská veža and Piaristický kostol)
KOŠÍKOVÁ, Olga, general provisions, Hlavné nám.
KUČÁKOVÁ, Emília, dairy and delicatessen, Štefánikova 4
MAHREROVÁ, laced bodices, Hlavné nám.
MAKKOVÁ, Júlia, dressmaker, Farská 2
MÍČANOVA, Joža, dressmaker, Nám. sv. Anny 17
MIHALIČEKOVA, J. – flower shop, Hlavné nám.
MINÁRIKOVA, dressmaker, Hlavné nám.
MOHROVÁ, haberdasher. Hlavné nám.
MURINOVÁ, pharmacy U božského srdca Ježišovho, Nám. sv. Anny 10
NOVÁKOVA, Anna, restaurant U pošty, Hlavné nám. 26
NOVOSADOVÁ, Gréta, milliner
PETOVSKÁ, K. dressmaker and laced bodices, Hviezdoslavova 21
PRACHÁROVÁ, J., widow, garage, Horný Šianec
PRETZELMAYEROVÁ, Laura, delicatessen, Sládkovičova ul.
PRCHALEKOVÁ, Amália, bakery, Hviezdoslavova ul.
REISSOVÁ-KUTNÁ, Štefánia, delicatessen, Vajanského ul.
ROTTEROVÁ, newsagent, at Kaplnka sv. Anny
SCHULZOVÁ, Amália, restaurant, Pribinová ul. 2
REFERENCES
THE FORMS OF POVERTY IN THE RURAL DISTRICTS IN SOUTHERN SLOVAKIA

OEGA DANGLOVÁ

Olga Danglová, CSc., Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

Key words: social transformation, poverty, material deprivation, social deprivation, value differentiation

Poverty does not mean “little property”, it is not the relationship between aspirations and the means available, either. It is, first of all, the relationship between people.” (Sahlins)

The fundamental socio-economic transformation currently in progress in central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, brings legalisation of both wealth and poverty into society. It has thus introduced two new phenomena previously unknown to the egalitarian old regime, which destroyed both wealth and poverty as forms of social status. Now private property is again guaranteed by the constitution, the effort to become rich is legal and the appeals to become rich contained in political concepts are clear messages for the new era. The right to be rich and demonstrate wealth in an ostentatious way has become a characteristic feature of our daily life.1 What is symptomatic on the other hand is the legitimisation of poverty, which has become socially pressing. Statistics about the number of people living under the poverty line have been regularly publicised by the media as bellwether trends. Poverty has become a fatal fact of our new daily experience.2

As a result, various shades of poverty, as suggested by Swaan, are gradually being disclosed. In terms of ethics, Swaan uses the politically incorrect language of the 16th and 17th centuries when speaking about the poor. While placing them on a scale, he first refers to povres honteux - passive, obedient and confused, deprived of the necessities, people
endavouring to conceal their poverty and requiring nothing from the society; then he mentions the more active poor, who beg and let others know about their misery when, often ostentatiously, they show it off. After that he describes beggars, who resort to threats and blackmail when asking for alms. The last group, according to him, consists of coquins vagabonds, who do not only signal threats but actually steal and destroy. In welfare states, they are referred to as the underclass. On the grounds described, the differences between the particular forms of poverty are enormous.

J. Szalai says that the observers from western Europe, who, when asking, "Why do the poor in the former socialist countries still exist?" are often given this answer: "Poverty is an inevitable consequence of the transition from socialism to a market economy, the growth of which is associated with economic difficulties." While this explanation is true, it is nevertheless somewhat laconic and oversimplified. Furthermore, it does not reveal the sources of poverty nor explain the new phenomenon in a purely technical way: the cost of economic growth and the social advance of the majority is paid for by the immediate exclusion of a particular minor section of society from this process.

However, the question of whether poverty is explicitly a matter for the individual remains unanswered. Does it spring from an inability to adapt to new conditions set by society? Or is it just the unwillingness to work, or low initiative and inflexibility which suppress the individual's ability to contemplate change? It is not possible to claim that it is purely a socially based problem due to external conditions - errors ensuing from the economic and social systems, social structures, discrimination or prejudice. No one has asked yet whether it is a consequence of the intertwining of external influences and the internal disposition of the individual, or, more precisely, the absence of the kind of disposition considered necessary for the individual to adapt to situations arising from society undergoing a rapid developmental alteration which requires rapid reorientation and immediate, and appropriate reactions from the individual.

According to Czech sociologists, whose opinions have been summarized by I. Mareš and I. Možný, the supporters of the extreme right are characterised as blaming the poor (they make no effort; they have very low moral values), the supporters of the centrist parties are inclined to underestimate the role of subjective factors which cannot be managed by an individual's will (lack of ability or talent) as well as universal external factors (lack of equal opportunity, discrimination, prejudice); the moderate left have a tendency towards a fatalistic perception of poverty (bad luck) and the extreme left understands poverty as a natural consequence of an inappropriate social system.

Nevertheless, the differences between the attitudes of the Czech and Slovak populations appear to be much more remarkable. While in the Czech Republic the opinion that poverty is the inevitable consequence of an individual's personal characteristics, clearly prevails (i.e. the tendency of blaming the poor - the poor are responsible for their own poverty); in Slovakia, on the other hand, twice as many respondents consider poverty to be a consequence of social injustice.

Another question remains unanswered: to what degree is contemporary poverty a matter of inherited poverty passed down from generation to generation through the way of life, when children born to poor conditions learn to live under specific constraints, i.e. within a certain system of values and attitudes which directly stem from poor living conditions. The poor thus create their own culture the substance of which is the development of adaptive mechanisms and strategies of accommodating to the wider context of a complex society.

In the Slovak environment it is possible to think of an inherited culture of poverty which
turns to the past in order to retrieve models to revive the life-style of particular social
groups from the period before WWII or from the earlier phases of socialism. Moreover, the
features of poverty in urban areas, where they are much more visible, differ from those
typical of rural districts, where it has existed in various hidden forms and remains hidden
being a problem of thinly populated areas, unsatisfactory infrastructure and inadequate
communications.

**Attitude to poverty in the rural districts in the period between the world wars**

Now the focus will be on the rural districts, more precisely on the social structure of
these districts between the world wars. The gentry represented by great landlords and wealthy
farmers, whose main interest was to place their production on the market formed the thinnest
layer. The thickest stratum comprised middle and small farmers, whose family economy
was oriented towards self-sufficiency, i.e. to satisfy the needs of the family; only a part of
their production being destined for the market. This stratum also contained small land
owners, or landowners in areas with very low agricultural productivity, where even the
hardest work was insufficient to meet the needs of modest living. These petty landowners
used to have supplementary jobs: they let themselves be hired as seasonal labourers, or ran
cottage industries or attempted to find work outside the village environment, most frequently
as peddlers or factory workers. These farming factory workers were the transition from
farmers to proletariat. The last layer consisted of the proletariat - people without land or
other means of production - wage earners. They differed from factory workers in their
technical approach to production and particular features of sociocultural differentiation.8

The stratum of the agricultural proletariat was the poorest and was close to poverty in
terms of both material and social deprivation. In the Slovakian village environment poverty
was acceptable and was not despised although its condition was not as respectable as it was
in medieval times when by reference to early-Christian images and New Testament
interpretation it represented virtue and piety. Further evidence of this relatively positive
attitude is encoded in a proverb, "Poverty is no reproach". Furthermore, various folklore
texts characterise the poor in a positive way: they are modest, hard-working, good-looking,
a poor girl has better prospects of a happy marriage than a rich one, and a poor wayfarer
represents a deity wandering the world.9 Poverty was considered as a commonplace aspect
of farming. Even well-do-to families could become poor as a result of drought, bad crops,
loss of cattle, or other unexpected natural disasters. On the other hand, poverty may be
caused by a poor economy or alcoholism. One of the causes of poverty was also the system
of inheritance: according to the Hungarian inheritance code, property was subdivided and
distributed throughout the family.10 In the micro-world of village society, especially in regions
in which egalitarianism was emphasised, the idea of being a member of the community and
needing to co-operate was espoused. At the same time there existed a network of social
protection created at a local level - the landless would help the rich during the harvest for
which they received payment in kind; the community took care of the homeless, sick and
old people. There existed a rule according to which those who were materially better off
had to help those who were in need. This was also a way to eliminate various clashes and
jealousies within the community. The situation of the poor appears to have been more
favourable in rural communities than in urban. The differentiation was due to the different
attitudes of each to poverty and, most probably, due to a different perception of their personal
status by the poor themselves.
On considering the Hungarian small farmer's social environment during the inter-war period (which may be equally applied to Slovak conditions), J. Szalai emphasises its introverted character, existence within the limits of a feudal social structure passed down from generation to generation through traditional forms of life. These forms moulded everyday life and influenced ways of satisfying most needs from housing to family relations, which were then determined by direct dependence on the patriarchal power of both church and secular lords. He underscores the fact that after WWII these relations transformed into asocial hierarchy, party leadership, the organisations of a campaign-type of society, which, in fact, reflected serfdom. As a result state both paternalism and the means of social control could be superimposed in a much easier way. The patriarchal methods of the state were implanted as social safety mechanisms for everyone; non-differentiated education, health services, housing for workers, canteens, and childcare institutions. These systems had a basis in traditional life rather than modern civic concepts. By means of a socioeconomic link-up with feudal methods, traditionally conceived structures relying on mutual assistance with family and neighbours exchanging gifts and services, could, paradoxically, have strengthened and revitalised, modern production, communications and education. As I. Možný says, only such a system could create that “strange amalgamation of traditionality and modernity”.

Modernisation also produced preconditions for the improvement of living conditions and progress of the poorest agrarian stratum by means of better connection with towns and industrial centers. The newly acquired status of wage-earning labourers enabled them to get free from the institutionalised village system, the traditional bonds and ties to the land led to more impersonal living conditions and greater mobility. The standard of living of agricultural wage-earning labourers, who had been constantly under the threat of pauperisation, improved also because of generous state support.

In real socialist society there were, of course, also poor people, but those who were economically or politically marginalised did not form a numerous group. This fact may be considered as a social success of the former regime in Czechoslovakia. A regime declaring social well-being for everyone could not accept visible wealth and poverty, either. As a consequence, existing poverty was made invisible. For this reason, begging at churches or at public spaces was prohibited. Both begging and charity were declared criminal offences.

In order to eliminate poverty the equalising of incomes played an important role lest poverty be seen purely as a problem of income distribution. Under such conditions the existence of poverty was negligible: false equality was a characteristic feature, an essential trend within the system. As for the rural environment, the material well-being of the villagers living in the socialist agrocomplex, especially families, clans and various interest groups profiting from these relations, was often much higher than of other highly qualified social groups. Nevertheless, the growth was sometimes attained by means of archaic economy, an amalgamation of the non-financial incomes resulting from familial and neighbourhood mutual assistance with incomes accrued from other than wage-earning activities. For this reason, it did not reflect the real productivity of labour.

The state made efforts not to create the coquins vagabonds, or underclass - a culturally and economically disadvantaged class without permanent bonds to production processes, i.e. without wage earning jobs. As the Constitution guaranteed the right to work, people with peripatetic work habits, absenteeism, drunkenness were considered as deviants. Nevertheless, it is must be admitted that the state made great efforts to suppress the
underclass. On the other hand, the methods applied were often counterproductive. To be considered as part of the underclass did not necessarily mean to be poor. Members of this group were active in the informal labour market, taking a variety of transitory and part-time jobs, where they often found much better paid jobs than were possible in the legitimate market. A particular stratum of the underclass, actively considering their future, participated in moonlighting and illegal businesses (money-changing, dealing in second-hand cars, pimping, etc.), which enabled them to accumulate capital. As a result, after 1989, in the initial phase of building-up market mechanisms, they could easily integrate into these processes.\textsuperscript{16}

The taboo on poverty and its low visibility caused this issue to be allocated scant attention by empirical researchers, both sociological and ethnological. Nevertheless it was partially analysed in sociological researches examining the “population with limited possibilities for consumption” in which only income per capita was considered. Poverty in the broader sense meaning much more than only living in reduced economic circumstances and existing close to deprivation in the sociocultural context naturally remained on the margins. Nevertheless, sociological research into minimum living conditions in the former C.S.F.R. reveals importantly that: approximately half of the poor lived in working class households, the second group was formed by old-age pensioners, and the lowest numbers of the poor were on cooperative farms.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, larger families, single-parent families or parents on low incomes also appeared in the disadvantaged group. Although the data indicates the most frequently occurring types of poverty, namely family size and type or retirement, they illustrate a major weakness of the investigations: they ignore incomes from the secondary economy, the exchange of gifts and services in the informal market, which was a typical feature of the rural environment, they do not reflect lower expenditure on foodstuffs due to self-sufficiency and additional incomes from private farming plots. Furthermore, they do not convey information on the low expenditure resulting from mutual familial and neighbourhood assistance.

\textit{The emergence of the poor in rural areas after 1989}

On the collapse of socialism when the protective embrace of the state and socialist organisations was lost those most dependent on the benefits of the state suffered immediately. Among them were those predominantly relying on state bureaucracy, socialist distribution, social benefits, institutional child care, subsidised canteens, assisted housing for workers, health services and state education. What most characterises these people is the lack of a clearly defined economic role and the lack of a network of contacts built during the previous regime, i.e. they lack the means to ensure economic independence or, on the other hand, to search for alternatives. Seasonal workers in socialist industry, workers without qualifications who often abandoned their factory jobs in hope of finding better ones in agriculture, the Roma who got accustomed to living without work but relied on deceit, irregularities and petty theft. It must be admitted that they in particular were trapped by socialism; they were most frequently excluded from the official labour market and, therefore, took on only one unskilled job after another. This group has been joined to an extent by agricultural labourers, who after the privatisation of state farms or collapse of cooperative ones were left without any means of living.

In 1995 - 1996 I carried out empirical research in the rural surroundings of the town of Dúnská Streda, namely at Topoľčany and at Okoč, villages settled by members of the Hungarian minority, the purpose of which was to throw more light on this situation.
The farms of Jánoštelek, Maďредел, Jánošíkovo (Nagy Bélle and Kis Bélle), Starý Gójaš, Nový Gójaš, and Asod belonging to these villages, were until 1990 integral parts of the State Farm of Čalovo. Most of them were restored to earlier owners; animal husbandry, the core activity of these farms, was abolished and agricultural labourers were released. As a consequence, they became socially dependent, unemployed, or only part-time or occasionally employed. Though they continued to live on the farms, the local village population consider them a marginalised group. Their attitude is also based on the generally held opinion that these people are only “newcomers”, who do not come from the village but from all over Slovakia and even from the Czech Republic although most of them come from nearby Hungarian villages in Čalovo, Dunajská Streda and Nové Zámky. The state farm at Čalovo provided employees working at distant farms with accommodation; this assistance was extended and largely improved in the 1970s, after the heavy floods which struck the whole area of Žitný Ostrov. After the disaster, new flats and semi-detached houses were built for agricultural labourers. This attracted young people who had just started their families, especially those from large families, with low incomes and without the means to obtain their own house or flat (Under Communism nearly everyone wanted to be on his/her own. What I have is mine.), and people with unstable family relationships with common-law husbands and wives.

However, the mobility of inhabitants of these farms was enormous: families were constantly coming and going. According to respondents from Jánoštelek, which is nowadays inhabited by fifteen families, approximately a hundred families have lived there over the period. Since 1989 only two families departed the farm. The rest are tied to the now abolished farm, which offers no livelihood, and cannot leave because they have no other housing prospects. This finding proves that not all people living on farms have been caught in the social benefits net although this is true in most cases. Despite differences in social character and the absence of traditional bonds or a common past, they form a group awarded the status of the poor from both objective and subjective viewpoints. Besides material deprivation there are other indicators such as low incomes limiting access to goods and services, and resultant lowered standard of diet, clothing, hygiene, and transportation. Furthermore, social deprivation is seen as disadvantageous in terms of the village community, wider community and limited family activities.

The purpose of the research was to discover the reactive mechanisms of individuals, families and the community as a whole to their unfavourable situation. In other words, the aim was to understand the social change associated with the phenomenon of poverty through the narrow view of a micro environment, then to diagnose poverty and its manifestations in everyday life. In order to achieve this aim, classical ethnological methods usual for examination of small communities such as interviewing and life histories of individuals and whole families were applied. The expected result is a more accurate understanding of the poverty phenomenon in the given environment as reflected in the opinions and values of the people living on the farms and predominantly concern the most pressing issues of material and social deprivation.

Lewis’ culture of poverty

This method was also applied by Oscar Lewis, who in the 1960s introduced the notion of a culture of poverty into anthropology. Lewis was inclined to interpret poverty as an inherited phenomenon of life. He was persuaded that the culture of poverty is a way of life
passed on from generation to generation. Children born to poverty are guided to accommodate constraints imposed by their lives. Their attitudes, strategies and values are developed by means of accommodation, acceptance of their marginalised position in a highly socially structured and individualised capitalist society. They realise the improbability of attaining success measured by the values and aims of broader society. From Lewis' point of view they share not only poverty but also a different life-style or "culture of poverty", which exceeds the frontiers of states, nations and differences between urban and rural conditions.

This very thesis of Lewis's was justifiably criticised. Critics objected that the poor are not poor as such; they claimed that they are poor only in a particular social context as various societies consider poverty in different ways and the poor occupy different positions. They underscore the fact that being poor in an American big city is not the same as being poor in India, where poverty is a consequence of the highly formal caste system organisation of that society. Even Lewis corrected his views after a visit to Cuba after Castro's revolution. He discovered that though the slums in Havana which he had long known due to pre-revolution researches had only changed slightly and the people lived in equally desperate poverty, their attitude to their own status had altered: there was much less frustration, hopelessness and apathy.

The critics of Lewis' culture of poverty criticised his thesis as highlighting only the negative features of poverty - the poor eliminating and ignoring positive features whereas the ability to live with it and square with it belongs here also.

Lewis clustered the negative aspects of poverty into four groups:
1. Inherited "culture of poverty": as a result, people living in poverty are irresponsible and unreliable.
2. Lack of privacy, as another characterising feature, causes premature beginning of sexual life. When characterising these features, he relied on idealised practices of the middle class.
3. Speaking of the poor as "people with a week structure of ego" and "with unclear sexual identity";
4. and with inferiority and powerlessness complexes.

According to J. A. Winter the characteristics produced by Lewis, relying on individual self-evaluation, are rather speculative.

Even though several theses produced by Lewis were criticised and the author himself corrected some of them, his findings and comments still are a source on which the anthropology of poverty may draw. Several of Lewis’ views were applied to our examination of the community living at Jánoštellek farm. Similar to Lewis works, in which the poor speak on their own behalf, in our research the people living at the farm present their opinions and their own assessment of their situation. Although this method cannot avoid description and it is difficult to cluster a representative sample, nevertheless, the information obtained at interviews with people distant from their characters creates a complicated and varied mixture, it provides opportunities for explanation and interpretation. However, to attain the truth depends to a great degree on the social sensibility of the researcher and his/her ability to understand the social reality.

What life histories narrate

In order to introduce the reader to the situation at the Jánoštellek farm, an extract of the K. N.'s life history will be publicised here. This is because the respondent speaks not only
about her personal experience but also because she explains the situation there in general, and thus allows more light to be shed on the difficulties and problems of everyday life at the farm.

K. N., born in Prague, is about thirty years old. She got divorced twice and has two sons by her former husbands, who now live in the Czech Republic; her third son is by her common-law husband. In the past, she was employed as a sanitary worker in a hospital in Prague. Because of the children she and her husband moved to a village near Prague, where she started working as a cattle-breeder. There she met her now divorced husband, whose adult son also lives in the Czech Republic. In 1987 she, together with her children, moved to Slovakia where they had an opportunity to find accommodation and work at the state farm at Jánoštěl

That was the most stupid thing to come here. If I had known they would divide the republic, I'd never have come here. I had worked at the state farm for one and half years and I was quite happy that we lived in the country. Then I went on maternity leave and since then we've had only problems. I haven't got used to living here and I'll never be able to. Now it's neglected and dirty; there's no heating in the flat. I'm sorry I've come here. I'd rather die below the statue of St. Wenceslas than here. The state did the greatest stupidity when it gave the possessions back. They shouldn't have given them out to the privatisers, because they don't know what to do with them.

The state farm has not existed since 1993 when it was restored to the R. family. Most of the released employees still live in the flats allotted to them by the former state farm. At present there are fifteen families; most of them live on social benefits. Several people are old age pensioners.

The restituents made an attempt to work on the farm themselves.

But we had no capital and our sons and daughters had their own jobs. A son said that he would work there for three months but he wasn't very successful and so we had to rent it out. The first tenant didn't pay the rent at all and therefore we had to put the case to the court. Now Jánoštěl is rented out to a company from Dunajská Streda. But they want only fields; they don't want any livestock sheds nor cattle. And they don't want to have anything to do with the people who live here. They're only vagabonds, they steal and ruin things. Every month we pay 30,000 Sk for electricity and then we're not able to get the money back from them. They will steal everything - electric light bulbs and the wires as well. It's useless to rely on them and let them do something. Everything is in ruins there, no one works properly. We had a good crop of corn, but they didn't plough the fields; they only said they'd do it in the spring. I'd rather sell it all but nowadays it's hard to sell land.

(The owner of the Jánoštěl farm)

Mrs. R. is said to have given the farm to one of her sons. Now he does everything. Every year he rents out the farm to somebody else. And so every year there are new conditions for paying the rent and electricity. The first tenant wanted us to pay 3.60 Sk for 1 kw. It was pretty hard to settle the matter and to make him understand that we were not private undertakers. He only gave us trouble. After a year he only took the crops and vanished into thin air. Then we paid nothing to the second tenant because when he had taken over the farm he immediately wanted to increase the rent and the R. family phoned us every three months to tell us not to pay anything to him. So we didn't pay for three quarters of the year. Now its about three months since the farm was rented out to the third tenant. And we don't know yet who he is. Well, he's raised the rent by 25%. When we pay, we just get a kind of receipt with a stamp from some firm. And now R. wants us to pay the rent for those nine

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months or he'll move us out. It's not possible. No one has so much money. I came to terms with him about quarterly installments of 2,000 - 3,000 Sk. It's true that there are people who don't pay at all and their debts are about 5,000 - 7,000 Sk. And they only mock those who do.

R. says that it is just a waste of money to maintain the flats and most of the buildings. He said that till May 1996 he 'd let everything be as it used to be but then he'd pull down the old blocks and move the people who lived there somewhere in Malacky. Many people, mainly the elderly, can't speak any Slovak. They won't be able to live there. We live in newer blocks but we don't know anything about what he's going to do with them. But he wants to pull down everything here.

(During 1996 the situation calmed down and now no one speaks about moving the people out and demolishing the houses.)

Each of us wanted to buy the flat and also rent 10 ha of land from him but R. didn't want to give us anything, he just didn't want to help us. Nobody maintains it here. In our flat the electric wiring went off and so we've got only one socket and there is no one we could ask for help. The front door is broken. We wanted to buy a new one, but the owner wouldn't refund the money to us. Also no one cleans the cesspools. We race for coal and wood ourselves. We go to the forest to pick up dry branches fallen off the trees. Next to us lives an old woman and last year she had nothing to heat her flat with; so we used to throw some coal and wood over the fence to her garden. Otherwise she'd have died. She doesn't know how to defend herself. If they'd wanted her to give them the whole pension to pay the rent, she'd have done so and then have starved to death. It's a horror. We live like beasts.

Well, the people who live here are all sorts, also Gypsies; most of them are on social benefit, but they aren't bad. Look, I'm neither Hungarian nor Slovak but if I need to borrow something from the older ones who only speak Hungarian I just go to them and show them the label or box of what I need and they lend it to me. Aunt Mariša from the neighbours even bakes strudel for us because I don't know how to make it. That is the situation that makes them behave like jackals. Everyone wants to gather things just for their family but on the other hand there are some people who'd steal even if they had a million. They're real monsters. Most of them keep a pet animal at home. They've got nothing so they want to have a pet at least. Then, either they or the animal will have something to eat, and so they steal. R. is told us to watch out for those who steal. But I'm not here to watch out for thieves.

Everything would have been different if they'd given work to the local people, but they'd rather hire strangers. They come for one season only, pick the harvest and then leave. The fields are under crop but the cowsheds and piggeries are empty. They slaughtered the animals but the plants won't grow without them.

(K.N., unemployed, Jánoštělek)

Neither the village clerk nor the economist of the co-operative farm at Topoľníky highly value the farm.

Mrs. R. pays the taxes and there are no problems of this kind. But the farm has been devastated; two more years of further mismanagement and the land will have no value. Even now (the end of October), the straw is still in the fields. If I were the owner of the farm, I wouldn't invest anything in the buildings either. The best thing would be to pull down everything. But we have to observe the law; it's not possible to throw people out.

(The clerk of the village of Topoľníky)

Year after year, Mrs. R. lets somebody else take her in. At the moment she is expected to decide on whether she will again let somebody take her in or rent out the land to us (the
farmers' co-operative) and be happy with 1,000 Sk as the rent. But if we rent it from her; we won't take care of all the buildings and people. It's out of question to start animal husbandry here. Who excel at it are the Dutch. So Mrs. R.'s cowsheds will remain empty. And the farm and the people? Can you remember those old American films? Cowboys raiding a farm and killing the farmer's family and then riding away? And what happened to the farm? It was laid waste. That's the only solution.

(The economist of the farmer's co-operative)

It is important to examine the pauperised communities at farms to discover whether their existence is (1) predominantly a socially based problem and the marginalisation of these communities coincides with the overall situation in the agricultural sector, which now appears to be in depression, or (2) rather a problem of individuals, their negative personal characteristics, mental diseases, lack of ability, initiative, disturbed family relationships and irresponsibility leading to delinquency.

Members of the pauperised communities feel, first of all, their material poverty. It is understandable when seen from the point of view of per capita incomes and equipment in their households. The standard of living of the people housed on farms ranged from relevant to very good. The period in which they have experienced their material poverty is relatively short. Their poverty may be characterised as short-time and, for this reason, it is not possible to speak about a learned life-style adapted to constrained conditions, a life-style passed over from generation to generation, and about habits reflecting such a life-style.

Although it is not possible to speak about inherited poverty, there are still certain indicators of continuity ensuing from the family life-style practised during socialism or even in the pre-war period. Despite the variability of individual life-histories of poor people, there are consistent cases of being born to poor families with large families, unstable families, free partnerships and children born out of wedlock. Several cases are due to faulty upbringing. However, there is one feature unifying them into a group - a low degree of education as most people living at farms are unskilled labourers.

In order to illustrate this situation, extracts from life-histories of three inhabitants of Jánoštělek, each of them representing a different generation, are presented to the reader.

The oldest inhabitant and also someone who can remember well the history of Jánoštělek is aunt R. She was born in 1917. She came to the farm as an eighteen-year-old girl after her father (born at Topoľníky) was employed there as an ox-team driver. There were nine children in the family. Immediately after her arrival, she started working in the fields helping during the harvest; then she was digging out and sorting sugar beet. During the war, when men were in the army, she worked with cows and helped to manure the fields. The man to whom she got married was an ox-team driver at the farm same as her father. They also had nine children.

_We weren't to blame that we had so many children. There was no contraception at that time and they would put us to jail for abortion._

The life at the farm before the war was incredibly hard and merciless. She can remember moments in her life when she nearly delivered one of her children in the field during the harvest or how she and her husband had to work for two years to pay for wood and rye or how she made soup for her family of ten liters of water and 750 grammes of meat. She also says that she received children's allowance only after the war when she delivered her fourth child.

_It was slowly getting better after the war. You could do your shopping for one hundred crowns but today you get very little, nearly nothing._
Aunt R. is a widow; she lives in a spacious flat in a semi-detached house and runs a modest but well-tended household. She shares it with her fifty-years old mentally ill daughter. Other children have their own households. Š. S. is fifty years old and is unemployed. He was born as the youngest of sixteen children. The whole family always lived on the farms in the surroundings of Čalovo. As a twelve-year old boy he had to help with the sugar beet. When his father died, his mother was working as a milk maid, so he used to help her with the milking. After the war he worked for a short time in Bohemia. After his return to Slovakia in 1950, he worked on a state farm near Nové Zámky and, later on, on a farm belonging to the state farm at Čalovo. He has always lived outside the village in a lonely standing house. Although he obtained an apprenticeship as a cook during his military service, he always worked with animals. He says that he cannot imagine life without them. He moved to Jánoštelek eight years ago as he found a job there as a fodderer and milker. He was married three times. His first wife was Slovak. After she died, he got married for the second time - to a Czech woman.

But she was a heavy drinker, always short of money and so I walked out on her. My third wife was Hungarian. I left her when she throttled our new born baby.

He also suspects her of causing sudden death of his eleven-year son by his previous wife:

Sure she gave him something. He was full of life and cheerful but when he had eaten stewed tomatoes and peppers that she'd made for him he felt sick. When he died, I completely turned grey.

Š. S. had six children by his three wives. None of them received higher education. Four of them live in villages nearby Komárno, Nové Zámky and Hurbanovo; two sons live in Bohemia - in Prague. He has not seen them since the desintegration of Czechoslovakia. He lives alone but every other day his daughter comes to see him.

M. S., a woman thirty years old, comes from a working class family in Bratislava. After leaving primary school, she started working as a cook in a restaurant. She met her husband-to-be, a native of Kollárovo,\(^\text{[1]}\) when he was working in Bratislava as an unskilled building worker.

We came to Jánoštelek after our wedding in 1987. We got a flat here and we both started working in livestock production. Although it was much better in the kitchen, it was not so bad to work with cows. We had good wages; we had 9,000 crowns together and also got some agricultural produce.

The S. have three children. They both live on social benefit. They are not even able to obtain work at the co-operative farm at Topoľníky because they wouldn't take on anyone from here. They cannot find anything at Dunajská Streda, either. They offer jobs there but each of them only takes money away from home rather than brings it in when you count in the fare and some soup.

According to family histories recorded at the farm at Jánoštelek it may be concluded that five of the fifteen families living there were divorced or based on free common-law bonds.

At the farm known as Starý Gójaš there are four families whose structure is as follows:

1. A couple consisting of a widower and a divorced woman: they have lived at Starý Gójaš as common-law husband and wife for twelve years. Both of them have adult children by former spouses. The man works for a private undertaker.

2. An unemployed couple characterised by others as *backward and rather strange people*. They have four children.
3. An unemployed divorced woman and her two adolescent sons.
4. An unemployed Romani couple and their four children. Three of them attend a special school.

Although we do not dare pronounce any unchallengeable conclusions based on examination of such a limited group of subjects, the life histories of the individuals as well as family histories reveal certain symptomatic features, such as a low level of education, disturbed family bonds, alcoholism (When they get money, half of the farm gets drunk) and mental handicaps, which predestine people to be poor. Are the individuals or families to be blamed for their poverty, then? The "Yes" answer would only be an oversimplification of these results. Such an answer should be based on the partially true and partially false notion that people are born free and equal. In reality they are born with different dispositions and, consequently, their starting position in life as well as the scale of opportunities are different.

Material deprivation

From the economic point of view one of the poverty status indicators is a low income and the income per capita obtained due to employment or social benefits, or due to temporary jobs. It is accompanied by a limited consumption sufficient only for physical and social survival. Low incomes presuppose the development of adaptive mechanisms to life's needs in very modest conditions. It requires an ability, which, in fact, only few have, to rationalise expenses and consumption and to obtain additional means of living by a variety of compensatory activities.

My income, together with the children's allowance, makes 5,400 a month. He (her common-law husband) gets 2,150 Sk as a disability pension. It's only his good will that he helps me. He could pack up and go. It's necessary to pay rent with that money. It comes, together with the sum for fuel we have to buy, to about 2,000 Sk a month. I pay 1,000 Sk for meat every month. We can afford sausages and salami only very rarely. I also pay for school - 16 crowns a day and 400 Sk for the bus as I take the child to the kindergarten. I need to give another one thousand to my son who goes to a vocational school in Bratislava. The second son, who goes to the Slovak school at Veľký Meder - at Topoľníky there's only a Hungarian school and he speaks Hungarian very badly - needs another one hundred a month for the bus pass. The next year I'll enroll him at the school at Topoľníky. We switch on the light as little as possible to save money; I wash the linen by hand and use gas bomb to make the meals. We have rows all the time because of the money. (K. N., a woman 30 years old, unemployed).

When both of us were unemployed, we received the minimum living benefit. Now I'm working for a private firm for 3,500 Sk a month, which also includes children's allowance. We were better off when I was at home. We still have teenage children. I pay 1,000 Sk to the boy who goes to agricultural school. It's a problem to buy shoes and jeans; we've got no money to give them to go to the cinema, theatre or disco. An then there's the rent not to speak about the food. I can't make both ends meet. I wanted to ask for a loan in a bank to buy clothes for the children. But they turned me down because I don't have a living wage.

(M. P., a woman 40 years old, a worker)

I had six children. Now I live here alone. I get 2,180 of social benefit. When I pay for electricity and the rent, I have 1,000 Sk. If my children didn't help me, I'd be broke. Today no one will give a job to a man 53 years old, not even a watchman's job and the old-age pension is still far ahead.

(J. S., a man 53 years old, unemployed)
I came here in 1989. I worked with cows. My wife was at home because the children were still very young. It wasn’t necessary for her to go to work; moreover, she was ill. At that time I got as much as the social benefit is now - 5,000 crowns. Now I pay 900 SK for the rent, another 500 SK is the loan for the newly married; school lunches for children are another 400 SK. Then we buy flour, sugar; well, I smoke a pack of cigarettes a day, and we’re through the money. We don’t have winter clothes for us or for the children, either. Last time when we bought trainers for them, we had no money left to buy food. In winter we all live and sleep in the kitchen because we can’t afford to heat other rooms. I used to go to the Danube canal to collect wood, but now it’s forbidden. The fine is 500 SK.

(Č. T., a man 30 years old, unemployed)

However, the informal economy allows only very low incomes. It includes growing vegetables in small, neglected front gardens and also feeding poultry, especially geese, and pigs. It is important to say that this economic activity has not been necessitated by bad economic conditions; it also reflects the former habits of working in agriculture, especially in livestock production.

I cannot imagine my life without animals, without chickens and geese. Even now they help me. I had fed up ten geese, sold them and then bought coal for the winter. This year at Christmas, I had three twelve-kilo geese. Well, I don’t want any goats. They’re bleating all the time and you have to keep them on chain. In the summer I had cabbages, savoys, carrots, strawberries and pumpkins, and I fed the geese on them. Here those who don’t have any animals are only lazy or don’t know how to breed them.

(Š. Š., an unemployed 50 years old man)

7,000 SK is nothing for three nearly adult children. If I didn’t grow vegetables and have some poultry in the yard, we’d never have any meat.

(M. M., an unemployed 40 years old woman)

Some of these people attempt to find a solution to their conditions in part-time work which is provided to the inhabitants of Jánoštělek by a local chicken breeder. He remunerates them in money or in kind - chicken. Others are involved in petty theft and deviant behaviour.

I knew one woman from Gőjás who also lived on social benefit. She was a single parent. And so from time to time she took some goats away from the farm. These times made her steal because she had nothing to give to her children. Now they’ll put her to prison.

(K. N., an unemployed 30 years old woman)

The worst of all farms is Jánošikovo. The people there give much trouble, especially those who have fallen out of the social net and now live on what they steal. The police have been there several times.

(The village clerk of Okoč)

Trespass on fields and theft is of a seasonal character: what is just ripe will be stolen. At the time of our research it was corn. We even couldn’t watch TV because the dogs were barking all the time at those who were going to the corn field.

(K. N., an unemployed 30 years old woman)

Although there was a night watchman in the field, it was possible to bribe him. Nevertheless, it did not always come off:

We gave him a bottle of alcohol and took only a bag full of corn cobs. The next day we found neither the bag nor the sacks. It was he who took them away. But he says he didn’t.

(S. Š., an unemployed 50 years old man)

Similarly to other state farms, where animal husbandry was abolished, the local people stole material from livestock sheds and piggeries. At Starý Gőjás, they also carried away...
what they could from the houses abandoned after 1989 by former state farm workers, who lost their jobs and left that place after the farm had been closed:

The houses were built after the floods in the 1970s and belonged to the state farm at Čalovo. Now they are in ruins: there are no floors, window frames, heating, and electric wiring left. They weren’t taken away only by people from Gőjäs, who stayed there; they only stole the wooden floors as fire-wood. But there were also people from neighbouring villages with their cars. The Gypsies stole copper wires and bricks.

(P. C., a 40-year man receiving a disability benefit)

What is considered to be poverty reflects the standard of living which is supposed to be adequate in a given sociocultural context. On examining the life conditions of the people at the farms against the index of material deprivation, such as dietary habits, clothing, and housing, i.e. the basic necessities, it is possible to form a conclusion that they do not starve, do not wear rags and do not live in huts. Nevertheless, their standard of living is now much lower in all these items than it used to be in the recent past, and also in comparison with contemporary general standards of other social groups.

Despite this the level of housing is not very low: the flats are quite spacious, the people are not cramped together in a small living area. For instance, two generations sharing the same flat is rare. Electricity, running potable water as well as indoor water closets, bathrooms, and fully furnished kitchens in blocks built in the 1970s have been taken for granted. The local magistrate takes care of clearing the household waste away. What the tenants do complain about are the neglected, not attended to and deteriorating flats. Nevertheless, only they themselves may often be blamed for the situation. The buildings need to be reconstructed, but reconstruction requires investment, which neither the owners nor the tenants are willing to make. The former argue that no or very low rents allow them to do so; the latter, on the other hand, do not feel like spending money on something that does not belong to them. As a result, the chimneys on some houses threaten to fall down, in others the roofs leak and plaster is falling off. The last event was a broken water pump.

Some families, mainly the young ones, would rather leave the ghetto and move house to small social flats in the village. But the chairman allotls the flats to people from Topol'niky because we have somewhere to live.

The lower living standard is reflected in the changed diet. The means are inadequate to buy meat, salami, and sausages; these are considered to be luxury items. The people here do not buy tropical fruit at all. An opportunity to compensate for the lack of means to buy food is seen in growing their own vegetables, fattening pigs and poultry or petty theft. In the rural environment, food considered to be a particular representative sign of family feasts and ceremonies has maintained its role and now is the only indicator of very rare family festivals. In functioning families it is still, first of all, the wedding.

My daughter got married a year ago. It’s such a habit to fatten your own pig when you know there’ll be a wedding in the family. I was apprenticed to a cook, and so I myself arranged for everything. I slaughtered twenty chickens and forty hens, geese and ducks I had been fattening. We treated everyone at the farm to wine and some hard drink.

(S. Š., an unemployed 50 years old man)

Another indicator of reduced consumption is clothing, where restrictions mainly concern families with many children. Necessities include warm winter clothes and shoes which are more expensive. The adults also say they cannot afford decent clothes to wear when they go to town.

Although the people living at farms are not in the habit of referring to themselves as
poor, their poverty is spoken about implicitly, in a subjective and indirect manner, when they mention their low incomes and insufficient consumption. They feel depressed because they cannot afford the same kind of diet, clothing and housing which they were used to and which are regarded as normal in the wider society to which they belong. Their material deprivation is linked to social deprivation.

Social deprivation

The people who live at the farms are characterised by the villagers as lazy, idle drones and drunkards, as people who have the slightest inclination to work. Nevertheless, not all of these people belong in this categories; some of them complain of being lumped together with others. The reason they have been trapped by poverty is seen as a lack of opportunities to find better paid jobs.

They are disappointed both by the results of the restitution of the farms to the previous owners and the behaviour of the new leaseholders, who have not given them jobs at the farm and, on the contrary, have recruited workers from elsewhere instead. They feel that they are not trusted and that their performance at work is not justly evaluated. On the other hand, the problems of these people stem from the fact that only the owners' relatives and their relatives are taken on. To them this unfavourable situation is epitomised by the farm at Gőjás, which was privatised by the former management of the state farm.

Sure they gave us jobs here at the beginning. But he was cheated out of his property and it was stolen from him in the end. No wonder - he set a wolf to mind the sheep. He had a nightwatchman here who stole six sacks of wheat and fodder, and the cows had no milk then. While he worked as a night watchman, everything was taken and sold. Every manager got a job, all the buffoons at the top remained, only common workers were sacked. (P. C., a handicapped pensioner, 40 years old)

Generally speaking these people are rather pessimistic about getting any job. They argue that the labour market offers only badly paid ones.

Kačena, the neighbour, works for an Italian company at Dunajská Streda. She makes shoes there. Her wage is so low that she's in debt all the time. After she pays for a bus pass and gets something to eat, she has no money - only eyes to cry. Recently she had to go on sick leave as she didn't have money to get to work. (K. N., an unemployed woman, 30 years old)

A watchman was needed for the Komárno ship-building yard. About fifty people applied for the post. They offered 3,000 Sk, just enough to get there and back. So, if I'd taken it on, I'd have had only two hundred left. (P. C., a handicapped pensioner, 40 years old)

In several cases the acceptance on work is conditioned mainly by capital which, of course, these people do not possess to start their own business. For this reason, they consider themselves to be socially handicapped.

I took part in several courses arranged for the unemployed by the Job Center at Dunajská Streda. I even have a certificate. I was told that I'd be qualified to make business deals. But to start off I needed money and a car, which I didn't have. (M. D., an unemployed man, 40 years old)

I wanted to start my own business so I went on a business course. To start I needed 100,000 but the bank didn't give me the loan. They told me I could get only 16,000. But those who have 200,000 or 300,000 get a million. They just want the weak to fail. Why should they keep them afloat? (M. D., an unemployed man, 40 years old)
We tried to start our own business. We wanted to fatten pigs. To feed them we needed three hectares of land but they didn’t want to lease it to us. What’s more, we didn’t have money and without money you can do nothing (T. B., an unemployed man, 40 years old).

However, attempts to lease land, as I recorded in several instances, were not motivated by a farmer’s wish to own land in order to cultivate it. They were the attitudes of a labourer for whom the holding of land is a means to ensure work and, as a result, be safe from unemployment. Such attitudes suggest that work is considered only in impersonal terms as a necessity enabling them to have a regular income and access to material things. Any emotional involvement in and satisfaction from work are not emphasised. What is honored is only clearly visible hard work, i.e. physical work, no matter how monotonous and exhausting it will be, or the production of physical goods.

On farms, the temporarily unemployed become the long-term unemployed, gradually resigned to their lot and consequently accustomed to their new status. On the other hand, some of them are really inadaptalbe and do not want to work at all. For this reason, villagers claim that these people are responsible for their own misery, which means they are inclined to “blame the poor”.

Those who want work will find work. Those who don’t want to will stay at home even for five years. There are some who work when they feel like working and then they work only on the side. They pay neither taxes nor insurance.

(an administrative female worker at the farm at Gójaš, 20 years old)

If those people wanted to work, they’d get some work, but they don’t’ want to. On the other hand, they have money to buy cigarettes and go to the pub.

After 1989 a very controversial relationship based on the awareness of others - “us” and “them” - has developed between the inhabitants of Jánostelek and the villagers: The people of the village must have haloes round their heads because all evil comes from Jánostelek only.

Seen from the villagers’ point of view, the paupers living at the farms are an underclass, an alienated group neither wanted nor needed by the local people. Even the village clerk thinks that if it weren’t for the people at Jánostelek, a much larger percentage of crime would be cleared up. They just don’t want to work. No wonder since there’s minimal difference between the state guaranteed wage and the social benefit allowance. But I admit they are much worse off than the people in the village.

In comparison with the village community the people on the farms feel socially rejected, disadvantaged and unequal. They are convinced that local policy-makers feel no sympathy for them and support only the majority population.

All of us have been turned down. The ‘polgármešter’ - the village clerk - takes care only of his own people from Topolniki. But at election time they come with the ballot box. Last year when I got the election papers, I threw them into the waste-paper bin. Why should I cast my vote for someone who will do nothing for us?

(E. M., an unemployed woman, 50 years old)

The wretched local officers’ve sent us to hell. They didn’t care a fig for us when we had troubles with water. The ‘polgármešter’ didn’t send us a tanker; he said that it was dirty, and they didn’t want to send us the fire engine, either.

(K. M., an unemployed woman, 30 years old)

Subsidised flats are allotted only to people from the village, never from Jánostelek.

(an unemployed woman, 40 years old)

The old age pensioners from Jánostelek say that if they lived in the village they could buy
cheaper food once or twice a month. Here they don’t know anything about it because there is no local radio. Why shouldn’t the old woman living next door have the privilege? These women had worked all their lives. I just can’t understand it. Everything seems to be upside down: those who don’t need anything are supported.

It is necessary to say that the village clerk made several attempts to find solution to the situation at Jánoštělek. Nevertheless, he admits he does not know how to publicly announce the sale date to the people there, but he promised to improve the situation. In 1996 the road to Jánoštělek was reconstructed and the chairman also arranged for the bus to divert and stop at the farm, which the local bus company had not planned previously. The families with a living wage only receive a special allowance to buy food for their children.

Most quarrels relate to the system of distributing official funds. The inhabitants of the farms firmly believe that the distribution system is not just because some of them can obtain loans to buy coal because some don’t.

*When you apply to the local office for assistance, you get nothing. I went there to ask for money to buy fuel. I wanted 3,000 Sk to buy coal. I wanted to pay the money back by installments. The chairman told me he had no funds for it. But he gave a loan of 10,000 to a family who are on the dole. She bought something for their children and then drank the rest with her man. Last year I got a reduction from the local office to buy food and exercise books for my children. This year Peter (the clerk) told me that I have no right to the reduction because I get children’s allowance and I have to get on by on that.*

(K. N., an unemployed woman, 30 years old)

The local office has only limited social funds and, as a result, only a very low sum of money can be distributed among those in need.

*What is of concern in the social agenda is that the people of Jánoštělek are our people. But the village has only a low sum of money in the social fund. The worst off get money to buy coal, but they have to prove they have got no other means. We even had to give out money from the social fund to pay for a burial.*

Those in need may recourse to the Job Offices, established as official institutions the aim of which is to provide state assistance in finding jobs. However, having acquired purely technical approaches to the problem, they only operate as distributors of the financial means. At the same time, they thus supervise the lives of the people. As a result, the relationship is one of conflict and dependence. With reference to this type of assistance in overcoming poverty it is necessary to note that this is a much more complicated matter and cannot be solved by mere distribution of social allowances.

*The clerks from the Job Office come here and ask us whether we have gold, papers, or a color TV set. If you have something valuable, they’ll take it away from you. The old car I’d bought for 5,000 Sk didn’t interest them.*

(Č. T., an unemployed man, 30 years old)

God save you if you don’t have your papers in order or don’t bring them in time. The officers need to have everything on time, but if you need something, they won’t help you. It happened to me the other time when I didn’t have some of Ludvika’s papers (her common-law husband) with me. I didn’t get the children’s allowance, and they were to go to school. But they don’t care at all. They only told me they didn’t have any money to give to me.

A year ago my divorced husband, who lives in the Czech Republic, stopped sending me alimony for my son. I let the Social Insurance Office know about the situation, but they did nothing about it. They only keep saying that the children are in bad condition while we don’t know if we can buy them food or clothes. Then a woman I’ve known for ages told me
to apply to the police and they really found him. Also, I had so many problems getting Slovak citizenship for me and the children. All that just breaks your back.

We had expected that the social gap separating the people at the former state farms from the rest of the villagers, their closest neighbours would bring them together and make them co-operate. However, the very opposite seems to be true. The families live isolated one from another and even under the most critical circumstances they do not unite in order to pursue common action. On the contrary, they become more introverted and, consequently, more isolated. Rude and ruthless behaviour is quite common. This finding corresponds to Lewis’s assertion concerning the culture of poverty at the local community level, in which there is minimum organisation at the level higher than the nuclear and extended family.23

The water pipeline was ruined as the engine had burnt down. We couldn’t wash ourselves for two weeks. We had to carry the water we needed in cans. Those who’ve got a car wouldn’t help those who don’t. Eva, our neighbour, has got a well in her yard but she told us she wouldn’t let us take anything even if we were dying of thirst.

(K. M., an unemployed woman, 30 years old)

People here are mean, they suspect one another.

(A. T., a housewife, 30 years old)

We don’t keep in touch with anybody. We’re on our own. There are only problems with the neighbours. They even shot our dog with an air-gun. When we protested, they wanted to beat us.

(M. F., a housewife, 40 years old)

Your neighbours would give you away if they knew you were working on the side.

(P. C., a handicapped pensioner, 40 years old)

When M’s son was ruining the bus arrivals and departures notice-board, R. něni (aunt), came out of her house and shouted to him to stop. He broke her arm.

(Č. T., an unemployed man, 30 years old)

Oscar Lewis writes: “People living in the culture of poverty are provincial. They are completely indulged in their own problems and difficulties and take interest in their local conditions, neighbourhood and way of life. They totally lack any class awareness but they sensitively react to differences in status. They miss participation in and integration to the work of decision making institutions in the wider community.”24

The social deprivation at the lower local level is deepened by deprivation at the level of the wider society. The inhabitants of the farms are not able to identify any means by which they would assert their own rights in the wider context. Nevertheless, if they could, they would not have any idea of how to bring about any change in their status. Their political attitudes are overwhelmed by indifference, fatalism and passivity; at the same time, they are antagonistic towards those who are in power and who cannot see from their top positions to the bottom of the society. Nevertheless, in terms of political behaviour they will claim that policy-making is a matter for politicians. As a result, they have acquired an indifferent and unconcerned stance, both politically and socially. Despite this, they sensitively react to the disappearance of the paternalistic care provided by the former regime, in which the right to work and social benefits were taken for granted. Without being supported by the state they feel as if surrendered to the mercy of uncertainty. Their sentimental memories of Communism, which was much better, are, therefore, fully grounded.

It doesn’t matter who is in power. They’ll always rake it in and we’ll only scrape up.

(A. T., a housewife, 30 years old)
I'm not interested in politics. There'll always be only what they want, but we won't get rich on it.
(Č. T., an unemployed man, 30 years old)

In vain will I have my own opinion. It's a God forsaken place here. No one is interested in us.
(M.P., a female worker, 40 years old)

Those who are sitting in parliament have their pockets packed with money and so only look down on the poor. If they could, they'd take away from us even the air we breathe.
(M. M., an unemployed woman, 50 years old)

We are well aware of the fact that the explanations recorded within the ghettoised community at one farm on the Žitný Island are insufficient to answer the question of why the poor are poor. Poverty cannot be explained on its own grounds but only within the sociocultural system in which the poor are identified as one of its components. For this reason, we have been able to only roughly outline the wider context. On the other hand, we have highlighted thoughts concerning poverty and defined it as an inevitable consequence of the transition from socialism to a market economy. Those who were most dependent and most closely tied to the paternalistic, in some instances even feudal, practices of the former regime pay the highest price for the previous patriarchal care provided by the state. From this point of view, the condition of the previously in demand unskilled, especially agricultural labourers, should be considered most acute. As a result, the transfer of poverty to rural districts is most easily observable in those areas where the state farms collapsed and farm workers employed there were immediately released. Nevertheless, these conditions seem to be also due to depression in the agricultural sector. The unsatisfactory economic situation marginalises not only agricultural labourers but farmers as a class in general.

The reality of agricultural labourers released from state farms after 1989 was for most of them cruel and beyond their understanding. The new situation aroused in them feelings of being alienated from and condemned by society. Absolute certainties and tried and tested patterns which were previously believed to be unshakable vanished to be replaced by insecurity as the new most characteristic feature of social life. Total reversal of living conditions have made both individuals and families face up to this highly unfavourable situation and adapt to a new life-style. However, only few of them have had the initiative, flexibility, and capability to accommodate the new reality.

Despite the fact that most agricultural labourers working on the former state farms enjoyed a satisfactory level of material goods, it was possible to distinguish particular status features, such as low education, unskilled labour, low family income, large families, broken homes, alcoholism, and low intelligence as clearly observable in several individual cases. These could be considered to be signals of the threat of the poverty trap. Individuals exhibiting such characteristics and living in less favourable conditions were certainly more exposed to various external pressures, which they were not able to resist. Since they lacked flexibility to immediately react to changes in the socioeconomic system, they were rather predestined to succumb to them and become poor. Several life histories which I have introduced in the study seem to support this view.

To be poor is extremely frustrating in a sociocultural context in which poverty has no status. This may be exemplified by the attitude of the people living on the farms, who only rarely would refer to themselves as poor. As a result, an anomic situation has been created:
people cannot be compared against the values of the wider society, which, moreover, seems to be due to a sheer absence of values related to their status. In reference to this situation also, Slovak society is working on the reconstruction of the public dimension of poverty, measured throughout society by comparing individuals and social categories at different levels within the system of social stratification. On these grounds, ethnology should also declare its position in the process of identifying poverty in order to discover effective methods of explaining and defining this social phenomenon. It should examine the status of poverty under particular conditions set by various sociocultural systems and, on the other hand, it should also consider the explanations provided by those whose lives are directly affected by this phenomenon - the poor themselves. Moreover, their voices should be taken into account whenever the poverty issue is being discussed.

FOOTNOTES

   Nadace pro výskum sociální transformace, p. 1.
6. Cited according to MOŽNÝ, I. and MAREŠ, P., c.d., p. 35.
P., op. c., pp. 12-13. According to them there was a decrease in the numbers of the poor among farmers working at cooperative farms in Slovakia from 6% in 1965 to 3% in 1988.

18 LEWIS, O., op. q.

On the grounds of the land reform in the 1920s, the big farms formerly owned by aristocrats and the church were parceled out and, as a result, at the village of Topoľníky two farms came into existence: one of them owned by Lacko and Co. occupied 350 ha and the other so-called Jánostelek after its owner, Mr. Jesenský, an advocate based in Bratislava, occupied 550 ha. Only 120 ha spread directly a Topoľníky and the rest, 430 ha, was at the village of Šokó.

The structure of employees at the farm belonging to the Lacko family was in the 1930s as follows:

1 farm manager who was also the lease holder (számtartó - in Hungarian)
1 office clerk
1 husbandman
11 drivers of ox-teams: usually lads 16-17 years old
12 whips responsible for the carts and wagons
1 supervisor (aratógazda) responsible for the seasonal labourers hired for the harvest. These were usually members of local poor farmers’ or landless peasants’ families. They started working at the farm in spring for sowing and then digging the fields. During the harvest also women worked side by side with the men as reapers. There was a great interest among local people in seasonal work at the farm: already at four o’clock in the morning there were people waiting to be given work.
20 families of various servants (cselede) living directly in flats at the farm. They were permanent full-time employees and took care of the cattle and horses.
All of the employees lived at Topoľníky (Alsó or Alsó Nyárásd).

The structure of employees at Jesenský’s farm was similar, although the their number was higher and directly proportional to the larger area of the farm. The average number of employees at the top of the summer season was 150 people. There were also usually 50 - 100 children hired seasonally to dig weeds. In a difference from Lacko’s farm the Jesenský used to hire seasonal workers, about 20 women and 20 men from outside the village, usually Slovaks. Workers employed at the farm all the year round received payments in money, but they were also remunerated in kind; moreover, they were allowed to fatten pigs.

23 LEWIS, L., La Vida, op. c., XIXI, in Winter, op. c., p. 19.
24 WINTER, A., op. c., p. 19.
25 MOŽNÝ, L., MAREŠ, P.: op. c., p. 31.

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THE BLUE CROSS ASSOCIATION AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN BRATISLAVA

LUBICA FALTÁNOVÁ

Mgr. Lubica Faltanová, CSc., Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

Key words: Blue Cross association, religion

Ethnological and historiographic works from the middle of the 1980s direct attention to the rich life of Bratislava’s inhabitants in cultural associations and its unprecedented growth during the first Czechoslovak republic. The associations operated in various areas of life – in economic, social, cultural, humanitarian, religious, and sports.¹ The literature concerning associations indicates that in addition to associations, there were other types of getting together - including private professional groups, for example business associations, cooperatives, etc.² Particular categories of gathering are often not differentiated in statistics and sources. They have become a center of scientific interest through a variety of contributions focused on the social, cultural, political, economic, and sporting life of the inhabitants of Bratislava and on the issue of nationalities.³

With respect to the multinational image of Bratislava, a question of founding and functioning of associations according to the nationality and religion of the inhabitants is important.⁴ The interdependence between the foundation of associations and particular nationalities and religions was confirmed. This paper speaks about the activities of the association known as “Blue Cross” and correlates with the facts and research results obtained so far. The analysis of the documentation and literature points to the functioning of the association with regard to religious, national, social, cultural, and humanitarian aspects.

The paper leans on the archive material, direct interviews and various published works. The family archive material itself of the members of the Bratislava Blue Cross chairman’s
family (who do not wish to be named), dating from the foundation of the association until 1947, is worthy of special attention. On the one hand, there is a full set of quality texts, containing original and interpreted texts and photographic material, and on the other hand, a cultural phenomenon, texts dealing with the relationship of members of the association to their history, and association values established through the group’s activities. Thanks to the active interest of former members of the association in 1972 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Cirkev bratská (the Brothers Church) in Bratislava, the material was arranged by the wife of the chairman of the association (who was still alive at that time) chronologically and into sections, with commentaries and explanations. Written personal memories, autobiographies of the married couple, transcripts of interviews and the stored material established a valuable database for the issues studied.

The following materials were available: a) the first comprised of several separate items with titles given in the contents list: Memories of Sister A. Š.; Brother J.Š.; J.Š.: How Jesus Christ Found Me; J.Š.: Some More Experiences from Russia and the Appendix to Memories; Dialogue on an old picture, Thoughts on an Old Picture; Thoughts on an Album of Aunt and Uncle Š; Your Mercy is Better than Life; A Word in Conclusion; The Lost Coin (the content and characteristics of writing); b) the second material was compiled by Juraj Potúček, the author of several works on small Protestant churches. Its title is: J.Š. (1887-1976) missionary and temperance worker in Bratislava. (Correspondence - articles - documents). Compiled by Juraj Potúček on the occasion of his 90th birthday. Bratislava 1977; c) an album of chronologically arranged photographs is both an important source and document of the association. It contains several text components. A list of identified persons, dates, events, and places is appended to the photographs; d) A diary of J.Š. written during his captivity on the Russian front, in Czechoslovak legions till his return to ČSR in 1919. Autobiographies and biographies have not been the subject of analysis because, as reported in the particular works, the biographical method should be based on the representativeness of the sample as a means of reaching the objectivity of the interpreted data. Here they represent comparative material for direct interviews and literature.

The religious content of the Blue Cross association is expressed in the definitions of the association. The data about the circumstances of the establishment of the Blue Cross movement in Slovakia and within Europe contribute to the clarification of the main aims. One of the sources defines the association as a “Christian Pietist-Methodist association, the mission of which was the fight against alcoholism, gambling and a disorderly way of life from the very beginning”. According to this source the association was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Swiss Fritz Berger and was based to some extent on the traditions of German Methodism and/or a movement known as Halle pietism established by two Lutheran clergymen in the 17th century.6

According to other sources, Blue Cross was set up by an Evangelical priest of the Augsburg confession (ev.a.v.) L. L. Rochet in 1877 and, as an international association, it had its seat in Geneva. Gradually, it penetrated several European countries, Switzerland, Germany, England, Denmark and Sweden. In 1893, the first association of the Blue Cross was established in historical Hungary. At the turn of the 20th century, there were 500 Blue Cross associations in historical Hungary with 20,000 members.7 In Slovakia, the establishment of the Blue Cross is linked with the names of the two sisters (Kristína Royová and Maria Royová), who helped to set up the association in Stará Turá in 1897. There is a lot of literature that sheds light on the circumstances and the establishment of the association in Stará Turá.8 Some papers state that the awaking of the movement in Slovakia is due to
the Roy sisters (Maria and Kristina) in the Evangelical Church of Augsburg in Stará Turá, Slovakia in 1888”. According to the cited author the movement was established as an association in 1897 as Blue Cross, Evangelical Augsburg creed, internal missionary and temperance association. According to the principles of the Association, membership of the Blue Cross was bound up with the biblical spiritual resurrection. According to the Bible: ‘You must be born anew’ (John, 3, 7).

In other words, as authors close to the movement write in their works, spiritual work was built on the basis of the Bible and according to religious explanation, it was based on a personal turning to Jesus Christ. The acceptance of members was also based on the Bible, the Association brought together people who believed in God, converted Christians, and believers in temperance. The Pietist trend of the movement is also reported in Blue Cross in Slovakia development studies. The activities of the Roy sisters were also influenced by the modern Christian movement. For example, the work of the sisters in Stará Turá was influenced by contact with representatives of Jednota českobratrská, the new free reformed church in Bohemia. Its members found an organizational basis in Blue Cross, because their aim was not to create new church denomination, but to develop a spiritual revival within the Evangelical Church.

The Association in Stará Turá was the center of activities in Slovakia and members of the Bratislava branch were in permanent contact with representatives of the Blue Cross in Stará Turá, similarly as other branches. From an ethnological perspective, there is some interesting data from the initial activities of the Roy sisters. The beginnings date back to the period before the founding of the Blue Cross. It is a question of the internal interest of individuals on the one hand and external circumstances on the other hand, together shaping the initial incentive to activities resulting in the organized movement. This data points to important links in the early stages of their work with the traditional milieu of the local community and with traditional occupations in the region of Podjavorina. The ideas, gradually put into practice, were directly linked with knowledge of the social position of local pedlars selling embroidery and wooden kitchenware. Kristina Royová began to take interest in the low social and spiritual level of the pedlars’ children. She wrote: “My heart bled for the children of pedlars”. They were pitiable orphans of living parents. Ten months cared for by others, in reality neglected, followed by two months with the parents, who wanted to make up for what they had not provided with resultant caressing, overfeeding and the living of a completely abnormal life. I have longed to do something for them for years, especially for the children of our religious pedlars.” Her aims led to her establishing a temporary home for pedlars children. The care later focused on orphans. It is, however, just one part of the activities of the Blue Cross in Stará Turá.

Members of the movement described themselves as converts and believers while non-members were called unbelievers. They addressed each other as brother and sister. The symbol of the association was the blue cross and they were known as “modrokrížania” (modrý kříž = blue cross). With regard to the foundation of the movement and the spreading of the associations, attention is drawn to the inter-church character of the association, its leadership having the form of an alliance and its international orientation. The majority of the members of Blue Cross belonged to the Evangelical Church of Augsburg confession. Tracing the spread of the Blue Cross associations in Slovakia, some significant personalities should be mentioned. There is one to whom we should pay particular attention and who had a decisive influence on the establishment of the association in Stará Turá, namely Ján Chorvát. As a teacher in Stará Turá, he became familiar with the work of the Roy sisters.
After his return from the missionary institute in Switzerland, he was the one to initiate the setting up of the Blue Cross in 1897. He cemented and coordinated all activities of the Blue Cross.\textsuperscript{14} It was the period when the movement began to spread to Gmee, Novohrad, and eastern Slovakia around Košice. Encouraged by people with a new approach to religious life, new branches of the Blue Cross were gradually opened in Ozdín (1902, district of Poltár), Málinec (Poltár), Tisoľ (district Rimavská Sobota), Mengusovce (district Poprad), Trebeľov (district Košice), Obišovce (Košice), Béniakove (Košice), Bratislava, and other places. New ideas were disseminated by the missionaries themselves, but also by “self-made-persons”, individuals and local initiators who had been inspired by various sources. Magazines and books were very important.

Several centers were formed in Slovakia, often independently of each other, gradually interconnecting through the organization. For instance, foundations for the work in eastern Slovakia were laid by an inhabitant of Trebeľov: he learned about the religious revival movement in the journal Betania published by Jednota českobratrská, an emigrant living in America. He began to spread the new spiritual ideas after his return to his home village. They were further distributed through personal contacts with the inhabitants of other villages. At first, people gathered in private houses or various buildings such as evangelical schools, but later they began to be organized into associations of the Blue Cross and chapels began to be built.

The dissemination of Blue Cross associations among Slovaks living in Hungary and Yugoslavia is a special topic. It is of particular interest that the movement was spread among Slovaks abroad by missionaries from Slovakia. They encouraged and regulated the developing activities, at first by sporadic visits, later by more permanent stays lasting several years. The germ of the new spiritual activities stemmed from various sources. In relation to Slovaks abroad some data of this kind might be interesting. For instance, contacts with relatives living in Slovakia also helped to establish the new spiritual belief. The case of a family from Slovak Gmee visiting their relatives in Petrovac as early as the end of the nineteenth century serves as an example.\textsuperscript{15} But there are also other links between Slovakia and areas south of it, which played a part in spreading the phenomenon. For example, in recollections of the beginnings of their work in Nyíregyháza, “brothers” from Ozdín and the neighbouring villages in Novohrad, who used to go there to sell wheels, are mentioned. Some American and British persons who had been active as priests and distributors were also designated as the first propagators of the movement: they invited people to deepen their commitment to the biblical New Testament.\textsuperscript{16} The chain of impulses was concretized in the organizations of the movement.

Among longer term Slovak missionaries whose new spiritual orientation and activities were centered in Blue Cross, was Jozef Roháček. (Evangelization missions operated on an international basis - there was a separate mission for south-eastern Europe in Germany). Jozef Roháček worked as an evangelist in Báčka-Kysác from 1906 and from 1911 in Nyíregyháza, he was later replaced by Ján Roháč (born in Stará Turá, 2nd vice-chairman of the association in Stará Turá, elected at its establishment) in Kysác, who was active there till 1939. There were also other representatives of the Slovak Blue Cross and lay preachers from among the local Slovaks. Blue Cross associations were formed among Slovaks in the south of Hungary in Petrovac, Kysác (1904), Kovačica (1906), Ilok, Pivnica (1907), Padina, Stará Pazova, Šid, and Nyíregyháza. Congregations in those regions were regarded as an essential part of the Blue cross in Slovakia. Extensive contacts between Slovakian and Nyíregyháza members changed after repatriation of the Nyíregyháza Slovaks to the area.
around Levice, the villages Horná Seč and Dolná Seč, after WWII, after almost the whole congregation moved there with the preacher. As early as 1949 a biblical conference of the Blue Cross was held in Levice and members from Bratislava were also in attendance. Contacts with of Slovaks living abroad and representatives of the association in Stará Turá influenced the foundation of the Blue Cross in Bratislava.

The spread of the revival movement is associated with conflict with various institutions - the church, state organs, the community and family. Puritan-religious conviction emanating from Pietism had not always been seen as a positive contribution to the church. Throughout its existence members faced accusations of sectarianism and schism from the church. They did not leave the Church, however, as separation was not their aim (they attended both assemblies and worship and observed the principles of church life). On the other hand, the external signs of the community - separate meetings of supporters of the movement, the building of chapels, the acquiring of new principles of living, in the form of temperance, refraining from drinking alcohol and smoking, influenced the differentiation process in the religious and social life of the community and family.

Some traditions such as weddings were according to the new principles without music, dancing or alcohol as the participants took no part in entertainment. The spectrum of influence in family life was broader because family members of different ages and positions within the family became adherents of the new spiritual communities. The arrival of new habits in religion raised many controversial questions. Several sources of their acceptance in the form of personal data and experiences are available. We shall give at least some examples to elucidate how the whole process was reflected in the attitudes and experiences of the individuals and in the surroundings.

The chairman of the association of the Blue Cross in Bratislava, born in Nyíregyháza in 1887, recollects in written form: "In 1910 news about a new faith was spread round our town (Nyíregyháza, author's note) and around the sheep farms. Since I had been brought up in a religious family and school, the faith began to attract me. Stories had been circulating about those who attended the meetings: that they were believers, others said they were Baptists, still others that they were the Nazarenes, sectarians. Soon, those who went to meet the believers began to meet next door. I began to watch the family next door... There were some missionaries who visited us... And since they began to gather to listen to the Word of God, I also went there now and again. Sometimes just to warn them that they should not leave the Lutheran church to look for a faith. Those believers who had gathered to read the Word of God said that people should not dance, eat or drink because it all was a sin..." There are another three pages containing a detailed account of the perception of the chapters read from the Bible during a period of 3 to 4 months, descriptions of situations where friends stopped taking part in entertainment because of the gatherings, participation in assemblies held in an evangelical hall - "at that time, the church was not yet afraid of these sectarians", there were about 200 people at the assembly... The assembly was led by laymen, two brothers. One of them was a tailor, the other was a shoemaker. Our neighbour invited me to join in the assembly. Poems were recited, and religious songs were sung." He wrote of the influence of the Bible "as if I had heard the knocking of Jesus Christ on the door of my heart to open it..." Then at another gathering: "When we were leaving the assembly, friends with me asked me where were we going. It was not yet time to go to a ball, we used to go for a walk with girls, or to a restaurant to have a beer, and there often came to blows. But I said "I am going home". They asked me, "why home, and not to the ball?" I answered: "I will not go to the ball and I will never go again." They said to me:
“Have they already persuaded you too?” ... That same evening I went again to the assembly in Janovské salaše less than one kilometer from our place, instead of going to the ball. A woman born in Nyíregyháza in 1893 and later living in Bratislava from 1926 recollects on twelve pages: "The assembly took place in Vrbovské salaše... the words of the gospel according to Matthew woke me up... We come home: Where have we been? In Vrbovské salaše... and that was it. On Monday morning there was war... My father couldn’t stand that I had gone to the assembly, he told me on Sunday that he would turn me out of home if I went to the assembly once more. I was prepared for it... and when he really turned me out, I left..." Verbal attacks, articles against the movement, even the arresting of some missionaries, and quarrels in families—all caused some members of the Blue Cross to leave for other religious denominations. The representatives constantly defended their aims—to revive the Church spiritually. However, there are also many examples of mutual cooperation between the Evangelical Church and the Blue Cross. The movement was designated as a religious sect by state organs in the socialist period.

There were several events before the foundation of the Blue Cross in Bratislava in 1927. The group was formed by a group of immigrants, who had come to Bratislava after 1918, differentiated on the basis of ethnic and local origin. As early as that period a group of people gathered in Bratislava in two houses of Czech workers from the Klinger factory and later they met in the school on Podžavorinská street for home worship. In the first gathering of the Klinger colony at one of the family houses in 1920 there were, according to a photograph, 23 participants.

Identification of the participants suggests that the group comprised of individual family units. The family composition of the association influenced several aspects of its running but, on the other hand, the association also influenced family life and ties. As for the ethnic composition of the group, it consisted of Czech families and the Slovak supporters of the movement. From the religious point of view, Evangelists (ev.a.v) formed its basis, but there were also other religious groups at the beginning of the group’s existence. It was reported that one of the families was originally Baptist. From the perspective of the origin of individuals from Slovakia, there were two fundamental links, to Stará Turá and to Nyíregyháza. At that time, there was already an important representative from Stará Turá (from the photo of the 1920 founding assembly), from 1921 working with her husband, a missionary, who returned to Slovakia from his stay in Nyíregyháza. Other post-war immigrants, who were on their way to Bratislava, were born in Nyíregyháza. The reasons why the Nyíregyháza Slovaks settled in Bratislava were historical, political and economic, but also related to their movement affiliation. They had already become adherents of the new revival movement in the Church in their birthplace.

The individual fates that had led them to Bratislava varied. For instance, J.S. (1887-1976), who served as a chairman of the association for many years, had arrived in the Czech lands from Russia as a Czechoslovak legionary in 1920. Being a Slovak, he could not return to his family in Hungary. He got to Bratislava on the basis of his former contacts with representatives of the Blue Cross. Networking of the members of the group played an important role in personal contacts, spiritual activities, family and working life. It helped J.S. who arrived in Bratislava in 1920 (e.g. helped him to find a job). Together with other four families from Nyíregyháza, they formed a group denoted in texts as Nyíregyháza group. At that time, before the establishment of the Blue Cross in Bratislava, basic features of the group had been shaped at the local and supra-local levels - regular gatherings Bible readings, participation in biblical conferences held in various Blue Cross centers (e.g. in
Stará Turá in 1923, with 200 participants mostly from Slovakia), musical events, missionary activities — regular visits to other towns, dissemination of literature, personal appearances at gatherings, and charitable activities, particularly collections in support of the Blue Cross in Stará Turá. The association’s function was also educational, which reflected conditions in Bratislava at the beginning of the movement. From 1921 onwards one of the missionary workers who returned from his mission in Nyíregyháza, became a member of the association in Bratislava and, in addition to his theology studies, he performed spiritual education, taught missionary work, the Slovak language, spelling, and social studies.20

In addition to the essential activities of the group (gatherings, conferences, missionary work), there were also social and cultural activities, which included leisure activities such as making trips. These became a tradition from 1921 onwards. There are records from that period of summer trips to the surroundings of Bratislava, e.g. to Železná studienka. A photograph of 1924 shows the participation of a rather wide community of families on the trip, there were 41 people including children. The community was not closed, there were also “unbelievers” present. The programme of the trips contained religious elements (introductory readings from the Bible, singing, music, praying) and activities for leisure and recreation. It was a time of strengthening family religious traditions — the second generation of the group was shaped and marriages between its supporters confirm a tendency towards endogamy. If this phenomenon is followed from the very beginning of the movement in Slovakia and outside it, homogeneous matrimony were created as early as the first generation of members. The development of family tradition is confirmed by the fact that families within the entire community studied are mentioned in connection with the group in Bratislava.

A crucial moment for the future development of the group was the separation of Czech families, which began to meet separately as a station of Jednota českobratrská. The gathering in Bratislava was organized in the autumn of 1924 by a known Czech ethnographer living in Slovakia. The separated group met at first in his flat. The second group composed of Slovak members who founded a branch of the Blue Cross in Bratislava on February 13, 1927. J.Š., already mentioned above, was elected its chairman and remained in the position until 1948. His successor was, until the dissolution in 1950, another member of the Nyíregyháza group. This branch of the Blue Cross had its first seat in Grosslingova street No. 48, between 1929 and 1934 in a school in Karpatská street, and from February 1934 to 1950 in a room of the former library in Schulpe colony in Šancová No. 15 (the house still exists).

The work of the Blue Cross in Bratislava was tied in with the preceding activities. It is characterized by weekly gatherings, missionary work, choir activities, and socio-cultural activities. The size of the group at that time can be quantified by the capacity of the room in Šancová street. Every Wednesday and Sunday there met about 50 members of the Association. A significant part of the group was still composed of families from Nyíregyháza and Stará Turá. We can say that the work of the chairman of the Blue Cross in Bratislava was of primary importance for the existence of the group. His house with three rather small flats was, in addition to the prayer room in Šancová street, a significant center in the life of the Association. He provided accommodation for members (also non-members from other congregations) staying in town — whether they were employed there or just visiting town as distributors or participants in conferences. As a result there was a sense of belonging, the provision of contacts and a source of help. The chairman’s house was a place for informal and business meetings for both adherents of the movement and representatives of other
groups - e.g. Baptists, and Jednota českobratská. The memories and photographs provide evidence of the presence of a Jew, converted to Christianity (according to the data, “a Jewish missionary became a Christian but he said that he only recognized the Old Testament not the New Testament”). The ecumenical orientation of the Association was also seen in the support of alliance prayer weeks, which took place at the beginning of every year. The members of the association, its chairman in particular, were in constant contact, written and personal, with other centers of the Blue Cross in Slovakia, especially with Stará Turá, which he often visited with his family to meet the Roy sisters. Forms of personal contacts of the members of the association were gatherings and annual conferences of particular branches of the Blue Cross in Slovakia and biblical conferences in the Czech lands. There were also contacts with foreign countries. The connection between Bratislava and Stará Turá is also documented by the holidays of the children of Blue Cross members spent in Stará Turá in an orphanage founded by the Roy sisters. The texts and photographs show that members of the Bratislava association also traveled to Nyíregyháza, e.g. on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the local Blue Cross in 1935. Missionary work was a special task.

A record from a diary of the association chairman describes a missionary journey under the title Okružná cesta 1937 (A Roundtrip 1937). According to records, he traveled from Bratislava to Stará Turá on June 15, then to Vrútky and to eastern Slovakia, where he stayed longer and visited several places. On his way back he was in central Slovakia (Zelené, Osdínc, Lumenec, Lovinoban) and he returned to Bratislava on July 7, 1937 in the evening. On his 23-days’ journey, he attended 28 gatherings and meetings in 18 days. He distributed Christian literature and magazines and encouraged the activities of the young people in spiritual singing. The chairman’s children bequeathed a large library of Christian literature and other literature for public instruction.

Charity activities was part of the work of Bratislava members. This is documented by lists of donors. In one contribution, members of the association called for the raising money for the construction of a prayer station for repatriated Slovaks.

There was the organization of a Slovak biblical conference in Bratislava in 1938 and 1947, which was of importance to the activities of the local association. The location of the three-day July Conference was the YMCA. There were guests from Slovakia, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and abroad (e.g. England). The conference had approximately 1100 participants accommodated in youth hostels and with families. The participants wore badges to show their membership of the Blue Cross. All assemblies and meetings took place in the Evangelical church in Panenská street. The programme with praying hours, gatherings, and evangelical evening ended with a trip to Železná studienka and to Devin castle.

Blue Cross in Bratislava was also active in publishing. It was to its merit that Christian literature of different character began to be published. The library’s name was Svetlo (Light) and it issued nine publications.

Singing spiritual songs was a significant part of Blue Cross activities. The Blue Cross choir was comprised of young people and its members attended gatherings and conferences in Bratislava as well as in other places. In particular families, emphasis was laid on spiritual singing and musicality. Playing at least one musical instrument was part of their life. For example, in the chairman’s family, the harmonium, piano, accordion, mandolin, and violin were played. Music was played while on trips, at informal meetings, and inside the family circle. The participation of young Blue Cross people in the Association of Evangelical Youth was encouraged, e.g. by organizing summer camps (chiefly at Počuvadlo lake).
variety of events organized for children was also part of association activities - every Christmas there was a programme prepared for children and presents were given to them. The life of the Blue Cross association was intertwined with family life. It is particularly evident in the chairman’s family. That they spent free time with their own families and other members families.

also serves as proof. The tradition of family trips continued into the twenties. Sunday gatherings were the place to make plans for the afternoon meetings. There were many places in Bratislava to meet - Železná studienka, Koliba, Horský park. The meetings had formal components (interpretation of the Bible, praying) but focused on recreational activities and sports (e.g. volleyball). In addition, when no trips were organized and there were free days, the families usually met at their homes, visiting one another. People, who remember that remember a period of intensive socialization.

Movement affiliation was mirrored in the occupations of individuals. A road-transport firm founded by two members of the association from Nyíregyháza and Stará Turá serves as an example. The group integrated Bratislava inhabitants with various social and professional backgrounds. There were physicians, businessmen, a well known photographer whom we can thank for the large quantity of quality photo-documentation, theologians, professors, house-wives, and students.

Apart from some negative attitudes of other people, developments within the Slovakian Blue Cross association were not straightforward either. It is reported that after 1918, “after the coup d’etat some new elements of various religions came to Slovakia and began to influence the work in Blue Cross negatively…” There were several controversial trends within the association: one group was for the complete leave-taking from the Evangelical Church and joining some free Czech work (meaning especially Jednota českobratrská), the second group, which was preponderant, was for remaining in the Church and for founding the Evangelical brotherhood. Since no agreement was reached, the old simple association of the Blue Cross continued to exist. The association existed till 1949, then it was dissolved together with other associations and was forced to integrate into the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession as an intra-missionary part. According to the respondents, part of the membership joined Jednota českobratrská (in Slovakia it was re-named in 1969 Cirkev bratská).

The life of Bratislava in the 1920s and 1930s was colorful thanks to the life within various associations. Blue Cross had an international flavour, and that is the reason for its characteristics in a wider supralocal context. Thus the city can be looked upon as a whole open to external influences or as a city with new phenomena. Analysis of the association’s activities contributes to an elucidation of the issues related to the multinational structure and religious composition of the population. It also alerts us to the influence of life within the association and to family life and social contacts.
FOOTNOTES


2 Reported by MANNOVÁ, E.: Spolky v Bratislave, op. c., p. 268.

3 In addition to the mentioned studies on associations in Bratislava there are a series of contributions, which point to particular issues of the groups, their functions or activities in solving selected culturological issues: e.g. SALNER, P. et al.: Taká bola Bratislava, op. c., p. 11-21. The work also contains data about relations between different nationalities living in the city and the founding of sports clubs. SALNER, P.: A plesali až do rána. Ibid. pp. 54-66. One aspect is the organization of balls by individual associations. FEGLOVA, V.: O sviatoch a slávnostiach. Ibid. pp. 37-53. A part is devoted to data about the participation of particular associations in city festivities. FEGLOVA, V.: Dunaj a jeho brehy. Ibid. pp. 143-153. The chapter also deals with data about rowing clubs. NOSALOVA, V.: Kroz ako reprezentačný odev bratislavských stredných vrstiev v medzivojnovom období (1918-1938), p.371-379. About associations with a national awakening character focused on public education, compatriot circles (e.g. Živena, Slovácky krúžek, Skaličané), their activities, and influence on the occasional wearing of folk costumes. LUTHER, D.: Spoločenské konflikty v poprevratovej Bratislave (1919-1924). The author deals with the place of associations in relation to social and political changes after the establishment of the first Czechoslovak republic. STOLÍCNA, R.: Niekoľko poznámok o živote židovskej komunity v Bratislav. Slovenský národopis, 41, 1993, pp. 16-29. About some associations of the Jewish community. FALTANOVA, L.: Bratislavskí obchodníci v období medzi prvou a druhou svetovou vojnou. Slovenský národopis, 35, 1987, pp. 381-394. About relations between the activities of traders' associations (Bratislava Traders Corporation) and the integration process of socio-professional groups of Bratislava traders in the inter-war period.


8 It is thanks to Juraj Potúček that the literature was made complete. He presents an extensive bibliography within the above bibliography on small Protestant churches in Slovakia. POTÚČEK, J.: Príspevky k dejínám malých protestantských církvách na Slovensku a ich duchovného spevu (anabaptisti-habáni, Jednota Bratská, pietisti, metodisti, nazaréni, Bratská jednota baptistov, Modrý kríž, Čierkev bratská, Apoštolská církev a i.). Bibliography of the Blue Cross is on pp. 52-63. Henceforth as Príspevky k dejínám...

11 RUPPELDT, F.: Almanach cirkvi ev. a. v. na Slovensku za roky 1919-1928. For Blue Cross, see pp. 167 and 305. The following characteristics of Pietism is cited from POTŮČEK, J.: Príspevky k dejinám, p. 4, "The awakening movement which was formed in the German Evangelical Church of the Augsburg confession (ev.a.v.)... Pietism required from the Christians piety, humility, spiritual conversion such as was experienced by the apostle Paul, Pietism built a whole Christian life on the Word of God,... cultivated domestic worship and led believers to undertake missionary activities. Although Pietists did not leave the official Evangelical Church ev.a.v. on a formal basis, the movement suffered various problems, obstacles placed by the official Church and its representatives."
13 SLEZÁČKOVÁ, J.: Život a dielo sestier..., p. 16, 17. The complete activities of the Roy sisters, including their rich charitable activities, are presented. Included is the foundation of the first Sunday school for children in Slovakia, an orphanage, a hospital, an old people’s home, etc. Their literary activities are also known. The citation is from: ROYOVA, K.: Za svetlom a so svetlom. 1928.
20 Jozef Roháček developed wide-ranging activities in Nyiregháza, where he had been, as previously mentioned, since 1911. Thanks to him, the influence of the Bible deepened – by communal readings and discussion and prayers, with 30-40 people attending, but also by reading and praying in families. He also encouraged the reading of religious writings. Particularly the works of Kristína Royová were disseminated. He educated lay assistants. In general, attention was paid to musical life within the spiritual community. Jozef Roháček’s activities are an example - as a talented conductor and musician, he taught musical theory to supporters of the movement, he founded a choir, and taught singing to members. He was accused of nationalist activities and therefore his work in the choir was finished. As reported in the album of the family archive according to MARKUS, J. A.: Isten mőve napajákban - Božie dielo za našich čias. Nyiregháza 1935.
21 Biblical conferences took place in specific centers of the Blue Cross according to articles normally published annually in magazines in the first half of 20th century. The first conference was held in Stará Turá in 1904. Then there were conferences in Tisovec (1905), Kovač (1913), several
times in Ozdín, in Stará Turá, and Beniakovce. According to a photograph, 200 people attended the 1923 conference in Stará Turá, among them people from Bratislava.


24 According to memories and literature for young people, various evangelical visits to other centers of Slovakia were organized. E.g. RAKUSOVA, A.: Evanjelizácia v Hliniku. Cestou svetla, 1, 1947, No. 5/6, pp. 28-29.

25 RÝBÁRIK, J.: O duchovných prebudeniach na Slovensku. (An outline of spiritual awakening within the Slovak Blue Cross on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its foundation). Cestou svetla, 1, 1947, No. 5-6, p. 20. As reported, the majority of members belonged to the Evangelical Church ev.a.v. In 1924, the last joint convention of the Bratislava Evangelical Church ev.a.v took place and the congregation divided into German-Hungarian and Slovak sections. The Slovak Bratislava congregation of ev.a.v. the Church had, together with its branches almost 3000 members at the end of 20th century. In: DROBNÝ, J.: Evanj. a.v. cirkev v Bratislave. Zlatá kniha Bratislavy. Bratislava 1928, p. 145.

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DAUGHTERS OF LUNA –
RITUAL STATUS OF WOMAN IN THE MAYAS-LACANDONS SOCIETY

TATIANA PODOLINSKÁ
MILAN KOVÁČ

Tatiana Podolinská, PhD., Institute of Ethnology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

Milan Kovác, PhD., Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Arts, Gondova 2, 818 01 Bratislava, Slovakia

Key words: feminine ritual taboos, Mayas-Lacandons

Luna is Akna - “our mother” and, therefore, she protects us - her daughters. If a woman cannot conceive a child, she asks Luna, our mother, for help. Luna then visits this woman at night and helps her. Luna takes care of us because we are her daughters.

Chan Nuk, 45 years old woman, Nahá, Chiapas, Mexico, 01/21/2001

I. Introduction
We were invited to stay with the Mayas-Lacandons by the Departamento de Etnología y Antropología Social in Mexico City. Charged with the task to study religious life and how it has changed over time within the most conservative Mayan ethnic group - the Lacandons, we concentrated on issues concerning preservation of their religious identity in the changing
social and cultural environment. Between August 1999 and February 2000, we had a great opportunity to work not only on this central issue but also with several other themes of our interest which had not received attention before. First of all, we were attracted to ways in which the ritual status of woman in the Lacandon society was manifested. In this study, results of our research will be partially presented.

The Lacandons originally lived in the Yucatán Peninsula and still speak a dialect of the Yucatec language. After the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, they did not wait to be completely annihilated or enslaved by the conquerors as other Mayas did. To escape their domination, they fled to the vast pristine forests of Chiapas and lived there in seclusion for several centuries. Some of them met white people for the first time only at the beginning of the 20th century and others as late as in the 1960s.

The Lacandons still live in the Lacandon Rain Forest, to which they have adapted their way of life. In comparison with the post-classical period of Mayan history, which was put to an end by the arrival of the Spanish, it has not changed very much. The Lacandons still produce flint tools, cultivate maize fields, and hunt game in the jungle. Also their religion, the most important feature of their life from our point of interest, has not changed at all. They believe in the same gods as the Mayas did and they did not accept any missionaries. Seen from this point of view they have remained the only ethnic group in Central America whose religious life has not been influenced by Christianity. In the original Lacandon religion, Hachakyum is the principal god; goddesses occupy only subordinate positions. Only men can perform rituals and participate in religious life. Women play a marginal role in spiritual life and are also strictly prohibited from entering local temples.

Because of their status in religious life, women have been paid very little attention up to now. Even women researchers who managed to reach the Lacandons, preferred studying dominant male ritual practices to marginal female roles (which are only seemingly unimportant) in Lacandon religious life. None of those we mention here was successful: whether it was Gertrudy Blom, a Swiss matron, who influenced the life of the Lacandons of Nahá, or Graciela, a Canadian, who even got married to a Lacandon, but ran away after two years. There were several other women who undertook several, rather amateurish attempts to study the Lacandon culture. Nevertheless, their attempts to penetrate this peculiar female world failed as it remained closed before them as it did to men.

Relatively greater progress in this field was made by the Mexican researcher Marie-Odile Marion. She examined in detail the world of Lacandon women at Lacanjo. However, at that settlement the status of women was slightly different owing to the influence of Protestant missions operating there. The only place where this ritual sphere of life of the Lacandons was preserved intact and unspoilt by outer influences is at Nahá. As Marion did not concentrate on this key settlement, many of her conclusions concerning the ritual sphere of life appear rather superficial or tendentious when compared to those drawn from our own research. For instance, we cannot identify with her conclusion that Lacandon men consider women as “feeble-minded” creatures.

Since no man is allowed to talk to a foreign woman (i.e. Lacandon woman), male researchers were unsuccessful in studying their way of life. It is necessary to underscore that such communication is strictly punished in the Lacandon community and the violation of this rule is considered as adultery. It is a grave moral sin not tolerated even with single women. For this reason, it is completely impossible for a man to obtain information concerning a woman, no matter whether she is married, single or a widow.

Having all these rules in mind, we decided to form a small research team consisting of
a man and a woman and then to start the examinations of the ritual status of women. Our approach proved to be a good idea: after several months of close friendly contacts, a woman started confide to a female-researcher more or less willingly; on the other hand, men who spoke to a male-researcher revealed much about women’s ritual status. Being acquainted with the ceremonies, they were able to explain their content: what they were not willing to say about these sensitive topics to a woman they told a man. The strategy we adopted enabled us to slowly produce a more complete picture of Lacandon woman who, in no way, is that “feeble-minded” creature depicted by previous researchers; on the contrary, is someone who has great spiritual power.

II. Three altered states of woman: menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth

Lacandon society is, first of all, a society of men. When a Lacandon man is asked about how many people live in the village, he will give an incorrect answer as no Lacandon is good at counting. It is because their way of counting reflects their concept of society: only men are taken into account. This openly declared male dominance can also be clearly seen in the ritual sphere: women are strongly prohibited from entering the dwellings of gods (u na i ku’) under the threat of death. It is here where many taboos relating to women in general may be encountered. Very special taboos concern women during menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. What should be highlighted is that the Lacandons consider woman to be a carrier of potential contamination. Furthermore, is should also be noted that according to their concepts she carries negative energy. However, anyone wishing to better understand how the Lacandons themselves view woman has to approach them without any implementation of our cultural values. Only then it is possible to recognise that the Lacandons do not consider their women to be negative or contaminated creatures: the Lacandon men just take their presence during religious rituals as harmful and believe that it will impose sanctions upon them.

According to the Lacandons, the personality of a woman is altered during pregnancy, then at the time when she is expected to deliver the child and also when she has her period. It seems that other expressions possibly “altered” or “other” rather than contaminated may describe these conditions of woman. The altered personality of woman can be described as her ability to influence her husband. On these grounds, he is automatically excluded from taking part in any ritual because the presence of an altered woman (or a man) may impair the effectiveness of the ritual. When rituals are being performed, everyday life of the community is always disturbed as a result of the direct communication with gods. The rituals have very strict rules, which, if not rigidly observed, may become dangerous: any deviation from the rules will make the gods angry or cause the death of the participants in the ritual. As woman in the critical periods in her life is altered or other, she becomes extremely dangerous for a smooth performance of rituals.

There are a number of taboos relating to menstruating and pregnant women: there are fewer of them concerning women at childbirth - they are usually confined to their homes and so have no power to endanger the purity of the ritual.

As the man is in contact with his altered wife, he is not allowed to take part in the religious practices of their family and the community, either.

Explanations why it is so appear to be interesting though diverse. The Lacandons themselves are not able to shed some light on this problem as most of the taboos concerning women have been passed over from generation to generation for centuries. Moreover, they are not inclined to cast doubts on these prohibitions or to logically reason over them. Their
typical answer to questions from “our world” is usually again a question “Who knows?” accompanied by an innocent smile. The explanations provided by anthropologists refer to the wide-spread idea of menstruation blood as a source of contamination. However, in case of the Lacandons most of the taboos concern pregnant women, who do not menstruate. Many taboos concern women as such, without any distinction being made between a little girl and an old woman.

Drawing on the bits of information given by the Lacandons, we came to a conclusion that woman from the point of ritual, and especially of the more important ones, is perceived as a disturbing element in communication with gods diverting the thoughts of men in undesirable directions; she prevents them not only from communicating with gods but also prevents the gods from coming to the meeting place with men. For this reason, at times of all important rituals, men practise sexual abstention. This ability of woman to disturb the ritual practices is much enhanced during any of her altered states.

IIa. Menstruation

Lacandon girls become sexually mature approximately between 11 and 13 years of age. At that time, they usually get married and have their first child. Girls who are 12 or 13 years old have, as a rule, one child. Despite this, the girls are neither prepared for menstruation nor for sexual life. They know nothing about conception, pregnancy and childbirth. They learn everything only gradually when “the right time comes”, which means in fact that no one gives them any advice before the situation occurs in their lives. However, in everyday communication there are certain codes by means of which sexual themes may very indirectly be referred to. Women usually say: “I have a headache”, or “Have you already taken your bath?” or “Have you washed our dress yet?”, which they will understand among themselves as: “I’ve got menstruation”, or “Is your menstruation over?” or “Have you got menstruation yet?”. In the past women wore a strip of folded and sewn-together cloth the ends of which were held by her skirt belt - one on her stomach and one on her back. She had two such pieces of cloth; she washed them daily. During menstruation the woman was not allowed to take a bath and was allowed to wash herself only after menstruation. What is really peculiar is that she always took the bath together with her spouse.

There are many taboos on menstruation and they range from the most complicated ones dealing with rituals in the houses of gods to various constraints in women’s everyday activities. For example, a menstruating woman is not allowed to leave anything belonging to her on the floor in a Lacandon dwelling. First of all, she is prohibited from participating in rituals of the gods and from approaching near to sacred places. However, the most important taboo is on entering the caves which are taken as the seats of the gods. The taboos associated with menstruating women are identical with those concerning pregnant ones.

IIb. Pregnancy

In the Lacandon society, the period of pregnancy in a woman’s life is considered to be very peculiar. First of all, pregnancy is not a matter of the woman only but, in an explicitly stated way, it concerns her spouse or the father of the child as well. Although there are rules directing the behaviour of the mother-to-be to her future child, most of them deal with the behaviour of the woman and her spouse to the rest of the community and, similarly, of the community to the parents-to-be. With reference to these rules, it is necessary to state that none of them bears a secular character. For this reason, it would be enormously difficult to
discover among them any “rules on a healthy diet” during pregnancy in the widely accepted meaning of the word. All rules about which we had the chance to learn were of magic or cult character.

During pregnancy a woman seems to be isolated from the Lacandon society or rather, her situation may be denoted as ambivalent. On the one hand, a pregnant woman is ascribed healing powers and is considered to be “hot”. For instance, when someone cuts his/her finger, it is sufficient for a pregnant woman to take any leaf of a plant into her hand and cover the wound with it. As a result, the wound will immediately stop bleeding and will also soon heal up. Another example of her special abilities at this period is a thin cotton fibre called k’uch which is believed to have an enormous healing power when rolled up by a pregnant woman. In the past such fibres were used by the Lacandons for making their typical cotton clothes - xikals. For the healing procedure, a short fibre is bound around the ill person’s neck. The k’uch itself possesses a strong healing power irrespective of who rolled it, whether it be a woman who is not pregnant or even a man. In the event that there is no woman nearby, a man can make a k’uch. Nevertheless, the healing power of this fibre is not so strong as when made by a woman, and the most effective k’uch is always made only by a pregnant woman. For this reason, if there is one in the village, messengers are sent to her with a request to roll up a k’uch for the ill person. This request is never declined.

A woman wears the same cotton fibre k’uch around her neck as an apotropaic means when she is pregnant. It is interesting that the right time for binding the k’uch is not determined: some women already wear it in the first or second month of gravidity, others only shortly before the childbirth. One of our respondents explained it to us saying: “The child in the woman will decide, it will ask for a k’uch.” The pregnant woman then asks another woman - most frequently her mother-in-law or mother, which depends on in whose household she lives, to prepare the k’uch for her and to bind it around her neck. Pregnancy appears to be the only case in which she cannot roll up the k’uch for herself - even the woman who is asked for this service must not be pregnant, otherwise, such a k’uch would no power because “it is from the same woman and as such it will not function”.

On the other hand, according to the Lacandons, the period of pregnancy, multiplies the “disturbing” elements in woman. A pregnant woman or, more exactly, the child in her is believed to be able to bewitch a just born baby or other little children who cannot talk yet. Lacandon women say that the unborn baby can talk to these little ones. For this reason, when a pregnant woman meets another woman carrying a little child in her arms, this child will burst into tears without any reason and will not want to stop. Another consequence of such an incident is that the child’s head will also heat up. Nevertheless, Lacandon women know a special treatment against these negative magic effects on the child: it is necessary to wash his/her head in a concoction/brew-up of chilli paprika leaves and crashed garlic. But although they know how to suppress all these symptoms, they are still frightened when meeting a pregnant woman and, if possible, attempt to avoid her.

According to some Lacandons, every pregnant woman contains poison in her body and, therefore, her mere presence strengthens the effects of snake bite in the body of the victim. It is reported that snake bite is the most frequent cause of unnatural death among this population. The explanation to this phenomenon is readily available: everybody walks barefoot, there are many snakes and all are poisonous. Although the Lacandons know of medicinal plants for snake bite, they are persuaded that if a pregnant woman enters a house in which the bitten person is lying, then he is bound to die despite the application of healing herbs. Nevertheless, the pregnant woman can eliminate her negative influence by offering
the ill a spoon of *maatz*, a traditional Mayan drink (*pozol* in Spanish) brewed from maize and used daily in every Lacandon household. Only then will the victim of snake bite not die. We were told a story by Chan K’ín Jacobo from San Javier (about 25 years old man) based on his personal experience. When he was lying home in bed because he had been bitten by *hach kán* (the rattle snake), a pregnant woman entered their house. He got very frightened and thought he would die. But the woman realised her fault and hurried to give him a full spoon of *maatz* and thus saved his life.

When pregnant the Lacandon women are guided by certain rules on eating habits. There are several taboos associated with the category of imitative magic. For instance, they do not consume peanuts as they believe that their child will have a scaly head. They attempt to avoid eating chilli pepper and spicy meals although it is very difficult for them to respect this taboo because one of the favourite Lacandon meals is a cut salted lime with chilli pepper, or not yet ripe chilli peppers (which are even hotter than the ripe ones) boiled with crashed garlic. The result of violating this “no spicy meals” taboo is a child born with small red spots on his/her face, mainly on the forehead. As these spots disappear after a short time, this taboo on eating habits is not so strictly preserved.

Another imitative taboo concerns making arrows. In the community of the Lacandons at Nahá the production of arrows is one of the main male-dominated manufacturing activities. Moreover, the sale of arrows at Palenque, the nearest ruins accessible to tourists, is an essential source of income to local families. When his wife is pregnant, no Lacandon man is allowed to produce arrows. If he trespasses the prohibition, the child will be born with bulging outgrowths, similar to those harpoon-like arrows used when hunting for monkeys, on his/her temporal bones or on the nape of the neck. Our respondent K’ayum Paniagua violated this rule and, as a consequence, his daughter was born with two bulges on her right temporal bone and one bulge on the nape of her neck. After some time they vanished and nothing peculiar from this point of view could be seen on Nuk Rose, who was at the time of our stay at the village three years old. The same K’ayum violated other rules - the ones associated with behaviour of the husband of a pregnant woman and, moreover, that associated with the pregnant woman herself. When the woman is pregnant, her spouse is not allowed to climb a tree because it will turn dry or stop bearing fruit. At that critical period, K’ayum climbed up an orange tree growing in the yard of his house and which was yielding much fruit at that time. In order to confirm his words, he showed us dry branches in the middle of the crown just where he had climbed up. Despite his words, the half-dry tree was full of oranges.

Another notable ritual requests that the process of making a new canoe should be kept secret from a pregnant woman. The canoe is usually dug out of one piece of mahogany tree trunk. As it is a very hard and exacting work, it is usually done by five men. It is vital that a pregnant woman should not have the slightest idea that the men are just making a new canoe: if she learnt about it, the canoe would crack and all those hard days of toil would be in vain. For this reason, none of the Lacandon men would even allude to the fact that they were making a canoe. They argue that they can never be sure that some women may be pregnant although she knows nothing about it yet. There are many taboos associated with this process that have to be strictly respected: to conceal the process of making a canoe from women is thought to be one of the most important. No pregnant woman is allowed to enter a cave nor is the man whose spouse is with child. As Lacandon men really feel horrified at violating this taboo, they dare to enter a cave, for example, only when they are hunting a large rodent called *hare* (*tepeitzcuinite* in Spanish) in situations where they are absolutely
sure that their spouse is not pregnant. However, menstruation has a similar effect as a similar taboo prevents them from entering the cave. Our visits to secret caves in which particular ceremonies are performed, where old god pots are stored or which are inhabited by malicious creatures known as Xtabay had always the scent of great adventure. It was not only because of entering a mysterious sacred place but especially because of the fact that our guides really trembled with the fear that the cave opening would close and imprison us. Such imprisonment would be a punishment sent by the gods for violating the taboo on pregnant or menstruating women and their spouses on entering. We remember our guide Chan K in Antonio Ramo, who after leaving a cave supposed to be the home to a dog that every evening descends as a star to earth, gave a great sigh of relief and wiped sweat from his forehead. What surprised us most was the finding that thoughts of the mysterious dog paralysed our guide much less than the “uncertain” female companion did: he appeared to have totally lost his senses and was constantly giving quick looks at the opening to see if the cave was closing “its mouth” and swallowing us.

Another elementary taboo is the prohibition imposed upon touching sacred god pots. For instance, no pregnant woman is allowed to cross over such a pot. If she really does, she will deliver a handicapped baby. These taboos as well as many others should be understood at the level of mere declarations as it is highly improbable that a pregnant woman would touch these pots or cross over them: firstly, it is entirely unthinkable and, secondly, completely impossible: there are so many prohibitions, barriers and taboos protecting the places where these sacred pots are stored that there is no chance for a pregnant woman to desecrate such a place even by accident.

Pregnancy of Lacandon women is not only complicated by ritual prohibitions. It is not ideal and smooth as a natural biological process, either. Although Lacandon women are most of the time left to themselves, their own experience is admirable and they are able to provide help in some specific situations. For instance, Lacandon women know how to find the position of the child in the mother’s womb. To discover its position, they cover their hands in hot lard and then palpitate the pregnant woman’s abdomen. According to the movements of the foetus they can ascertain the position of the head. In the case the baby is in the turned position - legs down - they know of herbs which are able to turn the child to the right position - head down. They also know herbs against women’s infertility, painful and strong menstruation, swollen and hard womb as well as against ovarian cysts. In the community of southern Lacandons at San Javier, girls 12-years-old were able to inform us about these herbs. At Nahá the knowledge of them is slowly vanishing and, as a result, women there rely on 70-years-old Petrona, a herbalist from a Mayan tribe of Tzeltals. She regularly visits the households at Nahá and brings the herbs needed by the local women. As a Tzeltal woman she can freely move around Nahá and visit all Lacandon houses, which no women of Nahá is allowed to. This may also explain why Petrona’s presence is so much needed at the village despite the fact that Lacandon women know many medical plants for women’s illnesses. In order to shed more light on this problem, it is necessary to say that every woman is acquainted only with the properties of those plants about which she has learnt in her home or in the house of her husband. Although there exists something which may be denoted as standard knowledge, it is not disseminated throughout the community because every home (family or extended family) is a unit closed off from the outer world. This is why Lacandon women do not have any opportunity to compare their knowledge with other Lacandon women and extend it in this way. We were also told that this skill may be very dangerous and, therefore, many women do not feel like learning or improving their
skills in this field. In general, most Lacandons are very fatalistic about their lives and illnesses. As a result, they do not know how to cure themselves in the classical way, i.e. by medical plants. Instead, they rely on various prophecies, dreams and god’s manifestation of good will, which can, in no way, be interfered with or influenced by mortals.

The Lacandon are very traditional in their attitudes to any similar situation and give themselves into to god’s hands saying: “If Gods will ...”. Although no local health statistics exist on these subjects, Petrona told us that Lacandon women suffer from a great variety of serious problems in old age and, on that basis, help from an experienced herbalist is much sought after. Petrona is able to recommend appropriate treatment even in complicated cases where Lacandon women’s general knowledge of healing is useless. For instance, she cured Chan Nuk, our host Chan K’in Mate’s wife, of a so-called false pregnancy: not only was she able to make the diagnosis but also by means of “seven cups of concoction brewed of the leaves of one tree” delivered her of water gathered in her womb. Later, by means of other herbs, she helped this woman to conceive a child. More importantly, she also warned her that a child conceived with the help of these herbs would be born prematurely. And as predicted, a baby-girl was born after a seven-month pregnancy. Petrona helped Chan Nuk to deliver the child, and what is even more interesting, she also saved this baby’s life. She kept the little girl in an oven in warm ash, and as the little one was refusing her mother’s milk, Petrona gave her tea prepared with her own herbs. Today, Xaoch Susita is no little girl but a thirteen-years-old “young lady”.

The final piece of information concerning pregnancy is that the parents-to-be are able to determine the sex of their unborn baby according to their dreams and that they themselves can influence the sex of their child: if they consume more male portions - ton - of a plant called ch’ihb, then the newborn baby will be a boy; if they eat more female portions, they will have a girl. Usually, the parents-to-be will learn the baby’s sex in particular dreams while the wife is pregnant. So if one of them dreams of doing household chores, such as making dresses or pancakes - wah, the baby will be a girl. But if they dream of performing men’s duties, such as making arrows or cutting wood, the baby will be a boy. They believe in this dream symbolism and demonstrate the true meaning of dreams by providing examples of those which they had had before their children were born. Chan K’in Juan Carlos told us that he was dreaming when his wife was in her second month of pregnancy that he was cutting wood. Showing his three-years-old son Chan K’in Alberto, he said: “My wife wished a girl, but I knew it would be a boy; dreams can never deceive you.” His wife, who comes from the southern Lacandon community at San Javier, added: “My mother used to warn me that if I said that I longed for a girl, I’d have a boy.” In the Lacandon community at San Javier we also discovered that women wished to have a girl as their first child so they would grow old much more slowly. If the first child is a boy, then the woman turns old very rapidly. Nevertheless, they are expected not to have such wishes, but, according to their customs, give themselves over to god’s will.

IIC. Childbirth

Thus completely entrusted to gods’ care, Lacandon women give birth to their children. These days, as in the past, they most frequently deliver their child left only to themselves somewhere in the jungle. Even a woman who is delivering a baby for the first time has not been instructed beforehand what to do in labour. This may be because her mother always went to a secluded place in the jungle and brought home a newly-born child with the explanation, “I found him in the jungle”, or possibly “I bought him in the jungle”. Since the
Lacandons spend their lives in yards closed-off from the rest of society, the function of midwife or obstetrician has not developed with them. If the woman did not deliver the baby completely by herself, she was assisted by another, more experienced woman from the same household, or by her husband. What we really felt was a paradox was that men were able (or more willing) to convey more details to us than their wives could or wanted to. On the other hand, they say that not every man is strong enough to witness the childbirth and assist his wife. As a result, only strong men can help their wives. In that case, the spouse goes first to the jungle and finds there a place which is remote enough from the hut but not so far so that the woman can reach the place easily and leave it after the baby is born. He carefully clears the place with his machete so that there will be no snakes to bite his wife and so endanger her life. Then he brings there three stones and dry wood. After that he arranges a typical three-point fire over which he hangs a cauldron with water. Having completed this part of his task, he erects a wooden construction similar to a horizontal bar, a so called ko go che wi, or only che, which means wood. This consists of two forking branches and a pole which is put into the forks; then they are bound together by a springy bast of a tsu tok tree and a kind of primitive horizontal bar is ready. The supporting poles are made of very hard wood of a ya tree (chicle in Spanish), at San Javier of m’h’che tree. The horizontal branch is approximately 50 cm above ground level so that a kneeling woman can hold it in her hands and lean her abdomen against it just below her breasts. In order to make the position more comfortable for the woman, the horizontal branch is usually wrapped in cloth.

The woman goes to the place prepared by her husband after yoch ha – the amniotic fluid is expelled but before the first contractions. When childbirth starts, the woman kneels astride under the construction and reposes on it. During the whole event she is not allowed to put her knees together or to sit on her heels under any circumstances. If the delivery takes twenty-four or more hours and the woman is no longer strong enough to lean against the construction, her husband must hold her in the required position embracing her from behind below her breasts, thus supporting her. During an extremely long delivery, she is allowed to have a sip of water and eat a tortilla. In order to accelerate the delivery, she can suck two raw hen’s eggs.

Women usually complete the delivery with bleeding knees and chin (when they no longer can hold on to the horizontal bar by their hands, they lean against it with their lower jaw). If the mother-to-be is very weak or if the man decides to erect the construction in the house, he will rivet the poles immediately into the earthen floor inside the dwelling. The procedure is then identical. A present, this construction is still used at Nahá, Metzabok and San Javier. In the case of young mothers, they are sometimes delivered of the child when lying on their back assisted by a doctor.

When the delivery is in the traditional way, the woman has to entirely rely on herself or on her husband’s assistance. Chan K’in Jacobo told us about his wife and the extremely difficult delivery of their son. Chan K’in decided on building the construction in the hut. When his wife Koh Chabelia was in labour, it became clear that the child was in the reversed position. As it had not been recognised beforehand and they had therefore not used herbs to change his position in adequate time, Chan K’in Jacobo himself attempted to turn the child head-down directly in his wife’s womb trusting only on his intuition. This totally amateur endeavour, performed without any medical knowledge and without observing any rules of elementary hygiene, was, fortunately, successful and now, both his wife and son - about three years old, enjoy good health.
III. After the delivery

After the delivery, the woman can under no circumstances wash herself (This seems to correspond to the habit of not washing herself during menstruation.). Only the child is washed, then wrapped in a blanket or immediately dressed in the traditional Lacandon tunic - xikul; sometimes the baby is dressed in it after the arrival home. The exhausted woman is wrapped in nine special leaves of xibi, a plant similar to the banana tree, then small pieces of coal made from the wood of the chayk 'ya are also wrapped in leaves and put on her abdomen.

After the placenta is delivered, a ritual starts about which, as the men say, “women don’t know”. The woman’s husband takes the placenta, called witzin in Lacandon, meaning the younger sibling, washes it; dries it and then wraps it in a banana tree leaf. The next day, early in the morning - at four or at five o’clock so that nobody can see him - he takes the “banana package” and goes to the jungle to a place “where people do not go”. There he digs a pit in the earth about a meter deep. He lays the placenta on the bottom of the pit, covers it with about a twenty-five centimetres layer of ash on the top of which he puts three to five grains of maize. To complete the ritual, he covers the pit with clay.

This burial ritual of the “younger sibling” is performed so that Kisĩn, the god of death, would not eat pixan, i.e. the soul of the child and harm his/ her parents. As the placenta was connected with both the mother and the child, it is very dangerous because if ill-treated, it may affect the mother, the child and the father. For this reason, the man remembers very well the place where he buried the placenta of his first-born in order to bury the placenta of any future children in the same location. This “private family graveyard” is a place where he will also bury any prematurely born child. As research has shown, the Lacandons distinguish very strictly a prematurely born child delivered dead from a child who dies during or shortly after birth. The criterion according for a decision is “whether it looks like man”. It is interesting that they do not consider a prematurely born baby as a full human being so they do not bury him/her at their normal cemetery but only at that secret place known only to the father of the baby. A mature baby who was born dead or died at or after the delivery is considered a “fully valued” human being and may be buried according to local custom at the village cemetery.

This ritual associated with the burial of placenta (or the pre-maturely born child) was recorded at Nahá and at San Javier; it seems to be also performed at Metzabok and, probably, at Lacanjá. Another important feature of this procedure is the distance at which the placenta is buried from the hut: at San Javier they believe that if the placenta is buried close to the hut, the next baby will come soon, but if it is buried farther, it will take a much longer time before a new baby comes. They also believe that this may be the way to regulate the size of the family.

Another set of after-delivery rituals is associated with the umbilical cord, called tuch by the Lacandons. The umbilical cord is cut off by a sharpened stalk of a plant called och, which is similar to the reed from which arrows are made. The stalk is hollow and when split the edges are very sharp. The Lacandons would assure us that these split stalks are much sharper than a knife or razor and so the umbilical cord when cut does not bleed very much. The maintenance of this custom was recorded not only at Nahá but also within the community of northern Lacandons at Metzabok and at San Javier. The umbilical cord of the child is always dried up and retained in safety. At San Javier it is usually put under a stone close to one of the poles supporting the hut from outside. It may also be kept in a safe place somewhere
inside the hut so that it will be protected from insects or animals. This procedure prevails at Nahá.

Although we knew that our respondents were keeping the dried umbilical cord of their approximately two-and-half-year old son somewhere in the hut, we felt that they had no intention of showing us the place as they only pointed to some indefinite place above us. When inquiring about where they kept it, we were only given a vague answer, “It depends, some may keep it in a box”. We feel that at Nahá a particular myth is related to the umbilical cord but, unfortunately, we could not completely decipher its meaning. Our respondent Chan Kin Juan Carlos always opened and closed his narrative by a formula, “It’s a secret...”.

Nevertheless, we were able to compile the following bits of information into a story: after a period from three to five years, the mother of the child plants the umbilical cord with three grains of maize into the soil somewhere near the hut. When the maize growing from these “umbilical” grains is ripe, they break the stalk at about the middle and the corns are left on the cob for two or three months. The envelope of maize, so called clothes - nok, has apotropaic meaning. The mother of the child puts it under her head at the place where she sleeps; the envelope then protects her from evil powers, especially from Kisin. Grains of this “umbilical” maize are very important. They are not consumed but planted together with ordinary grains. The procedure during which one “umbilical” grain is always put into a hole with two ordinary ones ensures that the new maize will grow very high and beautiful. “Umbilical” grains are strongly believed to have a magic influence on the crop.

The period after the delivery is full of protective rituals as both the mother and the child are thought to be endangered not only by demons but people as well. For this reason, there are various ways of announcing that the baby was born. In this situation, a wide range of symbols may be used. Some of them are very ancient; others may be quite individual and relate to the fear of black magic, and, therefore, of a later date. For instance, at Nahá, the parents spoke about their child in a reversed sense in an attempt to keep the sex of the baby secret. The situation may be illustrated by way of this example: “She told me that she gave birth to a girl and only later I found out that is was a boy. Perhaps she did it for fear of me.” At San Javier one family did not let the father’s parents know that they had their first child although they lived only a half-an-hour walk from them and usually they saw each other before the baby was born. This situation lasted approximately a month. When asked why it was so, the baby’s father gave us an indefinite answer: “Well, perhaps I was very much worried...” After the baby is born, women from the family and the wider community come and see the mother. Each of them brings the cotton fibre k’uch, which is rolled up specially for this occasion. After arrival, each of the women binds this cotton fibre around the mother’s neck, as well as around both wrists and ankles. They do the same with the child. When they leave both the mother and the baby have about a four-centimeter layer of cotton fibres around their limbs and necks (one cotton fibre is approximately from 0.5 to 1 millimeter thick). These cotton fibres are to provide a kind of general safety to the mother and the child guaranteed by the female part of the community. The apotropaic effect of every k’uch multiplies and the total sum of their effects thus creates a very powerful protective zone around both of them. Each of the k’uches also helps heal wounds in a short time. It is important to note that the delivery of a baby is the only moment in the life of the Lacandon community when women from separate yards are allowed not to observe the “visiting taboo”. This visit to the mother may be classified as an important female ritual through which women express their feelings of ties among themselves while practising exclusively female
rituals of apotropaic magic. Although men may be present at these rituals, they cannot actively participate in them. The roll of cotton fibres k’uch is worn by the mother and her child for two or three months, until “they decay”. After that the woman clears all fibres from herself and the child and hides them in a safe place somewhere in the hut, together with the dried up umbilical cord of the baby, and retains them for two or three years. Only then can she throw them away, or if she wishes, keep them for the future. However, if the mother throws these fibres away immediately after the delivery, she will become lazy and do nothing in the household.

Usually the Lacandon women take up their everyday household chores very soon. “An hour after the childbirth, you can stand up and walk slowly.” As the Lacandons only take care of their own household, it is not generally accepted to assist the mother. For this reason, any help is considered as something more than expected and, as a rule, the mother starts to take full care of her household on the second day after the baby is born: she grinds the corn, makes tortillas and washes the clothes. If someone is helping her, she returns to her usual duties on the fourth or fifth day.

Nevertheless, there is a tradition of preparing the first meal for the mother, which is made by her mother or mother-in-law. The very first meal is roasted young stalks of a plant called ch’ib because, according to the Lacandons, it has a very strong regenerative power. It is even said not to decay because, when cut off and taken into the hut and left there without water and soil, it will produce new shoots in three days. It is interesting that consumption of this plant is not limited while unroasted: it is available to men, women and also to children. When roasted, it is reserved only for women and men who already have children. Roasted ch’ib is said to be so strong that it heals up all wounds very soon. But only a woman who has already given birth (and a man who already has children) is able to resist its strength. From this dietary ritual it is possible to infer that the main attribute of adulthood, respectively the coming-of-age, is, according to the Lacandons, neither the initiation ceremony - mek’chur - taking place in childhood nor the marriage, which is also concluded at childhood, but the delivery of a child. As a result, only a woman who has delivered a baby is considered adult.

The roasted ch’ib and tortillas are the main dishes of the mother for approximately twenty days following the delivery. Another component of the food for that time is strong chicken soup. It appears that also the kind of poultry is important: it is generally believed that soup made from a cock is much better than that made from a hen because “a cock is more powerful”. For this reason the best soup is made from fighting cocks that have no fat and only very tough meat. On the contrary, entirely unsuitable for the purpose are ordinary meaty hens sold at markets because they can hardly move due to their fat. According to the Lacandons, this kind of hen has no power or “vitamins”. It is accepted that clear soup made from a fighting cock is full of “vitamins” and, therefore, highly convenient for the mother. If the family does not breed any hens and does not have money to buy one, fish soup will do as the alternative to poultry soup. This custom seems to have survived in the Lacandon environment from much more ancient times. The first drink of the mother is atole in Spanish and sak ha in Lacandon, which means “white water”, a drink made from water and freshly ground, nearly raw maize. This drink is traditional for all Lacandon households and is usually reserved for children. The Lacandons ascribe the drink some healing power. The mother has to drink up a great quantity of the liquid after childbirth so that she will have enough milk for her baby.
IV. Opossum and Jaguar

Before a Lacandon man constructs the delivery stand, he reacts to inquisitive questions from his fellow men, "Where are you going and what are you going to do there?" by a formula: "T'u re ha och", or "In re hik och". His reply means "to catch och" or "I'm going to hunt och".

Och is opossum in the Lacandon language. It is not possible to determine why the Lacandons compare young children just to this skunk-like animal. It is considered a pest and is hunted but the flesh is not consumed, except by extremely phlegmatic individuals. Most probably, it is necessary to seek the explanation in animal symbolism, which may be studied with the Maya Quiché at Popol Vuh, where the opossum - och or vuch in the Quiché language - is the Master of Sunrise. In the Lacandon vocabulary, the word "och" exists as a proper name. It often refers to young girls who are called "Xa Och", which is a contraction of Chan Och - "Little Och", which will change to "Och" after she becomes adult. This denotation is predominantly associated with the feminine world although it may also refer to all children, without discriminating between their sexes. In general, "och" is used to speak about a child.

A very ancient formula is associated with the birth of a son. When the father is asked about his offspring, he traditionally answers: "I was delivered a jaguar. "If a girl is born then the answer sounds more indefinite: "I've caught an och." The announcement that a jaguar was born belongs to the very ancient world of the Mayas. First people created by gods were given the attribute "Jaguar" at Popol Vuh. As a result, the first ancestor of the dynasty of Yaxchilán, nowadays the most sacred place of the Lacandons, was called "Forefather Jaguar", which was also confirmed after the hieroglyphs had been deciphered. Even without knowing about these hieroglyphs, the Lacandons used to say that their forefathers were not humans but jaguars. For this reason, to call a newborn baby-boy a jaguar is of great importance for understanding the meaning of the traditional symbolic "felinisation" in the Mayan culture in general. On the one hand, animals as symbols and interpretations of the fact that a new baby is born signify closeness of the Lacandons to the natural world and, on the other one, they confirm that these people are real heirs to the ancient Mayan civilization, in which childbirth, creation of man, and social organisation resulted from activities of various deities exhibiting numerous animal attributes.

V. Strength of Luna's Daughters

The Lacandon women, whatever their status, do not take part in ceremonial practices devoted to deities. They are not allowed to touch the god pots, which play the key role in their rituals, and are not allowed to cross the boundary of the god houses, either. Nevertheless, their powerlessness in rituals is only seeming: women are present at the rituals and their activities cannot be considered to be meaningless. First of all, they work in the women's house, which is, in fact, the shrine kitchen situated on one side of the god house. There they prepare ritual meals which men feed to the gods. The meals do not become contaminated because any pregnant, or menstruating women have no share in the process of food preparation.

The women know secret recipes, magic formulae and songs without which the food will not be suitable for the gods, or will be totally ruined. As a result, the preparation of food is strongly influenced by rituals and, moreover, is entirely the domain of women. In order to shed more light on this activity, we may describe our experience with the magic formula
which must be sung when a drink of cocoa is being brewed. The preparation of cocoa is a top secret known only to women. It took us months to understand its core. After all we realised that the whole process rests on a magic song dedicated to gods and without which, as they are persuaded, the cocoa will have no effects. They sing: "Watch out, I'm looking after my cocoa, I'll pay for it to Master Hachakyum, I'll pay from a small luch (a small bowl made of pumpkin), it tastes good, My Lord, it is sweet, Chob, Humbikan, it so good, Humbikan, it really tastes delicious. I'll look after it, baked cocoa, ground cocoa ..." These magic songs appear to be of very old because of Humbikan's name mentioned several times in this song. This is a deity whose cult is not being practised with the Lacandons and who is not part of their pantheon any more although Humbikan used to be one of the most important deities of the classic Mayas. Under the name of Huracan, he is still mentioned at Popol Vuh. The language of songs is difficult to understand for the contemporary generation of women. It is especially so for the names of secret plants, which are referred to by new, very often symbolic names. Women sing these songs very monotonously, again and again, till the sacramental meals are ready. The singing of these songs has apotropaic and magic effects - they deter demonic Kisin, and lead to safe completion of the dish. The texts of these songs are actually sung precipices by means of which women explain to the gods what they are doing and, at the same time, entice the deity to come and watch what they are doing. The Lacandon women know tens of magic formulae concerning preparation of various meals. Even the most important beverage balché, which, as a prerequisite for communication by classic Mayas with their gods, is already mentioned with irony by Diego de Landa, is not unavailable to them. During the ceremony men bring the balché in bowls hollowed out of pumpkins to the shrine kitchen, where women can also enjoy having a drink of balché. Besides this, there are other evidences of a particular status of women in ceremonies. One of them is a special ritual paint which only women can wear. During the initiation ceremony of children called mek'chur, they paint dots on their clothes with k'uxu (achioté in Spanish) to imitate blood stains. Women, together with men, paint a similar decoration on their clothes on the occasion of the grand ceremony nahnah. Both men and women also decorate their faces during this ceremony with the k'uxu: women paint a red spot on their chins and men on their foreheads. Knowledge of these myths and ritual prescriptions is not an exclusive property of men. Chan K'in Antonio from Nahá, possessing a vast knowledge of religious myths, was often interrupted by Koh, his wife, who, even while we were present, give him a piece of advice and, moreover, correct his words when he erred in his explanations.

In social life women do not lag behind men in terms of rights and duties. Labour is strictly divided between men and women although women clearly have a lower status. Nevertheless, if a married woman decides to abandon her husband and children, she can do it of her own free will and without sanctions. A man can marry more women, and a woman can have more husbands (the authors recorded several examples of polyandry). If a woman suggests the imprisonment of her husband in the community jail, her husband will be imprisoned only on her evidence, without further investigation. Perhaps as a result of this, we could see men sweeping the village; we also saw men wash their own clothes.

Even in case of ritual taboos, women are not second-rank beings. We have already mentioned the consumption of roasted ch'ib; similarly, another Lacandon meal consisting of boiled fruit called pix (chayote in Spanish) is consumed mainly by women. Its most tasty part - the core called bat - is reserved only for women because on eating it men would lose
their strength. Women sometimes demonstrate very ostentiously that they enjoy their meal in order to provoke their husbands. However, ritual taboos are directed against pregnant and menstruating women. As already mentioned above, every woman is considered to be potentially dangerous. For instance, men very strongly feel themselves at risk when they renovate god pots. At that time, they seek seclusion in the forest where they usually spend from six to eight weeks. Not only is this a period of total sexual abstention but it is a time when they are not allowed to look at a woman, either. Paradoxically, every woman knows where the hiding place of her husband is as she brings him his daily meal. She first calls from a distance that she is bringing the meal; then she approaches with her back to the place, puts the food down and leaves quickly. Any exchange of looks with her husband will be disastrous for his several weeks of effort in making new clay god pots to may host some of their gods. Interestingly, the punishment for violating any taboo is not ordained by the community: it is believed that the culprit will be severely punished directly by the gods. For instance, women are prohibited from participating in the pilgrimage to Yaxchilán, an extraordinarily sacred place for the Lacandons. Once one of Chan K’ in Viejo’s wives violated this taboo and although it was only for one day, the punishment which naturally followed was very cruel: she lost the baby she was with.\textsuperscript{17}

The Lacandons are also persuaded that when the last day of the Earth comes, a giant animal called Nukuxbak will devour all sinners. Among them there will be liars, those who committed incest or sodomy, but also pregnant and menstruating women. One may only ask what is the source of such an extremely negative attitude to women who appear in a reversed state? It would be rather superficial to refer only to that menstruation taboo, because pregnant women are mentioned much more frequently. Taboos concern women in general, including young girls before puberty as well as old women after menopause. On the other hand, women play an important role in the performance of rituals. It is possible to mention that during the most sacred ceremony nahwah men paint breasts in a red dye made of the k’uxu on their ceremonial tunics. This procedure reminds of the rituals of androgynisation which were already dealt with by Eliade.\textsuperscript{18}

To sum up, to cast any doubts on the meaning of the women element of the Lacandons is meaningless. A great number of measures which help identify the ritual status of woman in Lacandon society are most probably rooted in archaic mysteries concerning woman.\textsuperscript{16} Woman can give life, deliver a new human being, which is an ability exclusively attributed by natural peoples to gods. Seen from this point, both her power and secrets are due to her ability to produce new life. It is believed that at rituals those creatures endowed with this power are able to impact the process of communication with gods in a negative way. As a result, the status of woman does not mean that she is an inadequate or inferior being but reflects her spiritual and symbolic power. Exaggerating a little, it is possible to say that the position of woman when examined against a background of rituals appears to be of greater importance than that of man. For this reason, she is paid such enormous attention in rituals and religious practices, because any reversed state of woman destabilises the sacred status of the community.
FOOTNOTES

1 The traditional life of the contemporary Lacandons has been treated by several authors, e.g. a chapter The Faith of Real People: The Lacandons of the Chiapas Rain Forest by Didier BOREMANS (In: GOSSEN, G. H. (ed.) South and Meso-American Native Spirituality. New York 1993, pp. 325 - 351) is considered as very convenient and instructive. Another important source dealing with Lacandons is a survey including essential bibliography by Enrique Erosa SOLANA, Los Lacandones. In: Etnografía contemporánea de los pueblos indígenas de México. Región Sureste. México 1995, pp. 53-85.

2 A comparison and a basic list of these deities is in: Roberto D. BRUCE S., Jerarquía Maya entre los dioses Lacandones. In: Anales I. N. A. H., Tomo XVIII, México 1965, pp. 93-108.

3 A history of the Lacandon resistance to the efforts of the colonial government and missionaries to convert them to Christianity has been dealt with in an outstanding way by Jan de VOS: No queremos ser cristianos. México 1990.

4 The settlement at Nahá was established thanks to her initiative to stop assimilation of the dispersed Lacandon families. She also had a great share in maintaining the cultural awareness and the traditional way of dressing and its slight transformations. One of her classic studies written in cooperation with her husband Frans BLOM is: The Lacandón: In Handbook of Middle American Indians. Part one - Ethnology. E. von Z. VOGT (ed.), Austin 1969, pp. 276-297.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


14 Animal mythology of the Lacandons, especially that concerning the origins of matrimony is associated with their social organisation, cf. e.g. Didier BOREMANS, Mitología y organización social entre los Lacandones (Hach Winik) de la selva Chianapanca. In: Estudios de Cultura Maya, Vol. XV. México 1984, pp. 225-249.

15 LANDA, Diego de. Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán. Mérida 1993, p. 44.

16 McGEE, R. J., op. c., p. 80.

17 MARION, M. O., op. c., p. 147.

