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Why does our people go to ruin?

LUKA LUKIĆ'S CONSIDERATIONS ON THE REASONS UNDERLYING THE BREAKUP OF RURAL FAMILY COOPERATIVES AND THE 'WHITE PLAGUE' IN THE REGION OF BRODSKO POSAVLJE

- Part of the manuscripts in the estate of teacher and ethnographer Luka Lukić, who recorded for years the events, customs, folk music and the dialect of Brodsko Posavlje, stimulated by Antun Radić's *Foundations for the Acquisition and Study of Material on Folk Life*, is kept in the Brod Posavlje Museum. In one of the preserved notebooks, described in this paper, Luka Lukić presents his view of the decline of the countryside and of the rural population, i.e. of the negative processes which influenced the world view and demographic changes in the early 20th century when depopulation was an integral part of many discussions.

Key words: Lukić, Luka
depopulation, Slavonija

INTRODUCTION

The Ethnographic Department of the Brod Posavlje Museum keeps part of the manuscripts from the estate of the teacher and ethnographer Luka Lukić. Although a teacher by profession, for years he assiduously recorded the events, customs, folk music and the dialect of Brod Posavlje, stimulated by Antun Radić's *Foundations for the Acquisition and Study of Material on Folk Life* (1897) (Primorac 2010: 27). Only a smaller segment of Lukić's extensive bibliography has been published so far. The Ethnographic Department of the Brod Posavlje Museum keeps only a part of the manuscripts – notebooks, loose pages, songbooks and

sheet music, news and rural life sketches, records of countryside events during the First and the Second World War, envelopes with drawings, letters, etc.

The objective of this paper is not the determination of factors influencing the changes in the organization of family life but, rather, a review Lukić's considerations on the reasons underlying the breakdown of family cooperatives in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the decline of the birth rate in the region of Brodsko Posavlje, through the comparison of Luka Lukić's work and the work of his contemporaries.

LUKA LUKIĆ – BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

December 2015 marked the 140th anniversary of the birth of Luka Lukić.¹ He was born in a peasant's family in Brodski Varoš on 4 December 1875, and died on 28 May 1956 in Varoš, where he was also buried in the local cemetery. According to Lukić's *Autobiography*² and a notebook entitled *What did I experience in my life between 1890 and 1940?*,³ he was born as the third child of Đuro and Stana née Filajdić. His older sister was four at the time, and his brother Stjepan two years old. His mother died only a dozen days after his birth, and he recorded the event as follows:

“It was cold, and mother was ashamed to leave the room but then went to the toilet 20 steps from the house. And she caught a bad cold, just after her birth. She thought somebody was shouting: ‘Stana, don't go to the toilet any more!’ She got fever and died on 20 December. And so we became two orphans. Aunt Anka cared for me first until carnival time- but when she also caught a fever my grandmother did not allow her to continue to breast-feed me, and they fed me milk instead.⁴ In the spring of 1876 aunt Tekla took over, and already at the age of one I got a violent diarrhea (...) and they did not know whether I would live. That lasted a longer time” (Lukić, 1939, E/A/2/KT/3).

1 On the 140th anniversary of Luka Lukić's birth and 60th anniversary of his death, in May 2016 the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts/Ethnological Department in Zagreb, the city of Slavonski Brod and the municipality of Klakar organized a scientific meeting, *Luka Lukić – His Life and Work*, which also presented a selection of manuscripts from the Brod Posavlje Museum.

2 Note 21 by 17 cm. Handwritten text: *Autobiography, Luka Lukić, primary school teacher*. The notes refer to the period between 1885 and the third secondary school class. The pages are not numbered.

3 A 20.5 by 16.5 cm notebook with the description of various experiences, either personal or of acquaintances, in Varoš, Petrinja, Brod and Kaniža. Handwritten text: *What I experienced in my life between 1890 and 1940*. The pages are not numbered.

4 In the notebook entitled *What I experienced in my life between 1890 and 1940. Introduction and notes*, Lukić wrote that he was ill six months.

He went to school in Varoš, Brod (Slavonski Brod) and Petrinja. In Varoš he attended school for two years, and then continued in Brod na Savi (called Slavonski Brod after 1934). A note suggests the (mis)fortunes of the time: “Until the 8th grade I went to school in *opanaci* [traditional peasant shoes worn in southeastern Europe] and in drawers, or even barefoot... then my aunt bought me a pair of shoes and I was a gentleman” (Ibid.).

In the autumn of 1889 he continued his education at the Royal Teacher-College in Petrinja, and lived in Anka Matasić’s home.⁵ He got his first job in Kaniža. The years later he moved to Brezine, and then to the village Gaj. This is how he described himself as a teacher:

“I did remarkably well in school. I was good to the children, but they had to be quiet in class and attend school regularly. I was very polite and kind with the local people. And when the first examination came, we were all glad, as children well know” (Ibid.).

In 1900 he moved to the village of Klakar (or Klakarje as he called it)⁶ where he remained until retirement in 1937. After retirement he moved to Varoš and continued to record events etc. He worked as a teacher more than forty years and participated actively in all the events in Klakar, gaining thereby insight into everyday countryside life and customs. On the basis of his own experience as a participating observer he wrote extensive records of the material, spiritual and social culture in the villages round Slavonski Brod.

Stimulated by Stjepan Radić’s *Foundations for the Acquisition and Study of Material on Folk Life* he recorded countryside life, customs and folk tunes from the Slavonski Brod surroundings. He cooperated with the (then) Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts (JAZU) in Zagreb, *Matica hrvatska*, the Institute of Folk Art, and the *Sveta Cecilija* musical journal which published a dozen of his ethnomusicological notes including descriptions of folk customs. He cooperated with the journal between 1920 and 1936. His most important paper published in *Sveta Cecilija* (in 1923 is considered to be *On Folk Singing in Slavonia*, where he described vocal folk music and typical phenomena in Brodsko Posavlje and included twenty-odd complete tune records and fragments from the transcriptions of profane and sacred songs. In addition to recording folk tunes, Lukić described all the phenomena in folk life related, of course, to musical practice.

5 The aunt of Ignjat and Dobroslav Brlić.

6 Through history the village had several names: Kalakar, Klakar, Klakary, Klakarye. The name was changed from Klakarje to Klakar between the two world wars (Blaževac-Pajkov 2016: 31).

He also cooperated intensely with musicologist Vinko Žganec⁷ at whose insistence he edited the records of folk tunes and copied them on mellograph cards (Krajnović, 1999: 76). The time spent at the Royal Teacher Colledge and Laboratory School in Petrinja, where he acquired knowledge of musical theory and practice, certainly helped Luka Lukić in his musicological work which includes recording tunes and sung texts, descriptions of singing, notes on singers etc., and descriptions and drawings of musical instruments. He also taught singing in school, led the church choir, played the organ and recorded music on the mellograph. The tunes he recorded were from the greater area of Brod na Savi (Slavonski Brod).

Although he was not a scientist but a passionate devotee of folk life, his overall work is important as a source for the study of the gradual disappearance of traditional countryside life in the region of Brodsko Posavlje. His major work, *Varoš – Folk Life and Customs* was published in three volumes of the *Proceedings for the Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*, JAZU Zagreb, between 1919 and 1928. His manuscripts on *Description of the village of Klakarje*⁸ and *Folk Life – Klakarje* provide an integral insight into the life and customs of the village in which he spent 37 years as a teacher.⁹

BREAKDOWN OF COOPERATIVE LIFE AND THE DEPOPULATION PROBLEM

Teachers working in the countryside often recorded in the school memorial registers information on the school and teaching, and information about the village itself, its architecture and customs. Some of them even went so far as to comment on the political situation and presenting their own views regarding the various negative phenomena affecting the countryside and its population, but also the people in general. According to the Primary Education Bill¹⁰ every school had to

7 Dr. Vinko Žganec, member of the Academy of Science and Arts (Vratišinec, 20 January 1890-Zagreb, 12 December 1976). *Mellographer*, ethnomusicologist and recorder of folk songs, rites and customs.

8 Luka Lukić wrote the *Klakarje* monograph inspired by Radić's *Foundations* between 1905 and 1952.

9 The description of the village of Klakarje is an extensive manuscript kept in the Ethnological Department of the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts, No. 128 a, b, c, d, e. It was written between 1909 and 1913. The event *Following Lukić's footsteps* in May 2016 presented three volumes on the material culture, stories and songs in Klakar with a critical review of Lukić's work.

10 When the Military Frontier was integrated into the rest of Croatia in 1881, a comprehensive school bill was introduced in 1888 for the whole country. The administration of schools was taken over by municipal school boards, and supervision by district and county supervisors, and the Regional Government. The records in the school memorial registers began to be kept mainly after 1880, when it became mandatory. The decision to keep memorial registers included an order regulating their keeping: the first part had to cover the history of the school since its foundation, and the second was the actual annual chronicle (Župan 2010: 213, 214).

keep and preserve memorial registers recorded during the school-year and added subsequently for every year. It covered information on the condition of the school facilities, teachers, pupils, and their social – often religious as well – and ethnic status. Along with the history of the school the teachers noted the events in the village, its history, geographical and natural features, and important events in the state and even beyond. Because of this the yearbooks were often the only written source for the history of smaller places.¹¹ Although a school memorial register was kept for the village of Klakar, Lukić also recorded his view on social conditions in his notebooks.

It is in one of such notebooks kept in the Brod Posavlje Museum, entitled *1. Why does our people go to ruin? 2. Folk Songs in the Brod Surroundings*,¹² that Lukić presents, in the first part of the notebook, his view of the decline of the countryside and of the people,¹³ i.e., the negative processes affecting the world view and demographic changes in the early 20th century (which gave him cause for particular concern), which should not have happened because of the natural wealth of Slavonia and its traditional heritage. The increasingly poorer demographic situation or decline of the people (in the material and spiritual sense) were caused, in Lukić's view, by a number of interlinked factors such as partition of common property, fashion and ducats (ornate dressing), and wishes for an easy life. Just like Radić, Lukić considered that folk (peasant) culture preserved the original Croatian culture; he found the decline of the (Croatian)¹⁴ population to be particularly disastrous because it opened up the possibility of increasing spread and influence of foreign culture, seen already in the costumes and the disappearance of folk culture.

“Having lived with the people for many years, I noted a major unfortunate truth – that our people is going to ruin, i.e., its number is decreasing from one day to the next. In terms of the environment, position and way of life we live in very favourable circumstances, and this decline should not be felt, let alone mentioned; but, the truth is here and it can't be denied. If that involved only one or several municipalities, thing would not be that bad, but we feel and see that

11 By order of Vice-Roy Ivan Šubašić promulgated in January 1940, the schools also had to keep ethnographic registers.

12 The record was completed in April 1935. The dimensions of the notebook are 20.5 by 15.5 cm. The title is handwritten: *1. Why does our people go to ruin? 2. On folk songs in the Brod surroundings*. The pages are handwritten in black ink and numbered from 1 to 13. Mark E/BILJ/1/KT/3.

13 Lukić used the term ‘people’ as a cultural category, i.e., in the meaning of ‘peasantry’, although in some parts of the manuscript it also refers to (Croat) ethnicity.

14 “Fifty years ago there was only a German here and there; today there almost three-fourths of them, and they want their own school, church and municipality, they even want the sermon in German even if they know our language well. What are we going to say about that?” (Lukić 1939: 1, E/BILJ/1/KT/3).

almost the whole Posavina, Podravina, Đakovština and Srijem suffer from the same disease, i.e., go to ruin. That is pitiful and it should not happen” (Lukić, 1935: 1, E/BILJ/1/KT/3).

If regarded in comparison with other references and texts on the same or similar topic, Lukić’s views are only the reflection of the time in which they were written. In the late 19th and early 20th century many social, political and economic changes took place in the still mainly agrarian Croatian society, while science and technology progressed continuously and changed the world. In spite of the fact that old values and customs developed over centuries became unnecessary, undesirable and began to disappear, the traditional division, based on patriarchal values, into men and women was still deep-rooted in the consciousness of the people. In the patriarchal society the woman was by implication the mother, and that was her basic role according to which her overall position in society was measured. The fundamental differences between the male and the female gender were highlighted as a natural condition, expressed mainly in education, the position of children in the family and the women’s general status in society. According to treatises and newspaper articles on the subject, the women’s natural role was to “breed the human race, live with their husband for the better and for the worse, and be good housewivdes” (Ograjšek 2004: 91); this view was also supported by Vice-Roy Hédervary who claimed that “in terms of their physical and sexual setup women are not fit for public activity and their principal task is the family” (Župan, 2004: 91). Children were considered to be the wealth of the family, and even most of the authors reporting on the society, and especially on the life in cooperative families share the view that the cause of all evil in the countryside was the breakdown of the peasant cooperatives (Brenko 2006: 52, 53).

“The *tal* (dowry),¹⁵ after the 1918 war, is a major evil and cause of our people’s ruin. Until 1914 the custom was present a little in the people, but now it has become a mania, a disease, and a worthy and proper girl could not even get married without a share (*tal*). If a mother has two or three daughters with no *tal*, she has better watch when her daughters will marry – if ever or never” (Lukić 1935: 7, E/BILJ/1/KT/3).

The discussions about cooperatives (as economic organizations) began after Vice-Roy Jelačić’s decree abolished serfdom and the peasants’ bondage to the land and the landowners. The peasants became the owners of the villainage (*selište*) and fast partition of peasant family cooperatives ensued; that was not the case in the Military Frontier where the cooperatives remained intact because

15 *Tal* = share, dowry; Lukić also used the term *osebac*, which meant part of the dowry obtained by women from their families which was not added to cooperative property but belonged only to the woman. He also uses the term *prćija*, also meaning dowry, property brought by women to their husbands.

of the character of the Frontier. The attempt to regulate customary cooperative law within written laws ran parallelly with the process of cooperative breakdown¹⁶ (Pavličević 2010: 274, 334-335). These attempts were mainly focused on protecting cooperatives from rapid partition. The advocates of cooperative life in the countryside, notably the poet and politician Ognjeslav Utješenović Ostrožinski, writer and politician Ljudevit Vukotinović, and publicist, politician and grammarian Andrija Torkvat Brlić (from Brod), suggested as reasons for their preservation the pauperization of Croatian peasantry, the reduction of its tax power and the century-long Croatian tradition of house cooperatives. The Military Frontier was demilitarized in 1871, and that changed the procedure of cooperative dissolution. In the law passed for the Frontier in 1870 treatment of cooperative partition was equalized with the rest of Croatia. The members of the cooperative were treated as co-owners and were entitled to their own share with full rights of succession and mortgage (Marković 2009: 223, 224; Pavličević 2010: 44-47).

Therefore, the causes underlying the breakdown of cooperative life were sought in external (social and economic) and internal factors (where women were mentioned most frequently). Women were criticized because of the breakdown of cooperatives since the time of Matija Antun Reljković, officer of the Brod regiment, who drew attention to the harmful partition of peasant family cooperatives.¹⁷

Nada Sremec rejects the women's guilt for the decline of the countryside and of the people because, as it was claimed, women sowed dissension between fathers, brothers and husbands, being "quarrelsome, lazy, thieving, cunning, lying... they estrange brothers from one another and children from the parents, and because of these quarrels the cooperatives broke down" (Sremec, 1940: 3). In her book "We are not guilty; the Slavonian woman") she described the women's hard life in the countryside in the first half of the 20th century. According to the sociologist and economist Rudolf Bićanić,¹⁸ this *female theory* of cooperative breakdown was naive and superficial. In his view, the causes underlying the

16 The first cooperative law was enacted within the Basic Military Frontier Law in 1807 (provisions on household cooperatives, art. 55-90). It was drafted on the basis of common law, which was then in force in the Military Frontier, and it was the first attempt to establish a legal framework for cooperative life. In later laws brought between 1870 and 1880 there were discrepancies between the Civil Code and cooperative law, especially with regard to ownership, inheritance and women's rights requiring the passing of many by-laws

17 According to Reljković, individualism, i.e., the claim to individual property sought by women led to the breakdown of cooperatives (Reljković 1916: 147, verses 2790-2795).

18 Rudolf Bićanić published in 1936 a book entitled *How the people live* in which he examined the sociological aspects of countryside life through interviews with people. The book appeared concurrently with ethnological monographs and it is methodologically related to them. Lukić's manuscript was written in the same period, and one cannot avoid noticing the titles – Bićanić's *How the people live* and Lukić's *Why does our people go to ruin?*

partition were demographic, technical, economic, political and cultural factors, the economic and demographic ones being the most important. Bićanić presented the concrete economic indicators of the crisis and their influence on the erosion of cooperative property: higher monetary taxes, appearance of merchants with cheap goods in the countryside, the railway which speeded up commerce and land exploitation, industry creating the possibility of earnings outside the cooperative, opening of the capitalist market, dropping wheat prices. All this called for changing the way and intensity of farming, and that was something the (hitherto) complacent peasant family cooperative with its internal structure and organization could not accept (Pavličević 2010: 288-291).

In the period under consideration not many people opposed life in peasant cooperatives, and they were not generally known and influential like its advocates and supporters. The opponents were individual clergymen, Frontier officers and junior civil servants, who criticized the cooperatives for spreading immoral life, laziness and early marriage. In particular they emphasized the fact that life in cooperatives thwarted the development of commerce because nobody could sell anything without the approval of all the members of the cooperative. They found fault with the members of the cooperative members because they spent too much, worked little, stole common property, while women who could not get anything at home “went astray”, tried to deck themselves out as much as they could and therefore attempted to earn something outside the community as well (Pavličević 2010: 147; Marković 2009: 229).

The breakdown of the cooperatives is related to depopulation which was a topical issue in the early 20th century. The problem of declining population in five Slavonian district, including the Brod district, was studied by the statistician Bojan Pirc,¹⁹ who analyzed in detail the village of Otok. The causes underlying the low number of births in the Otok area can be compared with Lukić’s conclusions about the lower number of children in the local population as distinguished from the immigrants. According to Pirc, the decline of the number of children was due to the ever more present view that a woman should not have more than two children mainly because of economic factors. This included cooperative family life²⁰ where the mothers in law blamed by Lukić talk women out of having children because of the distribution of property. Poverty was caused, people thought, by the division of property into several parts. This is where the root of the decline of the people, described by Lukić was to be sought.

19 Dr. Bojan Pirc, *Decline of the Population in Slavonia, socio-medical study about the birth and death rates in five Slavonian districts*, Belgrade, 1931.

20 That is, the community.

Moral and ethical reasons are also mentioned, such as ornate dressing or fashion, ducats and comfort (Pirc 1931: 26-30). The same reasons are also found in Lukić's manuscript.

“Our people don't want children, and if they have one or two, that's enough, they don't need any more. Only if children die, alright, bear children again, if that's possible. And a woman with 5-6 children is mocked in the village, but there is no wonder if a German or Hungarian woman have 10-12 kids. That is the main cause why our world is going to ruin, and persons to be blamed are not young women, but crones and mothers in law who don't like children and say, ‘two is enough even for the emperor and the vice-roy’” (Lukić 1935: 3, E/BILJ/1/KT/3).

The depopulation of some Croatian regions was not only due to the dissolution of the peasant family cooperatives but also to emigration overseas, the First and the Second World Wars, disease epidemics (cholera and the Spanish influenza in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries), the economic crisis, deagrarization and deruralization, and the continued decline of the birth rate. “If we look at the causes of why our people is going to ruin, we shall see that there are several, the most important being the ‘white plague’ [sub-replacement fertility] which is devastating our country” (Lukić 193 E/BILJ/1/KT/3). One cannot neglect either the grave position of pregnant women, noted by priest and ethnographer Josip Lovretić in his monograph “Otok”. They performed most physical chores just like all other women. “People don't care for a pregnant woman, they mock her, don't help her but even harass her” (Lovretić 1990: 257). Dr. Ivanić²¹ noted that the decline of the birth rate, according to Lukić one of the main problems underlying the decline of the people, was a problem affecting the whole world, but while the children's death rate is decreasing in other countries, in Croatia the figure is still high” (Pirc 1931: v).

The cause of the negative attitude towards women with many children can be found in the comprehensive social, cultural and economic changes brought about the earlier changes in agrarian production which took place since the abolition of serfdom, marking the first wave of dissolution of the cooperative way of life. Modernization and urban development were closely related to the trend of break-up of peasant family cooperatives and patriarchal values. Since the cooperative family was hitherto the basic living nucleus, it was hard to grasp the new changes especially because, as ethnologist Milovan Gavazzi emphasized, the foundation of the peasant family cooperative was the principle of indivisible property and joint management (Gavazzi 1978: 82). Joint family organizations had a firm hierarchical structure based on patriarchal principles of men's precedence and age precedence shaken by the new changes. The consequences were the strengthening of individual interests, the weakening of men's authority, and the stronger self-confidence

21 Director of the Central Hygiene Institute

of the mother and wife (Spajić Vrkaš 1995: 452). Employment could be found in other branches of the economy, and money began to flow into peasant families in various ways; this was reflected in better clothing (gold and silk embroidery), architecture (better building, better and more spacious interiors), more abundant diet and better living conditions. However, individualism was not considered to be a positive development, and Ivan Brlić discussed that in his work *Our Family Cooperatives – the Ancient Protective Dam of our Farms – Are Being Destroyed by the Spirit of Individualism, and Failure to Respect the Family and the Elderly* (Brlić 1938: 12).

FASHION, DUCATS AND FLAMBOYANCE

Already in the 19th century showy and ornate dressing was considered to be one of the major social vices. In Lukić's view fashion and the related ducats were the second largest cause why the people were going to ruin.

In the later 19th century, and more intensely after the end of the First World War, folk textile skill was considered a cultural asset and one of the features of ethnic belonging. Since it was gradually being abandoned under the influence of European civilizational influences, the question arose how to prevent such a development. Urban intellectual circles²² began to show greater interest in national costumes. Antun Radić thought that the mark of Croatian culture was to be found in folk songs, the people's understanding of justice and honesty, folk beliefs and costumes (Jiroušek 1936: 175). A similar view was shared by Vladimir Tkalčić, the first curator and later director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb; according to him the "artifacts of the spiritual and material culture of our 'common people' are primarily those that have preserved in the purest form our national characteristics" (Tkalčić 1922: 73). The interest for traditional things also strengthened the Illyrian Movement, which sought to express national belonging by dress. Interestingly enough, while national costumes were gradually abandoned in the countryside²³ folk style began to be introduced in urban clothing: thus, men began to wear *surkas*, brown cloth coats with red braids. They were patterned after the peasant coat, *halja* (Schneider 1985: 371-374). The end of the 19th century is also the period marked by the start of efforts to found ethnology in Croatia as a scientific discipline,

22 Isidor Kršnjavi (1845-1927), art historian, painter and famous cultural and public figure, also studied Croatian rural textile. In 1874 he began to plan an exhibition of Croatian handicrafts, an idea that did not bear fruit until 1879 when he managed to found the *Arts Society*. The new association appeared in public with the *Exhibition of Arts and Crafts* staged in the Vraniczany Palace. Among his many personal contributions to Croatian culture, Kršnjavi also deserves merit for the foundation of the Arts and Crafts Museum in 1880, of which he was the first director.

23 The process developed unevenly in Croatia. In some regions it started in the mid-19th century, in others its intensity grew in the 20th century, especially after the end of the First World War.

and the study of folk culture was related to elite culture. Analogously, national culture was identified with peasant culture, typical of the rural population in the pre-industrial period.

In the early 20th century the view circulating was that ornate dressing was destroying the moral, economic and legal foundations of the rural communities and that it was the main cause of the ‘white plague’.

The ethnologist Aida Brenko studied in greater detail the problem of depopulation, i.e., of the ‘white plague’ in Slavonia between the mid-19th century and the beginning of the Second World War. She also reviewed the new value systems which developed during the transition from natural to commodity-based economy. Along the line of Lukić’s considerations, Brenko concluded that women with one of two daughters did not want to bear any more children, afraid that they would not be able to provide for them according to contemporary requirements (Brenko 2006: 52, 58).

Women following fashion were presented as persons of light morals who neglected, because of laziness and comfort, the “natural” women’s chores and duties, mainly implying bearing children. However, sometimes urban clothing was accepted - in the same milieu – only by men and, even if women kept the national dress of a different style, the criticism was not levelled at the male part of the population.

In the same period *Seljačka Sloga* (Cultural & Educational Society of the Croatian Peasant Party)²⁴ promoted a number of activities focused on preserving national costumes which had begun to disappear in some regions. According to a booklet, *Dignity and Not Show* (Maček 1940: 10-11), published at the time, fashion undermined the moral and economic values of the community. National costumes were described as being of higher quality and durability. They were made in the countryside, on one’s own threshold, and the money remained in the village and not in merchants’ hands. Since spending money on manufactured clothing and fabrics were the cause of the pauperization of the countryside, *Seljačka Sloga* proposed the return to the production of home-made textile and hand-made footwear, which would enable the countryside to meet its own requirements (Brenko 2006: 52, 58), although rural agricultural production – because of economic development – was no longer a match for new technologies and greater market requirements. Moreover, after the break-up of cooperative families, women no longer managed to produce alone the clothing for the family, and it

24 Cultural & Educational Society of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), founded on 11 October 1925 in Zagreb.

had to be purchased. The costumes that were still produced reflected foreign influences in terms of workmanship and fabrics, which also had to be bought and therefore additionally impoverished the family.

Considerations regarding women's costumes as the main cause of the 'white plague' can be found in Luka Lukić's manuscript:

"Women no longer put on their finery and deck themselves out only on parish fetes but also several times a year, and do not only put on their attractive shirts – embroidered, plaited, silk embroidered – but also all kinds of skirts and blouses which cost hundreds of dinars. That's the evil, because that means flamboyance, and the home with two or three daughters must either incur debt or go to ruin. Before getting married every girl prepares so many unnecessary things that a cart could barely carry them. And that is not necessary, and need not be so! If the woman wants to show off with her shirts, that is good and commendable, but then no more skirts and blouses are needed, one is enough – when even the poorest woman in the village tries her best to wear even better clothes than the daughter of the richest peasant, no wonder that the latter shows off! And that is not right!" (Lukić 1935: 4/EBILJ/1/KT/3).

Pirc does not agree that ducats or ornate dressing are among the main causes of impoverishment of the family, deferred marriage and lower birth rate. The cause underlying the population decline were to be sought in the circumstances prevailing in the Military Frontier; moreover, the lower number of children was not a recent development, because even Reljković in his *Satyr* speaks about women casting spells at wedding in order to defer the first birth and remain young and beautiful as long as possible (Reljković 1916: 111).²⁵ The reasons for avoiding conception can also be sought in marriages contracted without assent, the setup of the country and specific circumstances.

The decline of the birth rate, the 'white plague' in the Military Frontier (due to avoiding conception and interrupting pregnancy) was analyzed by many authors. Thus, F. S. Engel²⁶ wrote on the subject of abortion: "Among the other causes which partly speed up depopulation there is abortion that causes substantial damage to the human race" (Kožić 1981, 18).

The information on the ways to interrupt pregnancy which can still be acquired in the field coincide with the data reported in various sources, i.e., the spindle, the knitting needle or the goose feather (Pirc 1931: 26). Medical reports mention mechanical means for performing abortions (pointed objects). Gynecologist and medical historian Vladimir Bazala mentions the insertion of, or drilling with, the

25 Verses 1545-1575.

26 Franz Stefan Engel (before 1752 – after 1822), Military Frontier officer and court official.

spindle (part of the spinning wheel), a goose or duck feather, and even sticking knitting needles into the stomach. According to tradition, the best results were obtained by feathers plucked from the wing of a wild goose. It was believed that some abortion procedures arrived in this part of the world during the Ottoman occupation. In Turkish court abortions were performed by midwives called *kan-li-hebe* (bloody midwives). Later their 'business' spread among the lower classes as well (Bazala 1943: 127-129).

Opinions about the higher number of abortions in order to reduce progeny can also be found somewhat earlier in the responses to the survey sent to its members by the *Croatian-Slavonian Economic Society* in 1850. Thus, Ivan Štefani, member of the Society, wrote in *List*:²⁷ "But, as much as possible they try to stop women from having children by all means if they remain widows burdened by many children, when they are harassed, forced to perform many household chores and neglect their own children, and they can't easily marry burdened by many children... This is why they take all kinds of drugs (and resort to magic spells) in order to stop birth, let themselves be pressed just to get the children of the womb, and are often victims along with the children" (*List* 1850: 29-31). Although women were blamed for intentional contraception, Pirc thought that it was "... done with the complete agreement between the husband the wife, and women are not the only party to be blamed" (Pirc 1931: 26). As possible reasons underlying the limitation of the number of children Pirc indicated life in the cooperative²⁸ (Pirc 1931: 29, 30), the division of the farm and moral-ethical considerations.

Because of the changing living conditions after the late 19th century having more children became undesirable. Women were expected to have fewer children, but the way to go about it was left to them. Because of this women resorted to abortions, unfortunately with consequences for their own health and life (Brenko 2006: 60).

In peasant family cooperatives children were not only regarded as members who enriched the family, they were also indispensable as manpower. A shortage of children would jeopardize the survival of the family. The decline of the birth rate was not due to fashion or wishes for more leisurely life, as Lukić believed, but to the need to provide decent life to future generations, life such as "their grandparents also had", thought Nada Sremec (Sremec 1940: 46). Brenko also referred to the leisurely life – as the life of women was presented during the 'white plague' – and mentioned that it mainly involved fear of conception, fear of abortion, fear of sin and fear of the law (Brenko 2006: 60). Material circumstances

27 *Gazette of the Croatian-Slavonian Economic Society.*

28 According to the Cooperative Bill, at partition the cooperative was divided into equal parts depending on the number of members. The splitting of property into more parts spelt real danger because of impoverishment.

and labour requirements did not permit women any longer (necessary) recovery after birth, and women often fell ill and died. Blaming women is explained by the fact that transition societies, along with other changes, are also affected by changes of dress, especially among women, which is then interpreted as the reason for harassment (Horvat and Perasović Cigrovski 2014: 300).

CONCLUSION

The majority of authors writing about society, and especially about life in peasant family cooperatives, presented just like Lukić the view that the break-up of peasant family cooperatives was the cause of all evil in the countryside. The people was going to ruin because of fashion and ducats – flamboyance. In the later 19th century, and more intensely after the end of the First World War, folk textile skill was considered a cultural asset and one of the features of ethnic belonging which was gradually being abandoned under the influence of European civilizational influences. Therefore ornate dressing – which destroyed the moral, economic and legal foundations of the rural communities – was seen as the main cause of the ‘white plague’. Spending money on purchased clothes and fabrics caused the impoverishment of the countryside, and women following fashion were presented as persons of light morals who neglected, because of laziness and comfort, the ‘natural’ women’s chores and duties, mainly implying bearing children.

As the economy grew stronger in the 19th century, and so did the opportunities for outside earning, money began to flow into rural families. This also contributed to the slow dissolution of cooperative economy. Better living conditions,²⁹ reflected among other things in gold and silk embroidered costumes, contributed to the erosion of family wealth and reduction of the number of children, i.e., of the population in general. The changes prompted the advocates of cooperative life to claim that it was the only way for maintaining and preserving family wealth. In the early 20th century *Seljačka Sloga*, the Cultural & Educational Society of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), promoted the preservation of the wholeness of folk life. ‘Folk’ implied everything that the people had created during history

29 Lukić mentions habits like the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and black coffee as additional reasons why the people went to ruin.

„Many people are killed by alcohol, tobacco, and even black coffee. Alcohol poisons the body, specially rum, brandy, liqueurs, cognac and other drinks. People enjoying this are usually thin and pale, have no appetite, eat poorly, die for a drink and usually end up with consumption after a few years... Tobacco also poisons our people, young people in particular. Black coffee is not good either, or healthy for the people, although some have got used to it more than to tobacco or brandy. With its poison, coffee, black coffee does excite the nerves, but it has a detrimental effect on the heart, which beats faster, and it should not, and is therefore bad for our health“ (Lukić 1935: 9-10, EI/BILJ/1).

to make its life easier. Along these lines, *Seljačka Sloga* tried to bring the peasant closer to the modern world through the adoption of basic knowledge without which no economic progress could be expected. Stimulated by the thinking of this organization, Luka Lukić recorded his thoughts about the negative processes which influenced the world view and demographic changes.

Since women were evaluated in terms of their productive and reproductive capacity, limited child bearing, contrary to cooperative ideology, brought about the decline of the number of children and of the population.

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