

EDUCATIONAL CARE FOR SLOVENE EMIGRANT YOUTH BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

Educational Care for Slovene Emigrant Youth before the Second World War

Children were a part of the emigrant population that was in the shadow of adults. The care of the Church and the state for their situation abroad in the inter-war period is investigated. The stress is on children of Slovene emigrants in France, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands. A few emigrant priests and teachers were involved with them and a small number went to supplementary lessons in the Slovene language. Correspondence between emigrant children and their peers in the home country was lively. They also met during holidays that emigrant children spent in Slovenia. Children were active participants at public emigrant events in the emigrant community. Despite all the efforts to preserve their national identity, the process of assimilation deepened as a result of them attending compulsory schooling in the immigrant country. Few personal testimonies of childhood have been preserved. Their feelings and experience are reflected in songs that were penned by adults in the language of children, e.g., in *Izseljenska čitanka* (Emigrant Reader) (1941).

KEYWORDS: assimilation of school children, emigrant teachers, contacts with the homeland, holidays in the homeland, written contacts between children

IZVLEČEK

Šolska skrb za slovensko izseljeniško mladino pred drugo svetovno vojno

Otroci so bili kot del selitvene populacije v senci odraslih. V medvojnem obdobju spremljamo skrb Cerkve in države za njihovo stanje v tujini, predvsem otrok slovenskih izseljencev v Franciji, Nemčiji, Belgiji in na Nizozemskem. Le malo otrok je obiskovalo dopolnilni pouk slovenskega jezika, kjer so se z njimi ukvarjali maloštevilni izseljenski duhovniki in učitelji. Živahno je bilo dopisovanje med izseljenskimi otroki in vrstniki v domovini. Srečevali so se tudi med počitnicami, ki so jih preživeli v domovini. V izseljenstvu so bili otroci aktivni del javnih izseljenskih prireditev. Kljub vsem naporom za ohranitev njihove narodne identitete se je proces asimilacije poglobljal kot posledica obiskovanja obveznih šol v priseljenjskih državah. Iz otroštva je ohranjenih le malo osebnih pričevanj. Njihovo občutenje in doživljanje se je odražalo v pesmih, ki so z otroško govorico prihajali izpod peres odraslih, npr. v *Izseljenski čitanki* (1941).

KLJUČNE BESEDE: asimilacija šolske mladine, izseljenski učitelji, stiki z domovino, počitnice v domovini, pisemski stiki otrok

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INTRODUCTION²

The position and role of children in migration processes has not often been the subject of research into emigration, in the present case for the period between the two world wars. There is no mention of the migration of children in the book by Klaus J. Bade *Evropa v gibanju* (Europe in Movement) (Bade 2005). It seems that the mass movements of people were not only genderless, but also without the presence of children. With the foundation of the first Yugoslav state (1918), care of Slovene emigrants by the state and the Catholic Church was strengthened. The levers of emigration policies were in the hands of Belgrade, but their implementation lay with the Emigrant Commissariat in Zagreb (Jonjić, Laušič 1998) and the Banovinas, in the Slovene case, the Drava Banovina (Šmid 2003; Kološa 1980). From the twenties onwards, Slovene emigration flows were directed to western European countries, primarily France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Germany (Drnovšek 2009: 39–43). Slovenes from Primorska emigrated from Italy to Argentina and throughout Yugoslavia (Vovko 1992: 87–92). The economic crisis in the mid-thirties caused an increased return home (Drnovšek 1999: 113–126).

At the appeal of the League of Nations in Geneva, a National Council for Assistance to Children was founded in the country (1921). In 1923, the International Association for Assistance to Children published the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of Children, which demanded that “the child that is hungry must be fed, the child that is sick must be helped, the child that is backward must be helped, the delinquent child must be reclaimed, and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured”. In June 1923, the Ljubljana Institute for the Care of Mothers and Children began work. The Society Care of Children (1928) appeared under the auspices of *Jugoslovanska matica* (Yugoslav Society). In 1933, the Yugoslav Union for the Protection of Children was founded (Jarc 1936: 9, 14). Care for children increased in both Europe and Yugoslavia.

How children and young people were publicly present in emigrant and immigrant events between the wars is the subject of this paper. Children were a part of the migration population that were more or less in the shadow of the world of adults. Although the attitude to upbringing and education of emigrant children in the period before the First World War was for the most part a matter of private interests, especially the Church, Yugoslav administrative bodies on national and Banovina levels were involved in it in the first Yugoslavia. The aim of Church activity among the emigrants was not just to preserve the faith, but also to preserve and strengthen the Slovene community abroad. It helped in overcoming people's everyday difficulties associated with life and work abroad. Children were part of that life and the Church devoted most attention to them. Despite possible reproaches of the Church about its ideological aggressiveness and exclusion of other beliefs, its bright side must be stressed, connected especially to care for people as such. The ideological divisions of their parents abroad certainly cannot be ignored (Drnovšek

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1997: 229–240). Upbringing and education of emigrant children was primarily the task of parents – with the mother (Anon. 1929), priests and teachers having the dominant role.³ Both at home and in emigration.⁴

“EDUCATIONAL CARE OF SLOVENE EMIGRANT YOUTH”

Assimilation, which is often characterised by the expression “alienation”, in the opinion of an anonymous thinker in 1932 was a natural process that could not be halted. He even touched on the thesis that at least the spirit and soul are preserved, even though language is lost (Anon. 1932). He saw a ray of hope in the fact that education and the establishment of “Slovene schools” was strengthening, i.e., courses conducted by priests and teachers sent from the Yugoslav state (educators). The Banovina administration was aware of the importance of emigrant priests and teachers from the religious, state, social and economic points of view.

At the first (1 June 1935) and second (23 August 1937) Catholic Emigrant Congress in Ljubljana, a request was made to the state to appoint permanent priests and teachers for the care of emigrants and their descendents, with the aim that they remain “devout and worthy children of the homeland” (Anon. 1935). Both were considered leaders and protectors of emigrant children, who were intended to strengthen the living bonds with the homeland, with state representatives of the host states and with Yugoslav diplomatic offices. The image of a teacher had to be that of a very good, devout, hard-working and serious man. In 1937, the Banovina made records of posts of priests and teachers. Priests and teachers should work in all larger Slovene immigrant centres in Europe and South America, with regulated status and with suitable financial support.⁵ The immigrant states did not in principle obstruct the social life of emigrants.

What was the position of children in emigrant societies? An example. In 1929, the Society of St. Barbara in Eysden in Belgium issued rules on the aims of the society. Immediately at the start, they highlighted the importance of Slovenes associating and gathering and of cultivating unity and friendship among them. Article four stated that members shall ensure that children know how to speak and read Slovene. Under article five, they should ensure a fine Christian family life, without drinking, unrest and disorder in the family. Children should be brought up in a strict Christian spirit. Children should avoid bad company. Boys over the age of sixteen became members of the society. Only male members had the right to vote, elect and be elected; female members only had the right to speak (Drnovšek 1990: 65–68).

³ AS 74, a.e. 1334, p. 12.

⁴ The paper is primarily based on archive, newspaper and publicity material. The Office of Emigration operated within the framework of the Sixth Department for Social Policy and National Health of the Drava Banovina. The archive material of this department was destroyed, except for the material of the Office of Emigration (Šmid 2003: 85).

⁵ AS 74, a.e. 1842, p. 19.

A lack of knowledge of the Slovene language, both among adults and children and young people, was a major problem. Lack of knowledge of the language was clearest among Westphalian Slovenes (Drnovšek, Wörsdörfer 2009: 85–91).⁶ They more or less did not know how to speak or write Slovene. Over the years, knowledge of the language also dissipated among children who had come to western European countries with their parents, and it was even worse among children born abroad. The alarm was raised both at home and among the emigrant community for preserving the Slovene language and spirit. The Society of St. Raphael – closely linked with the activities of the Franciscan Father Kazimir Zakrajšek (1878–1958) – supported efforts for improving the situation. Children had to attend compulsory school of the immigrant state, which resulted in a prevailing knowledge of the language of the country in which they were living. The more they approached the age of eighteen, the faster they forgot the language of their parents. While they were at home, they learnt something from their parents. The “shaming” of children for speaking their mother tongue in the multi-linguistic environment had a certain role. The assessment is not therefore surprising that Slovene was dying out in The Netherlands, which was among the most recent immigrant environments, let alone in the older Slovene communities. Courses were supposed at least to help to improve the situation. Children oscillated between the domestic and foreign language as well as between domestic and new values of the immigrant environment. In short: “Only let our emigrant children be good citizens of the country whose citizens they are by birth. And in this good Slovenes and good Yugoslavs”, was written (Anon. 1933).

How many children were there? In the case of France, in 1934 the teacher Janko Jankovič published a contribution in *Duhovno življenje* (Spiritual Life) “Slovene schools in France” (Jankovič 1934: 80–85), which was reprinted a year later in *Izseljeniški vestnik* (Emigrant Gazette) (Jankovič 1935). With a certain caution, he stated that there were around 18,000 Slovenes in France, 4500 of which were children. Slovene families were young and their first children were only just coming to the end of school. Two priests and two mining officials looked after them but only one was a teacher, the other was a choirmaster by profession. The four of them taught a total of 100 to 500 children in their own environment and, in his opinion, the remaining 4000 were deaf and dumb to Slovene words and blind to the beauty of the Slovene and Yugoslav homeland. However, he believed that not everything was bad. Emigrant societies could be founded. The mining authorities in many places contributed to the logistics of educational courses. And a further step, he believed that there were more than enough possibilities for young people to gather in France. His colleague, Svatopluk Stoviček, an emigrant teacher on the Belgian-German border was satisfied in the academic year 1936/37 that some 75% of children responded to his invitation and boasted that he had better educational success than his Czech, Hungarian

⁶ The first period from 1880 onwards, in the shadow of mass emigration to the USA, saw Slovenes from coal-mining areas move to the coal-mining and industrial regions of north-western Germany (Ruhrgebiet). As a consequence of the post-World One political and economic crisis in Germany, a portion of the so-called Westphalian Slovenes moved westwards and only a part of them remained in Germany.

and Polish colleagues. The children that did not attend his courses, in the teacher's opinion, were from poor families or children of parents who, because of their political convictions, did not have confidence in his efforts (Drnovšek 1990: 40–41). Jankovič was worried by the assimilation of children, which large nations more easily control (Italy, Germany). He was committed to preserving Yugoslav awareness, fidelity to the Slovene nation and the Yugoslav homeland. It was based for him on preservation of the Slovene language. What binds a mother to a child that speaks a foreign language that she does not understand, he asked? How does a mother lead it by the right path? Not least, it is not certain that a child will always remain abroad, especially in times when, because of crisis and the expulsion of foreigners, a mass return of the young to the homeland is expected. Jankovič was very severe. He envisaged that only ten percent of parents teach their children to speak, read and write. He reproached children with being illiterate. They spoke a kind of German-French mixture. Many like to “warble” in French and had no idea about writing and reading, asserted the teacher. He was as critical of the parents as of the children. He wrote: “Is it not strange that Slovene mothers give birth to English, Spaniards, Germans, French etc. instead of giving birth to Slovenes” (Jankovič 1935).

CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS

Holiday colonies for emigrant children and young people were intended to revive and preserve contacts with the homeland. It was often stressed that the young from the emigrant community wanted to tread on the ground of their homeland and see the places of their parents. The relative proximity of European immigration countries enabled these contacts to take place. When, at the first Emigrant Congress (1935), the president of the Banovina Association of Wives, Ana Zupančič, announced an invitation that her organisation was prepared to accept emigrant children on holiday, Kazimir Zakrajšek responded:

There was always a crisis with children, because children did not get one care, the protection and nurture that was necessary in order not to be morally corrupted, so that holidays in the homeland would not be merely to their moral damage. This is a question that we must separately study. (Anon. 1935)

Zupančič was of a different opinion. She was familiar with the previous holidays. She proposed from practice the following steps. First, the children should come on holiday for the entire summer and not just for three weeks as had been usual. She based this on the need for a longer period of learning the Slovene language. Second, from an organisational point of view she was committed to the children spending a third of their holidays in the mountains and the other two thirds by the sea and with relatives or charitable families. Women's and other societies that organise holidays would provide help. She rejected the practice that children be divided among farms, which did not have time for them when farm work was at its peak. Third, the children should have two to three hours daily les-

sons in Slovene, geography and history, since enough time would still be left for fun and excursions. Fourth, the children should be carefully chosen. Those that knew at least some Slovene should be considered. Mothers would thus be encouraged to speak their native language more with the children. If children returned from holidays satisfied, in the opinion of Zupančič, each mother would want to give her children the same experience and would strive for the child to meet the holiday conditions, i.e., basic knowledge of Slovene. Fifth, she believed that one year of education of children in Slovenia could also be provided. They should be enabled to attend school and courses within the framework of regulations. She was thinking here mainly of girls, who should be trained for helping emigrant teachers. The school authorities should help ensure that the stress would be on themes that they most needed, which she enumerated: baby care, training in singing and leading choirs and similar. Everything should be considered in advance, because of the modest resources. Sixth, propaganda was needed to obtain funds. Each Slovene newspaper should publish articles on the importance of work (sacrifice) for emigrants (Zupančič 1939: 155).

The main organisers of the colonies were emigrant priests and teachers. A mandatory aim of all groups of excursionists was visits to Brezje and Bled. In August 1928, Božidar Tensundern brought 260 children from the Ruhr to Slovenia on a five-week visit. A crowd of a thousand greeted them in Ljubljana (Tensundern 1973: 95–100). In 1931, a group holiday for children from Germany and The Netherlands was organised. There were 200 in total; 160 from Germany and 40 from The Netherlands. The children were aged from 8 to 16 years old. Providing children with holidays was modelled very much on Italy and Germany. The teacher Marija Ažman in August 1939 organised a vacation colony in order to prevent the indifference, apathy and alienation of Slovene young people in Germany. In addition to financial difficulties, organisational preparations were more difficult because children were concerned. The boys were separated from the girls and dispersed through various Slovene and Dalmatian health spas. The children from the colony the previous year had not known the Slovene language. It was therefore envisaged in 1939 that ten boys from Ljubljana would be included. They planned at least ten persons to accompany them (students of theology) in order to reduce the risk of physical injury, to provide lessons and educate the adolescent youth. In relation to food, it was believed that the children could not be given the same food as local children “because we must consider that they are accustomed to better food in Germany. We must in no way allow the colony not to be a success because of bad food” declared the Düsseldorf consul, Logar, and emphasised that it was an extreme attempt to save children so that they remain aware, and stressed: “Our colony therefore will not be a colony in the stated aspect, but a study-defence course”. Zakrajšek drew further attention to the poor international circumstances and proposed that two young people, a boy and a girl, should be taken from each Slovene settlement and that they should be prepared at two-month courses as “agitators” who would work among the emigrants. They also intended to spread this activity to France and The Netherlands.⁷ The war thwarted these endeavours.

⁷ AS 74, a.e. 284, š. 3.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AT PERFORMANCES

Participation at performances involved children from the youngest to adolescents, depending on the content of the event. The coming of Miklavž (St. Nicholas or Santa Claus), holy communion and confirmation, mother's day, 28th December, Christmas and Easter holidays and others were occasions made for children. The celebrations of societies and also Yugoslav state holidays did not take place without children. The blessing of a society's flag was a great event. As in Slovenia, children participated at 'Emigrant Sundays' and other religious events, such as pilgrimages to Kevelaer (Germany). Children and young people were not just in the background of various ceremonies but, with the help of teachers and priests, actively participated, e.g., in musical items, plays based on fairy tales, recitations, dramatic plays, performing allegories and so on. The dispersion of children over various settlements very often hindered work with children, e.g., preparing plays in spare time. This also made more difficult the work of societies and educational courses. The smaller participation in them was a result of the distance apart of settlements in which Slovenes lived. Particular stress was on Slovene choral singing of adults and children, to whom it was often said the local population very much enjoyed listening. Singing and stressing the symbols of the Slovene identity, in which Bled and Brezje stood out, was a constant of all events. Costumes and stage sets were normally modest. In *Izseljenska čitanka* (Emigrant Reader) (1941) and *Izseljenski vestnik* (Emigrant Gazette) (1932–1940), there are numerous photographs of children, for the most part in groups, always nicely dressed and normally with a priest or teacher in the centre or by the side of the group. That the children were only children was documented by the organiser of an Emigrant Sunday in Merlebach (France) with the words: "Unfortunately, the children were even more 'wild', inattentive and undisciplined, so that the director had really to hold himself in or have nerves of steel..." At the same performance, the organiser rather exaggerated when a choir of eighty children made an appearance with a concert of Slovene national songs. The children were tired and restless but, at the same time, the audience marvelled that they could remember such long texts, especially since they were not skilled in the Slovene language. They finished by singing *Hej Slovenci* (Hey, Slovenes) and *Lepa naša domovina* (Our beautiful homeland) (Anon. 1933).

"EMIGRANT UNCLE'S CORNER"

The priest, Anton Merkun, mentioned in the emigrant program in 1932 what the homeland must do for greater recognition of the Slovene emigrant community. What did he enumerate? School readers should have essays about emigrants, in geography the main colonies and where Slovenes are employed should be mentioned, in history the time of emigration/immigration should be identified, biographies, e.g., of Friderik Baraga, and this in primary, secondary and trade schools in the Banovina.

The scientific study of Slovene emigration was envisaged at university level (Merkun

1932). The stress was on making the young at home aware. The tasks were: encouraging children to write letters with stories about their life in the new environments, on the one hand, and children from home writing to the immigrant environment, on the other. The letters from children from abroad were varied in terms of quality of content and language, very often childishly naive, influenced by the insertion of rapturous words about the homeland. However, it is possible to detect in them what the children thought and what adult hands had contributed. The children sent their diaries and memories of visits to the homeland. In addition to the demand for textbooks for both children and adults, within the framework of Emigration Days or Sundays the celebration of these days was stressed.⁸ The teacher Julijana Šušteršič, who also went on a visit to children in France tried to imagine how she would interest children at home in emigrant themes. She was aware of how boring it could be merely to describe emigration numerically. The children themselves suggested that they would collect books, collect stamps, shells, handfuls of soil from the homeland, that they would write some letters about conditions at home, about suffering and poverty, and that they would send all together to the Society of St. Raphael, so that it could send abroad what had been collected. Some of what the children produced really was sent to Gladbeck (Germany), and some to Tucquegnieux (France). They also got an answer from the recipients (Šušteršič 1937).

As an example, thirteen-year old Drago Mikuš from Merlebach (France), of Slovene blood and language, as he presented himself, learnt German and French, the first through playing, the second at compulsory school. He believed that parents are to blame for not knowing languages, even the mother tongue. His five-year old brother also had the same upbringing and wrote in a letter: “Oh, woe betide if you broke out into German in front of our father,” although both father and mother spoke good German (Mikuš 1937). The teacher Jankovič ordered his son Tonček to write to the homeland. “But what should I write when I'm so small”, he lamented, since he was only attending “Slovene school” for the second year. What encouraged him to write? That he would like to learn Slovene, which would allow him to talk to his mother more easily (Jankovič T. 1933).

The editor of a column wanted people from the whole world to write to him. A correspondent, Alojz Ocepek, saw the column as a defence of the young against “falling into the waves of foreign life”. He criticised the decline in concern for the young and the tediousness of writing about them in the Slovene press. He appealed to intellectuals, who should devote greater attention to children abroad. He criticised the lack of activity of the authorities and cultural and educational societies at home (Ocepek 1936). Jožef Grašič wrote a contribution for *Kotiček izseljenske mladine* (Corner for emigrant youth) “We appeal for correspondence with our emigrants”. He highlighted the need to rely more on domestic youth, who should encourage correspondence with their peers. The next step would be to invite them to the homeland, at least for short visits (Grašič 1937). Jože Podslivniški predicted the “national death” of emigrant youth.⁹ When the Chamber of

⁸ AS 74, a.e. 271, p. 3.

⁹ If we take to hand *Spominski zbornik Slovenije* (Memorial Miscellany of Slovenia) (1939), together

Emigrants was founded (1938), a school section and youth fund were established within its framework. The intention of the first was care for the young abroad and the second bringing the homeland closer to emigrant children, e.g., by organising holidays. However, the time of peace ran out and, with it, plans and programs in the sphere of care for emigrant children and young people collapsed.

CONCLUSION

Emigrant children were a world to themselves. We know least about them since all research to date has been directed at the adult, mainly the male population. Bringing up children was shouldered by the mothers. The men were employed, the mothers and wives looked after the new home in the emigrant environment. Compulsory attendance at school in the immigrant country, in the opinion of many, alienated the children from the Slovene language. Assimilation was also desired by the country of immigration. On its account, it made roads, which united children in play and they thus accepted the speech of peers of other ethnic groups. This was not intended as a mistake but was something unheard of on the part of Slovene emigrant priests and teachers. Like it or not, the children and young people accepted the values of the new environment, about which there is not a great deal of data in archive sources. More prominent was the idealisation of the homeland, the places of home and Yugoslavia, which was often suggested by the Yugoslav diplomatic offices abroad. Written and personal contacts of children between the emigrant and domestic worlds were rare, usually during holiday colonies and the newspaper column of *Izseljenski vestnik* devoted to the young.

The paper has been written on the basis of archive and newspaper material, which was inclined to the Catholic party; less is known about children whose parents were non-religious or socialistically inclined. There is little material about the latter or it is not available in Slovenia.

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with the findings of Dr. Alojzij Kuhar, who was well acquainted with the emigrant question, in it also appear indications of the dying out of Slovenes in the USA, the imminent death of Slovenes in Canada, the recorded death of settlements in France; for a wonder nothing about the fate of Slovenes in Germany, of the disappearance of Slovenes in Belgium and only settlements in The Netherlands were characterised as the best Slovene settlements in Europe and the overseas countries (Kuhar 1939: 524–536).

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POVZETEK

ŠOLSKA SKRIB ZA SLOVENSKO IZSELJENIŠKO MLADINO PRED DRUGO SVETOVNO VOJNO

Marjan Drnovšek

Obdobje monarhistične Jugoslavije so zaznamovali migracijski tokovi zlasti v Francijo, Belgijo, na Nizozemsko in v Nemčijo. Poleg posameznikov se je v omenjenih državah povečalo število družin in s tem tudi otrok. V tujini so dalj časa bivali vestfalski otroci, večina pa je prihajala v povojnem obdobju. Cerkev in država sta izražali skrb za vzgojo in izobraževanje izseljenskih otrok in mladine. Poudarki v razpravi so povezani z delom izseljenskih duhovnikov in učiteljev, z učenjem slovenskega jezika, z medsebojnimi pisnimi stiki otrok, s počitnikovanjem otrok v domovini, z udeležbo otrok in mladine na prireditvah izseljenskih društev. Rubrika Kotiček za otroke v glasilu *Izseljenski vestnik* je bila bolj skromna, poslana pisma in dnevniki so bili pisani bolj z odraslo kot otroško roko. Tik pred vojno se je skrb za otroke in mladino povečala, vendar je bila bolj dejavna na programskih usmeritvah kot na aktivnem izvajanju načrtovanega. Ne smemo pa zanikati

mnogih človeških, malim ljudem prepotrebni pomoči, ki so jih ponujali dobrotniki v domovini. Med veliko gospodarsko krizo se je povečalo število v domovino vračajočih se družin. Jugoslovanska migracijska politika je bila manj uspešna, nenazadnje zaradi nezainteresiranosti Beograda, saj je bila večina izseljencev slovenskega in hrvaškega porekla in katoliške vere. V obravnavanem obdobju je bil na migracijskem področju s svojimi bogatimi izkušnjami iz ameriškega obdobja najaktivnejši pater Kazimir Zakrajšek. Svojih številnih načrtov ni izpeljal, saj je bilo dvajsetletno obdobje prekratko; ob začetku vojne se je namreč umaknil v Združene države Amerike.