

THE WAY OF LIFE AND EMIGRATION FROM GROSUPLJE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS UNTIL THE FIRST WORLD WAR

I wish to present the results of the ethnological field research dealing with the interdependence between the way of life and emigration of the inhabitants of Grosuplje and surrounding villages Spodnje Blato, Gatina and Malo Mlačevo from the end of the 19th century until the World War I. At first I was interested in the influence of emigration on the material, social and spiritual culture, but later on I decided to narrow my field of interest because of inaccessible field material and temporal distance.

Among the most evident were the social and cultural extensions of the relationship between emigration and way of life. First it was necessary to discover the conditions within those families from which emigrants came. Their descendants directly or indirectly still remember them and also save some documents, especially photographs and letters. This data is somewhat unreliable and blurred by memory, but it was possible to verify it partly in parish registers of former parishes Žalna and Šmarje to which the villages researched used to belong. Such data showed the main demographic characteristics and also the economical and social situation of individuals and thus enabled a more or less accurate reconstruction of their life—stories.

This paper deals with various reasons for emigration (economical and social situation of emigrants, relationships within their families and special features of their lifestyle), the way people left their homes, their new employments in the States, places where they lived in the U. S., the help they sent home, life in their home after their departure, the material outcome of their work in the States.

Altogether 22 emigrants emigrated from the above mentioned places (14 from Grosuplje, 3 from Spodnje Blato, 3 from Gatina and 2 from Malo Mlačevo). In 1900 Grosuplje had 365, Gatina 122, Spodnje Blato 99 and Malo Mlačevo 116 inhabitants. 4 of the 22 emigrants were born in other places within the Grosuplje municipality, but spent a significant part of their lives in one of the formerly mentioned places; their descendants live here as well. Only 3 among the 22 emigrants were female. The oldest was born in 1865, the youngest in 1898, but most were born after 1878. I was able to establish the year of their emigration to America and their age only approximately, regarding other, temporarily easily determined events in their families (the descendants mentioned their age or births, weddings and deaths occurring during that period). Most emigrations occurred between 1908 and 1913, but the first emigrant left home as early as 1898. The youngest was only fifteen years old then, the oldest forty-six. At the time of emigration most were between 17 and 25 and between 35 and 40. Three of them emigrated twice, the second time only a year or two after their return to Slovenia. All emigrated to the U. S. and only one went to Argentina for a few years and after that to the States. 6 of them were married when they left, but there were also 3 fathers of illegitimate children among the single ones. One of the babies was born out of an incest relationship inside the nuclear family.

Most of the emigrants were cottagers without any land who had to work as railway and transportation workers and their children, then farmers with a small plot of land (one of them was a sexton, another owned a forge). Only one was a land owner's son.

Thus we can see that most of the emigrants were cottagers and small farmers. The reason for their emigration was, as is generally said, poverty and a wish to earn more. This is roughly true, but when one gets more acquainted with general economical, social and kinship relations it loses its validity and becomes closely linked with the whole complex of economical, social and kindred problems which caused emigration.

The possibilities for young people to stay home or at least in the native village were narrowed down by a special system of inheritance which obliged the first-born to take over the estate and disburse the other children. The landowner's son who was to become the house-owner emigrated shortly before this because of extremely personal reasons. Among the 22 emigrants there were seven who sold their houses and land and made an agreement for a complete boarding for life in return. These bought their fare with the indemnity money. Two emigrants who had illegitimate children were paid their dowry by their still young parents who did not want to hand over their farm and had many young children. It also happened that the son who was to take over his parents farm went to the States in order to repair the house and disburse his brothers and sisters.

Some of the emigrants' relatives still save various documents which supplement the stories they told. Such a document is also a netebook where an owner of a small plot of land wrote all the income and expenses and also more important economical events in his family. Thus he wrote that one of his brothers sued him because of his disbursement. He also wrote down all the expenses for other two brothers: money for their shoes, clothes and other things. He also put down the date of his brothers' departure to America in 1909 and 1913 and even the sum he had to pay to his brother's agent.

The system of family and kinship relations, basing on a strict inheritance system of land property and modest chances of existence on farms additionally limited all the surplus young people. They were tied to their parents' home on one side and driven off the farms on the other. Beside those who agreed to a complete boarding for life but possessed no land or other property any more this situation was the worst for young farm girls. A mother of an unmarried son and an older single daughter said: "The son will get married and the daughter will be his servant." The daughter worked hard on the farm and her relatives remember her say: "I prefer to remain alone than to go to a big farm again." But since she did not want this and also did not want to become a servant of her brother's wife in the future, there was nothing else for her to do than to leave home and go abroad. At the same time a young man from a neighbouring village who had gone to

America a few years before wrote to the girl's uncle and wanted to know whether she was still single and willing to join him. The girl wished to see the young man's photograph and he sent it to her. Seeing a hat on his head she became somewhat doubtful: "How do I know that he isn't bald?" Eventually she sent him her photograph, received his reply together with a ticket and left. They got married, opened a tavern and most likely had a good life. Later on she sent a ticket to her niece, her sister's daughter. The sister's husband ran away to the States and was never heard of again, while his wife lived from hand to mouth with their many children.

It also happened that a father who was in America wrote to his daughter, asking for her photograph. In his next letter he already sent her a ticket and invited her to visit him. In the meanwhile he showed the photograph to a boy who had come to the States from a near-by village. The marriage was arranged even before the girl's arrival to the States. Later the father lured his other daughter to America in the same manner.

The system of family and kinship relations which was the principal cause for emigration in many cases, transformed in the new surroundings with greater and more various economical possibilities into a network of cooperation and mutual help. Every one of the 22 emigrants had sooner or later at least one relative in America. There were many families from which a few of their members emigrated. Thus as many as seven members from a nuclear family and the families of two married daughters left for America. They had left their home gradually, the first attracting the others. But there were also individuals who had relatives in the States, but they left home and came to America by themselves, without anybody's help, and did not contact anybody after their arrival.

Important reasons for emigration were also of a very personal nature or were hard to explain because of such great temporal distance. These were the people who had left because they were unable to cope with their personal problems or did something against the current system of moral norms and values. Thus a cottager and a railway worker, a father of eight children, who was a drunk and did not take care of his family, suddenly resigned and left. Nobody heard about him since. Another cottager with three children, a drunk and a loafer, disappeared in the same manner. His son, a butcher, left soon after him and after the arrival to the States discovered that his father spent all his earnings on cards and alcohol. The son started to work, sent money to his mother and also supported his father. Out of 22 emigrants three went to the States because they were of no use at home – according to their relatives. A cousin of one remembers this: "He took great care of his appearance. Other brothers worked hard, but he only sat on the stove, drank, smoked and chased girls. His mother kept sighing and thinking of a way to send him to America. Finally the family persuaded him, bought him his ticket and he never came back."

These stories about individuals who were of no use could also be interpreted in a different manner: some people could not or would not share the domestic work because they knew that somewhere life is different and were also capable of finding it.

The destinies of various emigrants are very different. Even the explanation that they all left in order to find work somehow loses its validity because there are so many other factors involved as well. America presented a salvation for those who were poor, who were in debts, who had no property, for single girls, for drunks and loafers, for men with illegitimate children and for those who wanted a different life.

It is difficult to find out how people left their homes or how they travelled to the States. But the following story about a boy from a very small farm and a sacristy is quite revealing: His mother was a widow and could hardly support her nine children. Their farm was in debt. The oldest son was going to be enlisted. Since he was a fine, healthy boy, he would surely have been accepted. His mother wanted to send him to the States and talked to an Italian pig merchant who often came by. He promised to help the boy cross the border. One night the son changed into some old rags and left with the Italian. Time passed. After many days the merchant returned and told the mother that the boy had written that he had arrived safely and lived well. Later the boy started to send money to his mother. And then there was a boy, supposedly not fit for any work, who took leave from his uncle saying: "I think I'll make so much money that I'll be able to build a castle back home. Now I'm being pushed aside, but I'll show them yet."

Most questions about emigrants' work and life in the States remained unanswered, the only exception being those who stayed in the States and still keep in touch with their relatives in Slovenia. Only in 12 cases relatives could answer how the emigrants earned their money in America. The data is valid for those who stayed in the States, but mostly for only their first ten years in America. All three women cooked in taverns for Slovene or Slavic workers (one of them in Cleveland). Most men worked in mines (two in Pittsburgh, Penn., two in Ely, Minn.), one in a Chicago slaughterhouse, one became a farm worker and one a butcher in Pueblo, Colorado. Two cooks, four miners and the butcher stayed in the States. The information about the occupation of the remaining seven was not available. Eight out of 22 returned to Slovenia: one cook, two miners, the butcher and the farm worker.

Those who stayed in the States sent money and packages to their relatives after the World War II. Only three never sent anything. Out of those who returned to Slovenia only three sent money home while working in America: one to a girl with his illegitimate baby, one to his wife who had to pay off the debts and one to a wife with many children. Two fathers of illegitimate children never sent anything. Others either brought their money back with them, returned without anything or nothing is known about this.

Those who returned had spent three, four, five, six and seven years in the States. The last two could not return earlier because of the war. Within five or six years three of them returned to the States for a shorter period of time.

The absence was the hardest for women who stayed behind with children. A mother with an illegitimate baby, a cottager's daughter, had to take care of herself and the baby. A farm maid in the same situation did not have an easy life

either, although her boyfriend regularly sent her money. She was given a room at home, but had to work hard for it. Her brothers despised her and would not even look at her. Even worse off were the mothers with many children who worked on other people's fields in return for some food, washed dishes in taverns (in return for some coffee grounds they could reboil for children), heated stoves at school, knitted mittens and socks at night and sowed for children. Many times a relative gave them some milk or flour or lent them some money. The absence of emigrants also changed the division of work within families. Thus a young farm boy whose sister went to America stayed alone with his old mother and had to take over all of his sister's housekeeping.

According to the data available the profit for those who returned home was rather small. The most successful of all was a young man who has sent money to a girl with his illegitimate baby for seven years, then returned, married her, invested his money into wine trade, built a house and opened a bakery. But it is difficult to say just how much that money he had earned in America helped him because he came from a wealthy family and would not be badly off in any case. Also one of the cooks and her husband who took over his parents' farm after their return nicely repaired their house. It can be said that one of the cottagers whose wife was able to pay off the debt amounting to 1800 gld. was successful as well. He covered his house with brick and bought some cows. Another emigrant with no property was not so lucky: after four years in a quick silver mine he returned home and had enough money for a good-sized farm. But he was stingy and hesitated so long that the exchange became very bad; then he could buy only one cow. A blacksmith who also owned some land and had four children returned home after two years and built some stables. Then he returned to the States. After he finally came back to Slovenia in order to enjoy the fruit of his hard labour he was killed during the first week of war. Two fathers of illegitimate children returned with no money at all. Each of them came to live with his brother who took over the farm in the meanwhile. The relatives of one of them remember him saying that sausages hang on fences in the States. His family kept asking him why he returned if he had such a good life in America.

These results indicate the direction of the development of ethnologically important questions which are connected with emigration from Slovene ethnic territory. Here I do not mention many questions and phenomena concerning material and spiritual culture because an extensive research will be necessary for their understanding. This research is only beginning now. One of the first tasks, and it does not concern ethnology alone, is the research of historical demography. This is a necessary basis for a better understanding of all the processes during which a foreign country becomes a second homeland where Slovenes have been struggling.

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