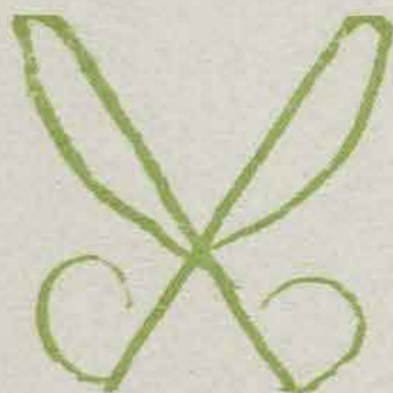

SLOVENSKÝ NÁRODOPIIS



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VRZGULOVÁ, M.: The Family of the Tradesman and the Position of Women in the first half of the 20th century

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PODOLINSKÁ, T. – KOVÁČ, M.: Daughters of Luna. Ritual Status of Woman in the Mayas-Lacandons Society

first page: Scissors. Line-drawing from the oldest City-book of Bratislava. 1364.
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THE FAMILY OF THE TRADESMAN AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**MONIKA VRZGULOVÁ**

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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.³ 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 Tranoscius. 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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-HAUPT 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 Starý 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
 APPELTOVÁ, 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, Justína, laced bodices and underwear
 ČERVENANOVÁ, M., hairdresser.
 ČERVENKOVÁ, Hildegarda, 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.
 GOPPOLDOVÁ, Júlia, milliner, Hlavné nám. 16
 GUTTMANOVÁ, haberdasher's, Hviezdoslavova ul.
 HAASOVÁ, textiles, Hlavné nám, Mestská veža
 HEVEŠIOVÁ – tobacconist, Dolné nádražie
 HOLČÁKOVÁ, Anna, laced bodice, Vajanského 8
 HOLOUBKOVÁ-URBASIOVNA, Mária, photo-studio, Hlavné nám. and Farská ul.
 HORNOVÁ, delicatessen, Sv. Trojica – Hlavné nám.
 HORYLOVÁ, dairy, Hlavné nám. (Mestská veža and Piaristický kostol)
 CHOVANOVÁ, Mária, bookstore and stationary, Vajanského ul. 12
 IVA, needlework
 JANŠOVÁ, Ružena, general provisions, Hviezdoslavova 32
 JANSZAYOVÁ-DRELICKOVÁ, Illy (Helena) – photo-studio, Hlavné nám., Farská ul.
 KAČIČOVÉ sisters, Farská ul. 5
 KASRIELOVÁ, Anna, general provisions, Meinl store
 KELLEROVÁ, Milena, widow, furniture and upholstery
 KIAČOVÁ, Terézia, hairdresser, Hlavné nám. ((Mestská veža and Piaristický kostol)
 KOŠÍKOVÁ, Oľga, general provisions, Hlavné nám.
 KUČÁKOVÁ, Emília, dairy and delicatessen, Štefánikova 4
 MAHREROVÁ, laced bodices, Hlavné nám.
 MAKKOVÁ, Júlia, dressmaker, Farská 2
 MIČANIOVÁ, Joža, dressmaker, Nám. sv. Anny 17
 MIHALIČEKOVÁ, J. – flower shop, Hlavné nám.
 MINÁRIKOVÁ, dressmaker, Hlavné nám.
 MOHROVÁ, haberdasher. Hlavné nám.
 MURÍNOVÁ, pharmacy U božského srdca Ježišovho, Nám. sv. Anny 10
 NOVÁKOVÁ, 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, Pribinova ul. 2

- SCHWEIDLEROVÁ, Anna, milliner, Hlavné nám. 26
 SKOPALOVÁ, L. – LIPA – needlework, Hlavné nám. 9
 SLABEŇÁKOVÁ, Mariena, women's and children's clothes, Hviezdoslavova 5
 SOPKOVÁ, Mária, garden restaurant, Sudňa 8
 TOCHTENOVÁ, confectionery, Nám. sv. Anny
 TREFNÁ-HORÁČKOVÁ, Filoména, photo-studio D'ART, Nám. sv. Anny 6
 TVRDOŇOVÁ, grocery, Legionárska ul.
 UHERKOVÁ, A. J., bookstore and stationary (first aryanized shop in Trenčín) Hlavné nám. (original owner Max Fried)
 URBANOVÁ, Štefánia, department store, Štefánikova 34 (before Flack VILDA – milliner's)
 VOTAVOVÁ, Heda, hairdresser, Piaristická ul.
 WEINEROVÁ, delicatessen, between Banková ul. and Hviezdoslavova ul.
- 4 After the abolition of guilds which had previously determined the transfer of craft skills from one generation to another, this became the task of the tradesmen's families. This phenomenon was evident all over Europe. The process was 30 to 50 years delayed in Slovakia compared with Western European countries (CROSSIC-HAUPT 1995: 87-111).
 - 5 Inside the social group of tradesmen there was an internal evaluation of the social importance of certain crafts according to their profit levels or to the nature of the work itself: for example hard work in a badly polluted environment compared with easy work in a clean environment at the center of social life. (KALAVSKÝ 1990: 72).
 - 6 I see social mobility as a move from one social position to another within the social structure of a social unit (GEIST 1992: 230).

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