Nešťaková, Denisa: Be Fruitful and Multiply. Slovakia's Family Planning Under Three Regimes (1918-1965).

Herder-Institut, Marburg 2023, 266 S. (Studien zur Ostmitteleuropaforschung 58), 55 Abb., ISBN 978-3-87969-485-3.

Denisa Nešťaková's engaging monograph analyzes family planning across three political regimes in Slovakia: the First Czechoslovak Republic, the fascist state that allied with Nazi Germany during World War II, and the early communist period from 1948 until 1965. Nešťaková has made an important contribution to the historiography of East Central Europe, European gender history, and the history of sexuality. Her rich archival source base includes documents and images from Slovak and Czech archives, and she engages with the work of historians, such as Dagmar Herzog and Kateřina Lišková, who have also contributed to the historiography of sexuality, motherhood, and family planning in Central Europe.

The book's title, *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, alludes to two important themes of the work. The first is the centrality of pronatalism across Slovakia's three twentieth-century political regimes to 1965. Although each state differed in its tactics and underlying philosophy, the "goal of each regime was population growth" (p. 4). The biblical origin of the book's title alludes to a second, related theme: the importance of religion in Slovakia's history of family planning. The Catholic Church had considerable influence in enforcing sexual morality, and even non-Catholics were affected by the Church's power. Nešťaková's study further demonstrates the dynamic interplay between institutions and individuals. Religious organizations, political groups, medical personnel, and the state viewed family planning as "a matter of public interest" (p. 5), and they debated the social norms of sexual behavior, motherhood, family size, and contraceptive methods. Nešťaková pushes against models of historical progress or regression. Instead, she sees the complexities in each regime and shows that citizens embraced, challenged, or ignored the dominant paradigms, depending on their various experiences and identities. Economic, cultural, religious, and racial differences influenced how women and families responded to the state's admonitions and demands. Women's activism generally fell into three categories: conservative and Catholic women who advocated traditional roles for women; liberal feminists who called for sexual freedoms and contraception; and socialist and communist groups who pointed out economic inequities that grew out of family planning ideologies.

Nešťaková makes a strong case for her focus on Slovakia, rather than Czechoslovakia. She rightly points out that many studies of Czechoslovakia are unbalanced in favor of Czech-speaking regions. Further, Slovakia's historical trajectory differed from the Czech case in ways that directly affected family planning. Before 1918 and the birth of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia was part of the Hungarian Kingdom, whereas Bohemia and Moravia were tied to Austria. Each region of the new state inherited different laws and customs. Slovakia tended to be more rural, more religious, and poorer than Bohemia and Moravia. Sizeable Jewish and Roma populations also contributed to the dynamics of family planning and the interplay of pronatalism and anti-natalism.

The first section of the book focuses on the First Republic (1918-1938). Nešťa-

ková shows how Slovak experiences departed from Czech practices, and she challenges the myth that Roman Catholicism in the region always led to large families. Instead, many Slovak couples tried to limit their families to one child. This practice emerged from the Hungarian tradition of dividing land among all children, rather than designating the oldest son as the primary heir. If Slovak families did not limit family size, their family holdings would become increasingly smaller with each generation. Limiting births, therefore, was an economic necessity. This economic system made marrying cousins an appealing choice, as it kept property within a family. As eugenics developed as a field of study and policy, medical practitioners dissuaded citizens from these close marriages by demonstrating the inheritance of unwanted characteristics within small populations.

During World War II, Slovakia was an autonomous fascist state allied with Hitler, while the Czech Lands were absorbed into the Reich. The Slovak State shared some continuities with interwar era pronatalism, but the extreme politics of the era marked a "major shift" in policy. The state sought to increase the birthrate of healthy, Christian Slovaks by implementing new social benefits for large families. Fascism attempted to correct past wrongs. Women were to return to the home, and men would dominate the political sphere. Although the birthrate did increase early in the era, ultimately the war resulted in a net loss of Slovak lives.

The Czech and Slovak regions reunited after the war, and the Communist state echoed the First Republic's embrace of women's rights. The communist state promoted equality between men and women, made divorce easier to obtain, and legalized abortion in 1957. However, the party's approach to family policy was marked by inconsistencies. Despite the rhetoric of liberation, the state promoted heteronormative sexuality within the context of marriage. Even though abortion was legalized, women had to explain their reproductive choices to a male-dominated committee before the procedure was approved. While the state advocated births among Slovaks, it pursued anti-natalist policies, encouraging or forcing sterilization upon Roma women in Slovakia.

Nešťaková ends her study in 1965, the year that oral contraceptives (birth control pills) were made available in Slovakia. It is a difficult choice for historians to decide the endpoint of their research. Unfortunately, Nešťaková's jump from the late 1960s to an epilogue about 2023 feels abrupt. According to Nešťaková, the introduction of the pill did not mark a major shift in people's reproductive behavior. The state discouraged its use, citing health and future fertility concerns. Only 80,000 women took birth control pills as of 1968. The reader is left wondering if that number increased significantly later in the century. In this section, Nešťaková writes that the state encouraged intrauterine devices (IUDs) as a long-term contraceptive choice. Yet, the book does not adequately explain why that family planning method remained unpopular. Reliance on coitus interruptus and the rhythm method was high, even when more technologically safe and reliable methods were developed. A short synopsis of what happened in the independent Slovak Republic after 1993 would also give more context for the contemporary vignettes Nešťaková shares in her introduction and conclusion. This well-researched and well-argued book will hopefully encourage other scholars to pursue work on the late-Communist era and the Slovak Republic.

This book is engaging and attractive, with color and black-and-white illustrations interspersed throughout the text. Nešťaková includes artwork, propaganda, and advertisements of items such as condoms and pessaries to illustrate the culture of family planning in various eras. The images highlight important themes, such as the sexualization of Roma women and the influence of German-styled propaganda in fascist Slovakia. In each era, the state, church, and party promoted the images of a robust, happy Slovak family, represented as Christian and white. Nešťaková's work will appeal to a broad audience of advanced students and scholars interested in East Central European history, gender history, or the history of sexuality. In three disparate regimes, the state prioritized the regulation of women's bodies and their reproductive capabilities, albeit in distinct ways.

Ewing/NJ Cynthia Paces