

Ján Botík: Ethnic History of Slovakia. On the Issues of Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Multiethnic Slovakia and Foreign Slovaks

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If the topic of „old Slovaks“ had not been so „fabricated“ in the media at the beginning of this year, then the reviewer of this title could begin his text by saying that the topic of ethnicity today is after its fertile period in the 1990's (we know what it is connected with) somewhat sidelined by other everyday themes by the very same „fabricating“ forces. However, it is necessary to add that in the 90's the perceptiveness towards the topic of ethnicity had been awakened also by the fact that despite various initiatives from below, „real socialism“ – as stated by F. Novosád – did not manage to develop such political forms that would enable to complete the process of national emancipation. (See *The Alchemy of History (Alchýmia dejín)*, p. 12 and other.) When such radical changes of a political regime like then occur, it is the very awareness of ethnic identity that is being particularly activated in all its functions. On the other hand, approximately a year ago R. Dahrendorf mentioned also another of the ethnic awareness functions that simply cannot be left out of account even when regarding functions in their entirety and this mainly concerns fear of nationalism. He reminds us that despite a frequent search for a new identity of for example European, Latin American or even a certain „world civil society“, most people feel at home in their own country: in a nation state where they belong as citizens (he illustrates the history by a positive experience with regained freedom to decide about Slovakia's national sovereignty in the 90's). Nevertheless, he points out that even the developed countries of the contemporary democratic world are not able to avoid nationalism, although it manifests itself in new forms and shapes such as economic protectionism (labour market restrictions, restrictions on cheap products market and similar).

This introduction reminds us very briefly of the diversity and differentiation of the connections that are usually related to and connected with the topic of ethnicity (ethnos, minority, majority, ethnic awareness, ethnic identity, assimilation, multicultural character, ethnocide, ethnocentrism, ethnic stereotypes and prejudice, cultural and social memory and many other concepts and categories used for analysing and explaining the multidisciplinary issue of ethnicity). Even though this extensive work (book is published in A4 format) is mainly focused on the ethnological point of view, individual themes and areas are subject of study of other disciplines, not only of social sciences but particularly of sociology. After all, besides social psychology the relationship between ethnology and sociology has ever since the beginning of sociology in the Slovakia been emphasized by its founder or its most important initiator A. Štefánek as one in which the disciplines most often cooperate in their research of the Slovak society.

In the first chapter *The Basic Concepts of the Theory of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity* professor J. Botík expressed himself heuristically to the multidisciplinary

binding and respected theoretical-methodological approaches and initiatives at the research of ethnicity. However on this place it is necessary to mention that the whole work has been designed as a „study book“ for the issue of ethnicity that is a topic not only very broad, but sometimes even unclear and contradictory. Since it should fulfil above all didactic aims, it is only natural that the heuristic theoretical-methodological issues are treated and summarised informatively and no stress is put on the approach to the problem. Nonetheless, J. Botík was successful at managing the heuristics, which is visible on more issues. For example, after a brief summary of historical concepts of a nation he proceeds to a theoretical-methodological initiative of social constructivism that is so often mentioned nowadays. Even though he does not mention the basic work of the sociologists P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, the retrospection of the semantics of subject and constructing up to the French neo-Hegelian E. Renan and his idea that „nation, it is a constant plebiscite“ proves that he is well informed about the issue and masters the sources and heuristics of „constructivism“. Naturally, in the philosophy or sociology of science there are also other opinions about constructivism that take the noetic status of cognitions into account as the results of a cognitive process in natural or technical sciences and reviving the old problem of the relationship between empiricism and conventionalism. On the other hand not accepting „constructivism“ nowadays would in many areas of social sciences mean the loss of theoretical support for one's claims.

Considering the big topicality of minority issues in developed countries connected mainly with the course and status of migration processes, even bigger attention is besides social constructivism paid to the issue of multiculturalism. This is legitimate; however, we could also add that nowadays the phenomenon of multiculturalism was not successful at avoiding certain crises that transcend the frames defined here in this chapter. As far as the issue of social or cultural memory as a certain innovative category is concerned – even though this category is not new either in sociology or in ethnology – author formulates here a more actual, noetically more acceptable and thus more varied stands to what falls out of this memory and why and how this process of „forgetting“ functions on the level of communities regarding tradition and ethnic group memory. Thus the category of forgetting can, elaborated from the social aspect, become an important analytical tool for explaining processes within social or cultural memory. When applying the category of social memory on religious memory we have come across a statement by another author that modern societies – above all the European – are not less religious because they are more rational, but rather because they are less and less able to retain their memory. However, if this process of the loss of ability to retain some contents of memory is not elaborated (how it functions, what are the causes and what penetrates the memory and what stays in there), then the changes in the memory will continue to take place. Whole history is the witness to such changes. However, this is only a general comment off the topic of the reviewed text.

Theoretical and methodological questions and issues are important for non-ethnologists in such a work. However, they cannot in a review cover the essential meaning and aim of the work if they are not its main subject, which here is the content how and by what means the ethnicity of Slovaks was created. I suppose that the main purpose of J. Botík's work is to show on a very extensive source material how can ethnicity of the Slovaks be justified and reconstructed and simultaneously show that this ethnicity has from the historical point of view been formed in the closest contacts with other ethnic groups that lived with them or next to them. He points out that multiethnic relations form a historically embedded invariant of ethnic awareness that is despite various historical cases of variations and excesses the value that has been here historically constituted and that such a cultural phenomenon needs to be developed and cultivated in order to deepen the understanding of its true and unique meaning in our cultural development (p. 29 and following). This is not easy, because factually it goes beyond ethnology into the most distinctive and most unstable area that deals with this and that is the politics. The second and the third chapter are dedicated to the ethnicity of Slovaks and multiethnicity of Slovakia. Other ethnic groups that it was formed of apart from the Slovaks are dealt with in individual subchapters of the third chapter (Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Romanies, Croatians, Serbians, Bulgarians and the Czech).

Throughout the whole work author's arguments and reasoning rely above all on archaeology, history, linguistics and ethnology, though he makes use of other sciences, too. After all, is it possible to reconstruct the whole process of Slovak ethnicity formation outside the knowledge of these sciences? Extensive analyses are devoted not only to original linguistic differentiations of the Slavs in their process of settling in new territories during the migration of peoples also on the territory of contemporary Slovakia, but also to mutual contacts of different ethnic groups in the following periods that found expression in loanwords taken from the language of one ethnic group into another. This provides a rich source material for further linguistic deductive methods helping to infer about life style, prevailing types of activities etc according to the meaning of loanwords. Ethnic factors are proven by the most stable names of villages according to the craft, market or geographical meanings as well as names of rivers, mountain, hill and such like.

Various questions may emerge that may suitably add to the study and didactic character of the book with the intention to summarize individual pieces of knowledge and evoke connections between them. If for example names of some rivers or mountains were adopted from Celts, Teutons or Romans by the incoming Slavs (such as Danube, Váh, Dudvák, Hron, Nitra, Fatra, Tatras, or Carpathian Mountains), then we cannot admit that there is a certain parallelism between a migration and an autochthonous theory, certain forms of coexistence between the original autochthonous and the new, incoming ethnic group. After all, fixing of the words, their meanings and what they denote is probably conditioned not only by the frequency in which they are used, but by the length of period during which the

incoming ethnic group gradually acquired these linguistic forms. This had probably not been a one-time process. After all, there are discussions that the issue cannot be regarded just either from the view of a migration or an autochthonous theory. Often mentioned issue is the coexistence of Avars and Slavs and their complete cultural dispersion in the environment of Slavic tribes. Author gives another example and a form of this phenomenon in the concept of "cultural symbiosis" regarding the mixed Celtic-Dacian settlement in the southern Slovakia in the half of the 1st Century AD (p. 19) or by putting a question given later in the work and that is "to what extent is the linguistic and cultural heritage connected to the old Slavs from the genetic point of view. In other words, what can be regarded as autochthonous and peculiar to Slavs and what is part of a wider and more universal cultural property?" (p. 40-41)

Another example of such rational debating about the stimuli that the book evokes is the issue closely connected with the expression used at the beginning of this review. Author states that despite various results, the reconstruction of the social system and social structure of supertribal union of the Slavs above the Danube river in the 9th – 10th Centuries, i.e. during the Great-Moravian Empire (p. 23 and following) and the level of its „ethno-social integration“ is one of the „weaker links“ of the existing research of all participating disciplines. He occasionally uses the expression old Magyars – found in quoted literature, too – or old Slavs. Nevertheless, it is clear that the heuristics of the expression old Slovaks is not the primary impulse for its scientific research. However, using such an extensive material as presented by J. Botík it is or could be an issue that might be developed in study methods forming a critical approach and attitude. It cannot be read as a simple „story“, but it teaches to understand for example that the acknowledgement of Old Slavonic as a language of liturgy besides three other until then acknowledged languages by the Pope himself had simultaneously been a very important step to conceive language as an attribute of ethnic uniqueness (p. 24) in a dominant unanimous understanding of power and Christian universalism and that the next step for this ethnic differentiation from the original Old Slavonic integrity were separation processes caused by creating Czech, Polish and Hungarian states (p. 37) that included the attachment of the territory of the contemporary Slovakia into a foreign language and foreign culture environment of the Hungarian state. Further step of ethnic individualisation was that the ethnonym Slovak started to be used as late as the end of 15th Century (p.38) etc. Yet awareness of national identity developed only slowly and in a complicated manner, which may be supported and added by data gathered by numerators from 1943, who asked the citizens of Eastern Slovakia whether they feel Slovak or Hungarian: if we feel comfortable among the Czech, then we will be Slovaks, if among Hungarians, then we will be Hungarians (see Building a State (Budování státu) by F. Peroutek, p. 134-135). If we study books such as this reviewed work by J. Botík, whose arguments are able to make you ready for problems that may emerge anytime after their publication, then these books can mostly be regarded as good.

Rather than using a traditional information approach we have so far described the issues of the first and the second chapter *Ethnic Image of the Slovakia*, and concentrated on the Slovaks as the first ethnic group of the most extensive third chapter *Multiethnic Slovakia and its cultural variety*. Even now, the interpretation of all ethnic groups forming the multiethnic image of the Slovakia is more or less similar. It includes historic connections and facts concerning their arrival to Slovakia or on its current territory, its causes, their economic life and fulfilment, cultural peculiarities, religions, tradition, their influence and mutual contact with the prevailing Slovak ethnic group.

Most space is devoted to the Hungarian ethnic group that had become a national minority after 1918 in the Czechoslovakia and is currently Slovakia's biggest minority. Based on analyses of individual events, social and cultural phenomena and displays author clarifies to what extent it accepted the changed relations how the minority kept dealing with them from 1918 until now. He points out that it must have been difficult in the inter-war period to cope with this fact manifested by the isolation from the majority society. (p. 74) Simultaneously, he points out the sources of high national awareness of the Hungarian ethnic group and their patriotism. On ten statistic surveys carried out from 1880 to 2001, he illustrates how the individual social and political events and changes reflect on the number and variations in the number of the Hungarian ethnic group in the Slovak region. He reminds us of different phases of the "de-Magyarization" processes of the southern Slovakia after 1918 and after 1945 and the impacts of these political resolutions and actions. In this context, he also analyses the factors for preserving and transforming Hungarian's ethnic group awareness up to the present days.

As far as the German minority is concerned, apart from its social and professional stratification (besides well-known he also mentions less-known crafts such as viniculture, woodcutting, charcoal burning and other), he emphasizes its religious variedness (besides Catholics and Lutherans, Anabaptists, too). Due to mutual influence of these factors in different regions of Slovakia the culture of the German minority is not homogenous, but rather unusually multiform from regional and social point of view. (p. 93)

What is important regarding the Roma minority apart from historical and cultural factors such as language, origin, group, family, employment or craft, art and Roma culture (music, dance), is the summary of how the Roma themselves perceive their own identity. It resembles some older phases and development stages of the ethnic identity formation of modern societies. He points out a number of connections and impacts of imposing the cultural model of the majority society upon the Roma, their double ethnic identity, ambivalence and passive approach to their own identity. Author had already mentioned the importance of a factor that the majority society is permanently inculcated with prejudice and stereotype approach to the Roma, which is applied to contemporary events as well.

As far as other ethnic groups (Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian minorities) are concerned author points out the influence of assimilating factors. This is also valid for the Ruthenian minority. At the same time he emphasizes the function of own national intelligentsia playing a role in forming ethnic identity and national awareness.

Situation and development of relations with the Czech ethnic group as compared to other ethnic groups is rather different. Due to shared history, a large number of ethnic differentiating factors lost their importance and their original meaning.

In this context, Jewish ethnic group is somewhat particular, mainly in view of the events that it was exposed to during the Second World War and its current numerous representation.

Final chapter is devoted to foreign Slovaks, to a large extent surveyed by the author himself.

The book by J. Botík contains a large number of concepts, terms, facts, examples, results, connections and relations to the issue of ethnicity of Slovaks in relation to other ethnic groups influencing the co-formation of this ethnicity. Considering the extent as well meanings, determinations and definitions of these concepts and facts, it is not a light reading. In order to prepare a review of such a text, it means to fully devote oneself for two or three weeks only to the study of this synthesis of ethnicity of Slovaks. However, it is an important monographic elaboration of a very sensitive and necessary issue useful for forming a critical approach to one's own ethnic identity and to knowledge of the development of own nation.

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