

DUDEKOVÁ KOVÁČOVÁ, Gabriela. *ČLOVEK VO VOJNE. Stratégie prežitia a sociálne dôsledky prvej svetovej vojny na Slovensku. [PEOPLE AT WAR. Survival Strategies and the Social Consequences of the First World War in Slovakia]*. Bratislava: VEDA; Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2019, 326 pages. ISBN 978-80-224-1786-0.

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Reflecting on a publication¹ devoted to the social consequences of the First World War, I will quote a statement by Jacques le Goff: “*The First World War gave rise to a new militarist culture of hatred and barbarism.*”² From many points of view, this world conflict is regarded as an event that at the time and in the years after its “official” end irreversibly changed all aspects of the lives of individuals and whole societies. It was also the beginning of the accelerated 20th century, in which unprecedented development of technology was one of many characteristics. A huge number of expert and artistic works devoted to the causes, course and consequences, the political and military aspects of the Great War both in the world and in Slovakia. The so-called greater history has prevailed in historiographic work, but folklore studies, where the object of research was and is the ordinary person and everyday life also recorded memories of participants in the Great War, both from the battlefields and the home front. They involve narratives forming part of the historical memory either of contemporaries of the war, who may or may not have been direct participants, or of narratives passed down by oral tradition. The strength of this theme also overlapped with the expert development of Slovak folklore studies. To put it simply, it is possible to state that folklore studies “discovered” narratives with the theme of personal history when its interest shifted from the group to the individual. Living but tied to the person of the story-teller and a situational context and so apparently unstable narratives or memoirs were outlined in the group model of the story-telling repertoire, alongside the traditional genres of folktale and legend. Memoirs as a dynamic phenomenon of story-telling culture became a living part of it perhaps because of their connection to a more intimate social framework. The traditional genres spoke of group ambitions, actions or defeats. Memoirs individualize these themes. While in the traditional version, the group is the hero and the individual hero symbolizes the group, in the memoir, the individual struggles with destiny and the conditions of life, and this is the core of the story or its basis. Ján Michálek presents basic work in the history of Slovak folklore studies from the point of view of the theory of the memoir.³ His research is concerned mainly with the district below Bradlo and Javorina. He attempted to study

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- 1 The work originated in the framework of the grant project VEGA 2/0107/19 “*Folklór, folkloristika a ideológia*” (“*Folklore, Folklore Studies and Ideology*”), (chief researcher of the project: Mgr. Zuzana Panczová, PhD.).
 - 2 Le GOFF, Jacques. Předmluva. (Foreword). In ORTIZ, Izabel (ed.). *První světová válka*. Praha: Nakladatelství Sun, 2010, p. 6 [Italian original *Storia Illustrata della Prima Guerra Mondiale*. Firenze-Milano: Giunti Editore S.p.a., 1999].
 - 3 MICHÁLEK, Ján. *Spomienkové rozprávania s historickou tematikou*. (Memory Narratives with Historical Themes.). Bratislava: Veda, 1971.

natural story-telling situations, appealing to the need to have “*numerous and reliable materials*”.⁴ The narrators were people born in the second half of the 19th century, and the research done around 1970 showed that: “*the number of these stories is still [up to the date of publication – note HH] relatively large and very varied in subject*”.⁵ The author, an innovator for the time, states that the memoirs concerned with the First World War can also be used as reliable sociological material for knowledge of views of the First World War and war in general among ordinary people,⁶ which folklore studies of the time designates as *historiosophy*. J. Michálek also looks from the point of view of the ecology of folklore at the important circumstance of the “revival” of story-telling represented by so-called commemorative occasions such as anniversaries. The presentation of the war theme in literature, film and drama often contributed to shaping the content and form of the narratives. From the point of view of the theory and poetics of the memoir, the contribution of J. Michálek’s work lay in more precise terminology and definition of the characteristics of sub-groups of memoir: *story-telling from life and memory story-telling*. The latter is a memoir that does not create a picture of the direct experience of the story-teller, the relationship to the depicted reality is mediated by at least one and sometimes more degrees. Thus it represents the stage of folklorization – in time and in space, which has results for the content and form of the narratives, when, for example, “*the historical figure becomes in the thinking of the people, as the oral transmission makes him*”.⁷ This critical excursion into the recent history of Slovak folklore studies is also confirmed by the reviewed publication, which analyses these memoirs as one of its sources.⁸ As the author states: “*The aim of the book is describe the most important social consequences of the First World War in the territory of Slovakia as a part of the wider context of the Kingdom of Hungary and Habsburg Monarchy.*” (p. 10), and the so-called ego-documents enable fulfilment of this aim by means of the “view from below”, namely through the facts and views of ordinary participants in the First World War at the front and at home. G. Dudeková Kováčová has published various expert contributions to individual parts of this field, so that the reviewed publication, which connects with and continues these contributions, is an extensive, mature and comprehensive study of this problem.

Since the author has studied the theme in a way that is to some degree innovative in the framework of Slovak historiography, starting from less used sources, including

4 MICHÁLEK, ref. 3, p. 9-10.

5 MICHÁLEK, ref. 3, p. 67.

6 MICHÁLEK, ref. 3, p. 59.

7 MICHÁLEK, ref. 3, p. 110.

8 Scientific collections of the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, Archives of the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia. SMATANA, Miloslav – BALLEKOVÁ, Katarína – HLŔŠKOVÁ, Hana – HOLEC, Roman. *Rozpamätávanie. Prvá svetová vojna jazykom prastarých otcov a materi.* (Remembering the First World War in the Language of our Great-Grandparents.). Bratislava: Veda, 2015. ISBN 978-80-224-1495-1.

the propaganda of the time, as well as ego-documents, she has expressed her views on their usability from the point of view of the objectivity of recorded facts and pointed to the limits of this type of source, considering, for example, the varying degrees of self-censorship and self-stylization in the oral and written memoirs. Although the work does not verify or even formulate a specific theory, it works productively with the concept of *survival strategy*, and inspired by social psychology, also with the concept of *feeling threatened* and not only in the immediate physical sense, but also of subjective expression of fear of loss of a secure existence in the sort of crisis situation that every military conflict represents. The author also takes an interest in the problems of weakening of loyalty to the regime and factors promoting radicalization.

G. Dudeková Kováčová has divided the publication into four main chapters, extensive introductory and concluding essays, a summary in English, structured list of sources and literature, and index of names. The individual chapters deal with the specific sub-themes that have received attention from the author: The problem of loyalty – from war hysteria to protests; In an extraordinary regime; Survival strategies on the home front; War as an experience. The chronological aspect of the individual sub-themes offers a picture of the changes and development of the theme before, during and in the years after the war. This gives the reader a well-rounded and exhaustive picture of the analysed phenomena.

The introduction to the publication describes the thematic and methodological orientation of European and Czecho-Slovak historiography on the Great War, mentioning the three main paradigms for constructing pictures of it applied up to now, as formulated by J. Winter and A. Prost (pp. 15–16). I consider it helpful that the author emphasizes the fact that in Czechoslovak and Slovak historiography up to 1989, various significant personalities of the Great War, and the phenomena of everyday life did not receive attention from researchers. In the first chapter (pp. 25–81) devoted to the problem of loyalty, G. Dudeková Kováčová applies detailed consideration of the social, ethnic and family background of people (p. 28 etc.) using the comparative approach, for example, of data from Tyrol and Slovakia, when analysing and interpreting sources of a personal nature and the local press. On the basis of study of these sources, the author has attempted to produce a typology of the motivations and factors determining changes of attitude to the war among ordinary soldiers. She points to the processual nature of attitudes and loyalty, which is justified by the soldiers' real experience of war rather than the officially promoted ideal of the soldier in the army, which had an important role in the state power apparatus of the time. The author points to the strength of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices in the official rhetoric of the time on loyalty.

The second chapter (pp. 81–155) approaches the character of the security measures in the extraordinary war period, and the strategies by which people dealt with these limiting circumstances both at the front and at home. The material of the censorship offices of the Ministry of War have proved to be a very interesting source of information here. The paradoxical nature of the wartime situation is documented by the activity of representatives of the Slovak political elite (K. Stodola, I. Dérer, M. Hodža) in the Slovak section of the censorship office, which they could use for specific political steps. The influence of propaganda on the formation of public opinion was intensified

by the developing media of the time: the press, film and photography, which enabled manipulation of the image of the war in propagandist stereotyping, leading, for example, to shifting of the boundaries of the perception of violence.

The third chapter (pp. 155–213) considers the strategies by which the home front with its essential supply function reacted to wartime regulations. The author again proceeds chronologically so that the political and military matrix is filled in with data about research themes: supply problems, spread of illnesses, state of the labour force, black market, pricing policy, war invalids, limitation of consumption and so on. Case studies of wartime everyday life in Prešporok (Bratislava) bring detailed data about creativity and improvisation to secure the survival of the urban community using legal and illegal means. These continued into the years after the end of the Great War as shown by memory narratives, where motifs of austerity and suffering predominate.

The fourth chapter (pp. 213–269) uses analyses of correspondence, memory narratives and diaries to approach the thoughts of ordinary people and show how social status also played a role in the war. It also brings a new view, that of prisoners of war in prison camps in Slovakia. The author also looks at the position of women, who were identified with the so-called home front in the propaganda of the Great War. G. Dudeková Kováčová also devotes detailed attention to the activation of women, their inclusion in the work process outside the home, and their rising level of education. One of the factors pushing this was the phenomenon of “replacing” men, who joined the armed forces or did not return from the battlefield. She also describes the survival strategies of soldiers and civilians through the drawings of children and data from surveys of the time. Information about the massive influence on children and young people in the framework of promotion of patriotism, from toys with a military theme, through literature and film to the orientation of societies and courses stimulates thought. The author mentions types of survival strategy (p. 235 and following). She regards the social position of the individual or group as the determining factor, but the situational dynamic and boundaries of decision making were defined by the wartime regime in which the state had the decisive influence. In the conclusion (p. 269–283), the author formulates the dominant and specific characteristics, which define the First World War – the Great War as a unique and cataclysmic historic event.

If in the introduction, I perceived the aim that the author set herself, I will state here that she successfully achieved it with a wide range of themes and their minute analysis. Apart from the importance of this work for Slovak historiography, it can also be considered an excellent instructive text for teachers, journalists and artists. The quality of the publication would be considerably increased by illustrations, which would be entirely relevant in this case. If such sources as printed materials, posters, correspondence, photographs, drawings and other visual materials were subjects for analysis, their use would at least increase the attractiveness of this excellent publication for readers.⁹ Perhaps it would be worth considering dividing the extensive text according

9 An inspiration could be a work such as: ORTIZ, Izabel (ed.). *První světová válka*. (The First World War.). Praha: Nakladatelství Sun, 2010, p. 6 [Italian original *Storia Illustrata della Prima Guerra Mondiale*. Firenze-Milano: Giunti Editore S.p.a., 1999].

to chapters and adding high quality illustrative material to produce a multi-volume work, and perhaps adding a DVD with contemporary film and sound recordings.

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THREE PUBLICATIONS ON THE THEME OF ŠTEFÁNIK FROM THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORY OF THE SLOVAK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

KŠIŇAN, Michal. *L'HOMME QUI PARLAIT AVEC LES ÉTOILES. Milan Rastislav Štefánik, héros franco-slovaque de la Grande Guerre*. Paris: Eur'ORBEM Éditions, Collectuoin Histoire(s) – Europe centrale sous la direction d'Antoine Marès, 2019. ISBN 979-10-96982-08-0.

MACHO, Peter. *MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK AKO SYMBOL*. [*Milan Rastislav Štefánik as a Symbol*]. Bratislava: VEDA vydavateľstvo SAV; Historický ústav SAV, 2019. ISBN 978-80-224-1785-3.

MICHÁLEK, Slavomír. *MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK AND THOSE WHO FOLLOWED HIM*. Berlin: Peter Lang, Spectrum Slovakia Series Volume 23; Bratislava: VEDA, 2019. ISBN 978-3-631-80316-5; 978-80-224-1788-4.

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From May 2019 to July 2020, that is from the centenary of his tragic death to the 140th anniversary of his birth, was declared the “long” year of Milan Rastislav Štefánik in Slovakia. As one of the leading creators of the Czecho-Slovak state, Štefánik was one of the key personalities, who shaped the modern history of Slovakia and the Slovaks. Many books and articles, both academic and popular, documentary films and theatre plays, were produced in Slovakia on this occasion. They include several books published by the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Especially the books by Michal Kšiňan, Peter Macho and Slavomír Michálek have the ambition to also address the academic community, bringing new information about Štefánik or shifting interpretations of him.

Kšiňan's historical biography represents a conceptually reconsidered academic work, lacking in Slovakia up to now, although this may be surprising in relation to the importance of Štefánik in Slovak history. The Slovak public is impatiently awaiting a Slovak language version. Kšiňan's work is based on a multitude of archive sources, published sources and an extensive bibliography. No work on Štefánik published up to now has such a rich and firm factual research background. This basis has enabled the author to bring to Štefánik's biography various new facts, and to correct old often repeated stereotypes.

It is necessary to state that historical biography represents an extraordinarily demanding genre, clearly the most demanding for analysis and explanation. Knowledge