TATIANA PODOLINSKÁ, TOMÁŠ HRUSTIČ (Eds.):
Black and White Worlds. Roma in the Majority Society in Slovakia (Čierno-biele svety. Rómovia v majoritnej spoločnosti na Slovensku)
Bratislava, Institute of Ethnology SAS, VEDA, 2015, 597 p.

The collective monograph *Black and White Worlds* is a representative demonstration of the current state of knowledge regarding the situation of Roma in Slovakia from the point of view of social sciences. The almost 600 pages offer a total of 17 articles by 21 authors from Slovakia and abroad, from various scientific disciplines: sociology, social anthropology and Romani studies. Given its size, it can be compared to the book *Čačipen pal o Roma. Súhrnná správa o Rómoch na Slovensku* (*Čačipen pal o Roma. A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia,* Vašečka, 2002). There are, however, several differences which, in my opinion, demonstrate the shifts in the scientific discourse in a very concise manner. The reviewed book does not seek to create the impression of complexity or entirety; on the contrary, the intellectual background of the authors is diverse, as well as the methods of their research work and the depth of their focus on local phenomena. While Vašečka's publication refers (including with its title) to the notion of one scientific truth that it seeks to reveal, the *Black and White Worlds* avoids presenting such uniform truth explicitly and on purpose. This is not a disadvantage, though. The authors were left free to show what they have been working on recently. This, however, does not mean that the publication is just a collection of texts without any links to one another. On the contrary, the book is characterised by thorough editorial work aimed at attaining unity in diversity. This uniting factor had the form of seeking new frameworks enabling an exit from the dead end that marked the conceptualisation of Roma ethnicity in the first decade of the 21st century, known for the conflict concerning the perception of Roma ethnic identity (Šotola, 2018) and discussions on the causes and nature of social exclusion within the Czech environment. Nevertheless, unlike the publication from 2002, the book by editors T. Podolinská and T. Hrustič shows much greater embeddedness in the current social-science discourse, which is a delightful discovery. Both editors declare in the introductory part that their paramount purpose was to compile an up-to-date publication highlighting the plurality of the concepts and methodologies that can be used to explore the issue of "Roma" in society.

The texts are arranged in three chapters according to their respective areas of focus. With regards to this division, it should be noted that it is not always fully intuitive: the first chapter entitled *Black and White Policies* with the sub-title *Discourses, Attitudes and the Possibilities of Participation* is about discourses, both public and scientific ones. It is understandable that the boundaries between them are not sharp; however, it is not clear why the third chapter entitled *How We Talk about Ourselves (The linguistic and social images of Roma as tools to keep the world of the "black ones" and the world of the "white ones")* is presented separately, as several articles deal with the historical development of the discoursive approach to Roma otherness. It is a question then to what extent different arrangement of the book

chapters would influence the final impression from reading the book and whether it would provide a different perspective (e.g. with greater emphasis on chronology or the level of approaching the specific elements). On the other hand, it can be assumed that the large extent of the book will rather result in selective reading based on reader interest.

The first chapter contains four highly innovative articles, each with a different focus. The text by M. Hrabovský *Anti-Gypsyism as a Barrier to Roma Inclusion* opens (quite logically) the publication with a clear purpose: to show that open as well as latent, yet de facto socially tolerated anti-Gypsyism is a significant component of the "Roma issue". The principal thesis of this text is that as long as Roma are commonly viewed by society "as inferior biological species", any endeavours to "empower" Roma would fail (p. 43). Hrabovský is right in noting that anti-Gypsyism is produced on a racial (and not only ethnic) basis and that it is not only about biased attitudes, but primarily about social behaviour as the result of somatisation of a certain social situation. As a reader, I regret that this perspective (commonly designated as *embodiment* in anthropology), which I have lacked in recent research, is more evident only in this article and is not elaborated further in the book. E. Marushiakova and V. Popov bring a critical perspective, seeing the current scientific discourse about Roma in Central and Eastern Europe through the optics of orientalism. In addition, they offer a clear proposal as a solution to this desperate situation: they note that Roma should also be viewed through the paradigm of exoticisation (as a specific community) and, at the same time, through the paradigm of marginalisation (as a specific social group defined by social exclusion). The article *The moral foundations of the dispute over social justice in Slovakia* (A. Findor, Z. Maďarová and A. Ostertágová) describes the results of interesting research based on the moral foundations theory; this application documents the difference between the political and value-oriented focus of the "majority population" and auxiliary professions staff, which represents the point of departure for any political and human-rights approach to Roma emancipation within Slovakia's public space. The first chapter of the book ends with an article by T. Hrustič, offering a reflection of the different forms of Roma participation in post-1990 public policies, focusing specifically on the barriers to the establishment of political parties with an ethnic background and to the inclusion of Roma candidates in majority political structures. He also highlights the increased role of Roma representation in local politics.

The second chapter entitled *Where and How We Live,* with the subtitle *Socio-Economic Images of Two Different Worlds* explores the dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships in the different areas of society – from economics and infrastructure through healthcare up to spatial exclusion. The analyses are made at different levels – from micro-probes into partial locations through the generalisation of conclusions from a single location on the basis of long-term comparison up to studies based on results at the national level. By reading these studies, the reader gets a picture of the potential of the various approaches to understand the complexity of the role of ethnicity in contemporary Slovak society. Through the example of the town of Gelnica, E. Mazárová shows that spatial exclusion of Roma is not a neutral

mechanism, but that it is related to the perception of public space by the dominant part of the population which reacts with irritation to the presence of Roma in the representative parts of the town centre – both by its behaviour and by creating spatial barriers. On the other hand, the case study by J. Grill is from a rural environment, highlighting the so-far little commented example in literature of the dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships in connection with the local economic situation and social mobility of Roma on the basis of migration, having its roots in the socialist period in the form of strategies of trespassing the narrow limits of local environments. The economic and "cosmopolitan" Roma capital puts in doubt the hierarchy based on long-term power asymmetries and results in growing feelings of insecurity and threat among the "white ones". The extensive text by A. Belák offers a representative summary of his long-term research on public health policies and the specificities of the self-perception of Roma in segregated environments. He deconstructs the networks of actors who are responsible for public policies and the discourse contained in the documents, and notes that the failure to achieve the objective of improving the health condition of the Roma population relates to the hidden assimilationist background of the policies and to the negligible participation of people who are the target of such policies. Based on a complex analysis of their attitudes to their own health within his long-term field research, he notes that, for Roma, the concept of good life prevails over care for their own health. T. Hrustič reveals in his article an emic perspective of the usury phenomenon in Roma settlements and points out that this problematic element is perceived by the local actors as the only realistic solution to their situation characterised by absolute poverty; for moneylenders, on the other hand, it is one of the few lucrative possibilities of improving their social position. The text by D. Škobla and R. Filčák offers an analysis of the local power fields and the impacts of big asymmetries on the basic infrastructures in terms of availability of drinking water at Roma locations. The highest level of the macro-perspective is offered in the study by A. Mušinka and K. Matlovičová who comment on selected methodological aspects and results of the nationwide collection of ethnic data (Atlas).

The third book chapter deals with language and language images and can be divided into larger sections. The first one includes three papers by the representatives of the Czech Romani studies who analyse the dynamics of auto-ethnonyms in different contexts (J. Červenka), the form of language plurality in an Eastern-Slovakian community of Wallachian Roma (M. Hajská) and the specific form of autonomous Slovak language socialisation of children in a segregated settlement (P. Kubaník). The second part with texts by E. Krekovičová, Z. Panczová and A. B. Mann deals with stereotypes in the form of caricatures and jokes in publications or on the internet. All three articles suggest that, after 1989, the form of the originally rather comic figure of a Rom has changed to become the enemy of society. I personally took interest in the historical excursion, according to which the main public enemy of Slovak society before World War II was the figure of a Jew – not only in connection with the economic exploitation of Slovaks, but, for instance, with reference to the lower level of hygiene; topics related to (im)purity represent a universal form of degrading a group of people viewed in opposition to the collective "us". This chapter and the whole book close with a study by T. Podolinská on the discoursive emic reframing of the concept of Romahood within the pastoral discourse of Pentecostal churches. She notes that by emptying the original content the convert can get rid of the stigmatising group "Gypsy story".

Tatiana Podolinská concludes her programme introduction by emphasising that the aim of the book is to encourage further debates and by highlighting that we must explore more extensively "the emic, inner perspectives of *all* parties to the imaginary dialogue in their specific forms and under the local conditions" (p. 34). Despite the emphasis placed on "all parties to the dialogue" (in italics), this book has fulfilled this purpose only partially – the exploration of the "Roma perspective" remains dominant. The perspective of the non-Roma is analysed

rather at the level of the discourse, while non-Roma agency is conceptualised and explored to a much smaller extent. I consider this asymmetry highly representative – especially with respect to the authors' emphasis on the emic perspective. The book editor views the distinction between the emic and etic perspective as significant, since the "etic analytical level of research is often 'contaminated' with apparently neutral contents from the emic level of the majority group" (p. 35). Nevertheless, the criticism of the etic level of research remains halfway, since the solution is not to make the emic perspective superior as the more truthful one. The emic and etic perspectives are not in contradiction; they cannot work without each other in the social science practice, because one needs the other one. Despite the authors' thorough efforts to use different concepts, I consider the one-sided preference of the inner approach as an opportunity for further development of the research and discussion on ethnicity.

I will try to elaborate on this objection and explain it. I understand the researchers' effort to comprehend the "Roma (micro) world", commonly denounced by the "majority", and to bring relevant information about it. Nevertheless, the unintended consequence of this effort can be the reproduction or the deepening of the notions on the different world/values/culture of the Roma living within the "majority society". In order to understand the different life experience and trajectories of Roma at different locations, it is not enough to provide an emic, i.e. agency perspective; it is necessary to analyse and interpret it within the wider social context with major power and economic aspects that cannot be neglected with respect to any, even seemingly unrelated issues (e.g. religion). As anthropologist Allaine Cerwonka wrote in her critical essay about the research on identity and experience, many researchers aim at "giving voice to members of the community" (Cerwonka, 2011: 61). However, within the poststructuralist identity theory, the objects are not clearly distinguished from the power structures that produce them. Hence, this studied experience of the actors cannot be a sort of final standpoint that we present as a finding, but we must ask further what factors constitute such experience and what factors create the positionality of the actors. According to Cerwonka, experience is not "a window into social reality", but only one part of the complex social location. Therefore, research should not aim only at providing testimony of the valuable inner world of marginalised actors, but – on the contrary – at showing how social mechanisms lead to their oppression and in what manners.

In his detailed study, Andrej Belák provides an overview of the comprehensive system of attitudes of the stratified Roma community to their physical health and explains why its local conceptualisation is contrary to the dominant representations. He refers to the emic concepts of *gizdy* (pride) and notions of good Roma life. The local Roma community is presented as a group of people which, to a certain degree consciously and of its own will, cannot or is not willing to satisfy the demands of the surrounding society. I am afraid, though, that the actor's perspective is absolutised in this case. I do not mean that the results are contrary to the field experience of the researcher – author of the study: on the contrary, I trust these results and consider them personally enriching, since I usually do not encounter similar conceptualisations within my research in Roma locations in the Spiš region. The problem, however, is that the assumption of the actor's perspective without thorough analysis of the context – i.e. the factors that shape the positionality of the actors – can lead to a risky movement on the edge of potential misuse by uninformed readers (this refers specifically to the description of the aspects of good Roma life). If we conducted research among homeless people, I can imagine what kind of answers we would receive to questions about their subjective perception of the quality of life, including formulations seeing life on the streets as a demonstration of freedom and independence. Nevertheless, to understand the homelessness phenomenon, we cannot stick to the actors' representations, but we must also understand the mechanisms leading to the ostracism of thousands of persons.

The emphasis on understanding the nature of Romahood in A. Belák's text sharply

contrasts with certain trivialisation of the discriminatory practices faced by Roma in the field of healthcare – just like in many other aspects of life. I trust his note according to which his contacts rather diminished the very fact of racism and attributed the extreme expressions to isolated individuals – but is this not a sign of adaptation to the long-term existence of double standards on the basis of which Roma are judged as second-class persons? I recently visited the medical emergency service with my Roma contact and her child and, while waiting, she shared with me her experience saying that Roma children are examined by doctors much faster and that non-Roma patients receive much more attention. Yes, it is also an emic perspective, but such experiences and accounts make me personally focus my research not on those who are marginalised, but on the mechanisms and pressures that have long shaped their habitus in the way that facilitates adaptation under the living conditions in which a common member of the "majority" can hardly imagine to live. Therefore, the problem is not the "willingness or unwillingness of Roma to be or not to be integrated" (p. 35), but rather the multi-layered forms of segregation, oppression and exploitation they face from non-Roma or other Roma who obtained a more favourable position in the otherwise largely asymmetric ethnic hierarchy.

To conclude, I would like to present my opinion on the graphical design of the book. It is very well done, attractive, exceeding with its high quality the common standard of scientific publications. The editors' choice of the artist proved to be excellent. However, I must share certain ambivalence in my feelings in connection with the above discussion: even though the editors justify the choice of two graphical antipodes of black and white as intentional provocation, they do not elaborate on this choice and leave it to the reader to figure it out while studying the book content. This raises the following questions: are the "two internally similarly constructed concepts of two different worlds" conceptualisations that commonly exist in society, or are they scientific conceptualisations? It is important with regard to the message of the book – if the black and white division is too schematic and the scientist is to disrupt and problematise it, why is it then necessary to strengthen it with the chosen design of the book? I understand the emphasis placed on the need to have thorough knowledge of the specificities of the Roma environment which can evoke the image of a certain *sui generis* world, but we should not forget that such specificity is the product of an asymmetric relationship, and we should therefore look more extensively and with greater detail at those relationships and threads which interconnect and create these two "worlds". We should constantly question the common notion of Roma isolation – and with reference to the book sub-title we can say that Roma do not live in the "majority society", since it gives the impression that the majority creates its own society: however, all people living in Slovakia create one society, though its members differ largely in the possibilities of shaping it. And it is this social context of the limited Roma possibilities that should become the main topic of future research. It should be stated as a conclusion that the reviewed book represents within the Slovak context a significant step forward in this direction. This shift is especially obvious when we return to the comparison to Vašečka's collective monograph of 2002 which placed great emphasis on the historical roots of Roma and on Roma identity and culture, i.e. optics focusing exclusively on one part of the ethnic relationship. On the other hand, the reviewed book tells us, at the declaratory level and through the studies contained in it, about both sides of this relationship, in the absence of which we would be unable to analyse any data from field research and quantitative surveys. I therefore think that we will return to the texts of this book in the forthcoming period, as this collective work is mandatory reading for anyone willing to seriously study ethnicity in the Slovak context.

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SOŇA G. LUTHEROVÁ, MIROSLAVA HLINČÍKOVÁ (Eds.): Beyond the Limits of Science? Applied Anthropology in Society (Za hranicami vedy? Aplikovaná antropológia v spoločnosti)
Bratislava: Veda, 2016, 167 p.

The book *Beyond the Limits of Science? Applied Anthropology in Society* published in 2016 stands out among the anthropological literature on our market for the past several years, not only because of its content, but also because of its innovative aesthetic form. The central focus of most chapters is the principal question of the usefulness of anthropology as a scientific discipline for society – what makes our science useful? What is the impact of social anthropology and ethnology on social events?

In their common introduction to the book, the editors Soňa G. Lutherová and Miroslava Hlinčíková present their opinions on the limits of scientific works and their purpose. They point out the application aspect of anthropology and the ability to apply the obtained knowledge in "addressing burning social problems" (p. 11). They thereby define applied anthropology as an independent sub-discipline of social and cultural anthropology, the aim of which is practice-oriented research with results applicable in various practical areas. It is also a specific "set of theoretical, methodological and methodical approaches" (pp. 12–13). All the book chapters focus on the different manners of applying the findings in practice through usefulness, participation or major engagement of experts in the public, social or institutional world.

In Chapter 1, Miroslava Hlinčíková elaborates the central topic of the book, i.e. applied anthropology and the ability to achieve social changes. She also reflects on the important topics and issues arising from research in connection with her position and relationship to partners in research. The author brings up many questions which, in the context of contemporary research, raise plenty of ethical dilemmas on a daily basis and which I consider fundamental: the questions of our position, unequal relationships between researchers and partners in research, the limits of academic work or the ability to contribute to social changes (p. 20). Along with the need to reflect on the unequal relationships in research, one question occurred to me while reading the book. As Marlene de Laine argues: "In contemporary fieldwork [...] the gap between researcher and subject has to be closed" (2000: 2), wouldn't it be more appropriate to replace the term *informer* (which appears in the introductory and in the final book chapter) with another term that would better correspond to the participative and non-hierarchic approach claimed by this chapter and by the entire book? I would also like to mention the duplicated text on pages 27 and 34 in connection with repeated citations of A. Appadurai. The author's reflections suggest that major engagement in social topics brings to anthropology an increased need for the art of "taking a position on different human issues" (p. 25) and that an imaginative equal sign can in fact be put between moral and anthropological responsibility, especially in connection with the need to react to "xenophobia, religious discrimination and all forms of cultural racism" and fundamentalism (p. 25).

In Chapter 2, Alexandra Bitušíková focused on applied anthropology and public space and on the question of how the application of anthropological methods can be beneficial to all those "who decide on the public space" (p. 42). Besides defining the public space from the anthropological perspective, the text deals with the possibilities

of "the application of anthropological methods used in the research and planning" of the public space (p. 43). Regarding the benefits and new possibilities for the use of applied anthropology, the author makes the readers familiar with REAPs (rapid ethnographic assessment procedures), i.e. intensive methods that were developed not only for deepening knowledge, but also for "strengthening the local community by involving its members in the research team" (p. 55). What I also consider important is self-criticism, i.e. the pointing out of the insufficient preparation of the students of ethnology in Slovakia regarding the art of applying the obtained theoretical knowledge in practical life and the capability of interdisciplinary cooperation (p. 66).

In the next chapter, Kamila Koza Beňová presents the essence of the feminist perspective applied in research and deals with her own complicated position as a researcher who is also a feminist and an activist. The text highlights again the question of usefulness of anthropological exploration (mainly in connection with its availability outside the enclosed academic world), which is, moreover, related to engagement and the voice of our heart. According to the author, ethnography is becoming feminist depending on who is conducting it, i.e. whether it is "in the hands of feminists" (p. 89). I assume that it is not exclusively women feminists, but everyone who claims feminist values and who explicitly and consciously applies the feminist perspective in ethnographic research, e.g. people outside the gender binary system (see Monro, 2005) or other excluded "minorities". In the final part, the author offers her own reflective story: I would like to highlight the author's critical reflection of the current situation in the civil sector in Slovakia, i.e. the functioning of the market principle and the creation of a competitive environment or personal networks, which is, in its essence, contrary to the original values of the political resistance movement. I also consider important her pointing out of the prevailing NGO-isation tendencies and the processes of "institutionalisation, professionalisation, depolitisation and demobilisation of the movements fighting for social" change, when organisations answer more to "their donors than to the people among whom they work" (p. 99).

In the penultimate chapter, the authors Helena Tužinská and Ľubica Voľanská deal with intercultural communication in Slovakia and with the reflections of the problems related to education in this field. Highly valuable is the fact that the authors use knowledge from their own practical work, i.e. from lecturing facilitation of seminars on intercultural communication and competences for employees of multinational corporations, state authorities and the academic sector. Their experience suggests that in spite of the participants' efforts to be open towards other cultures it is difficult to resist the prevailing stereotyping that relates to the "human need to simplify and organise social information" for the purposes of their easier comprehension and control (p. 124). The participants' expectations then often relate to the desire to obtain clear and permanent models and manuals of how (not) to deal with other cultures. The importance of applied anthropology in connection with the presentation of knowledge lies in the uneasy art of the experts to problematise these expectations, ideally through self-experience, and to shift the attention from labelling others "to the manners we classify ourselves" (p. 126).

In the last Chapter 5, Soňa G. Lutherová focuses on applied anthropology between science and art. The author deals with many important and in the current Slovak science relatively marginal issues related to a creative approach to research, such as the application of innovative methods of research; experimental genres and the formats of writing that reach beyond traditional analytical conventions; but also, for example, manipulation in relation to textual representation. This chapter deals broadly with ethnographic film and audio-visual techniques which are, in spite of their undoubted importance in anthropological tradition, used only marginally by contemporary experts in humanities. I would like to highlight the author's call (omnipresent between the lines) for spreading our research experience among the wider public not only through text but mainly as an experience for which the use of creative and innovative methods can be a suitable instrument of achieving or contributing to a social change. Apart from the known anthropological "interest in visual materials as objects" and the related "observation of interaction" between people and these objects (Rose, 2007: 2017), the author's findings also suggest that in spite of its temporary marginal nature, a certain form of playfulness, creativity and inventiveness in research (and related conscious crossing of the boundaries of the academic environment) has an important social benefit and importance.

The editors Soňa G. Lutherová and Miroslava Hlinčíková and the authors managed to cover quite a wide topic in almost 170 pages, which they personally consider very important and still little represented in the Slovak literature in the field of humanities – the topic of applied anthropology and applied research in general. In conformity with the reviewers of the book, I am of the view that it is an important contribution to the still little developed discussion, the importance of which is growing with respect to the dynamic development of (not only) European society. The book is an inspiring introduction to applied anthropology and presents to readers the important Slovak context in the different areas of research and its benefits to society.

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ZUZANA PANCZOVÁ: Conspiracy Theories: Topics, Historical Contexts and Argumentation Strategies (Konšpiračné teórie: témy, historické kontexty a argumentačné stratégie)

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Conspiratorial interpretations of social reality have become part of reality. They are present in the public discourse as its integral part, and affect the consciousness and behaviour of a large number of people. As shown by public opinion polls, conspiracy theories are popular not only within certain strictly defined segments of society (e.g. among people with specific socio-demographical characteristics – education, age, profession, type of the place of residence, etc.), but are believed in by a large part of society, sometimes even by the majority. One such example is the United States where more than a half of the population still believes in a conspiratorial background of the murder of President John Kennedy in 1963 (Swift, 2013). According to recent research by the Institute for Public Affairs (Bútorová, Gyárfášová, 2017) and GLOBSEC Policy Institute (Milo, Klingová, Hajdu, 2018) in Slovakia, almost an equal share of the country's population is inclined to believe in various

conspiracy theories (one half up to around two-thirds).

The dissemination of conspiracy ideas in the era of advanced information and communication technologies has become a kind of epidemic. It is not only a good profit-making business for a wide range of obscure actors (authors, advertisers, sponsors), but also a tool in the hands of players with clear political and power objectives (in particular, rogue regimes and states, as well as radical or extremist movements). The impacts of toxic contents with a social message, which have recently been intentionally disseminated by conspiratorial and disinformation "media", on the behaviour of numerous masses of people in crucial situations is undeniable. Their impact on the fundaments of the social and political establishment of modern democracy can be devastating. The gradually published empirical studies which seek links between the results of important societal decisions in selected democratic countries and the ways of shaping the opinion environment of people who make such decisions (e.g. through participation in voting) lead to concerns about the growing power of conspiracy delusions, including considerations that without the conspiratorial awareness caused by activities on social networks the current US President would hardly be called Donald Trump. Or, that without the conspiracy-tuned campaign with slogans about the hegemony of the "Euro-bureaucracy", the United Kingdom and the European Union would hardly struggle with the Brexit deadlock today. Or, that in such case, the Dutch Parliament would have apparently ratified the EU's association agreement with Ukraine smoothly, without dealing with the results of the very strange referendum on this question, initiated by people who had suddenly appeared on the Dutch political and media scene like the genie let out of the bottle, while carefully hiding their full visual identity.

In mass society, conspiracy theories are a mass phenomenon – socially and politically relevant. This phenomenon should be explored systematically. Specifically explored should be the factors of its survival and reproduction, preferably within topical con-

texts. The biggest benefit of the noteworthy book *Conspiracy Theories: Topics, Historical Contexts and Argumentation Strategies* by ethnologist Zuzana Panczová lies precisely in the exploration of conspiracy theories as a mass phenomenon in socially relevant contexts.

The author has long dealt with conspiracy theories in a systematic manner. Three years ago, she edited the high-quality monothematic issue of *Slovenský národopis/Slovak Ethnology* (number 3/2015, volume 63), dedicated to conspiracy theories, which was such an accomplishment that the entire domestic community specialised in historiography, sociology and political sciences could envy Slovak ethnologists. She later prepared and moderated a panel on rumours and conspiracy theories as part of the international conference "Ethnology in the Third Millennium: Topics, Methods, Challenges" (Smolenice, autumn 2016). Thirdly, she came with a unique publication in which she presents to readers issues related to conspiracy theories, the basic lines of the research of such theories, and the effects of conspiracy ideas as parts of the public, political and even scientific discourse.

As a professional ethnologist, Zuzana

Panczová offers in her book a description and interpretation of conspiracy contents that targets "end consumers" (recipients), some of whom are then involved in the development of the conspiratorial discourse either through dissemination of such content or by commenting and modified recycling. Thanks to targeted mapping, we get to topics which run rampant (any other expression would probably not be appropriate enough) in the Slovak media (not only "alternative") sphere – Jews, America, the West, capitalists, freemasons, foreigners, migrants, etc.

As Ted Goertzel noted, conspiracy thinking at the individual level is saturated with the individual's need to logically explain certain events under the conditions of uncertainty and the lack of control (Goertzel, 1994). The feeling of uncertainty and insufficient control can be multiplied in individuals in the late modernity period, when risk is becoming the dominant model of social and institutional behaviour in society (Matten, 2004) and when even society as such is becoming "risky" (Beck, 2009). Well-established patterns and structures, which just recently evoked feelings of certainty and stability, are disappearing and are replaced with new, not very comprehensible challenges and changes which disrupt the existing order and the adaptation to which requires intensive individual investments.

Post-Communist transformation is an illustrative example of such development. Society is fundamentally changing. People's ability to cope with the upcoming changes, handle the new life situation and apply their own skills affects their readiness to perceive and accept changes and, subsequently, the entire system that is derived from them. For many people, especially those for whom individual investments needed to cope with the upcoming changes and challenges are not necessarily taken for granted, such disrupting development cannot be random: there must be someone in the background who provoked, inspired, prepared and implemented it intentionally, someone powerful who is ready for everything and resistant against any disagreement – and especially, someone who is able to use it all to their own benefit and to the detriment of others.

Zuzana Panczová presents and analyses in her book authentic expressions of a similar interpretation of specific events in our country, in Europe and in the world which have in recent years emerged in the Slovak cyber space in huge numbers. It is no surprise that extreme political views are successful in this opinion environment, which is dealt with by the author in a separate chapter. Conspiracy ideas represent an integral part of the ideological credo of anti-system extremist political forces (as opposed to democratic and pro-system ones). The current Slovak radical scene is literally obsessed with conspiracies and it programmatically targets their instrumentalisation: it is much easier to convince supporters about simple and fast solutions (when, moreover, truth is within reach, it's enough to identify the culprit hidden in the background, behind the scene, in the backstage) than explain them the need for complex decisions with long duration and uncertain results.

At the end of her book, Zuzana Panczová concludes that "the research on conspiracy theories provides the possibility to better understand the signs of mistrust in the existing system and anxieties related to the negative image of contemporary society". I think that, as a researcher, she has successfully coped with her task. Her book will become a source of reference about conspiracy theories and about their research in Slovakia, and will surely be included in the list of mandatory literature for all those dealing with this issue in this country. It would also be desirable if these useful results of the author's research activities were utilised by those whose task should be to neutralise the destructive impacts of conspiracy delusions on the development of the democratic state and free society, i.e. journalists, teachers, civil activists, and democratic politicians, especially the ones in higher positions.

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