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**From the past to the present:  
Shaping Identities of the Young  
ROMILA THAPAR:**

**The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History**  
*Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014,*  
344 p.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a teenager shot at protestors in New Delhi, injuring a student. He looked visibly angry and later on it was discovered that he heavily used Facebook to do activities related to hard-line *Hindutva*<sup>1</sup> politics. He is not alone, many young men and women in India are grappling with social anxieties such as joblessness, family pressures and adhering to the dominant narrative.

Historian Romila Thapar while articulating a similar state of young people writes, *Combining social insecurity and aggression fuels the politics of religious identities and religious fundamentalism. This is viewed as an acceptable solution. The claim to hurt religious sentiments becomes a manifestation of this.* (p. 311). At this time and in this very context, it is important to read her work *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History* from the lens of youth identities. This review of the book is one of the attempts to do so.

This book is a compilation of the author's essays that are pre-published in different versions spanning the years 1976–2014. The versions published in this book are revised and updated. These essays have been divided in to four major chapters. Each chapter deals with a particular question that may be located in history

but is an important factor in shaping identities of today.

The author narrates her experience of writing history textbooks for class VI and VII in the 1960s. This essay is relevant for the young people as they are at the receiving end of the historical discourse propagated through text books, different types of media platforms, family and religious sources, etc. The author makes a compelling argument about how the textbooks and syllabus making bodies in India are not independent. 'Textbooks change each time the government changes' (p. 88). This constant change creates confusion in the minds of young students. Also, it raises questions such as: can a nation have several versions of History? Does history lead to the discovery of truth? And can the past be changed to suit the popular narratives of today?

While trying to articulate the explanations, the author cites the examples of the demolition of Babari Masjid (1992) in India or the destruction of Buddha statues at Bamiyan in Afghanistan (2001) as an attempt to 'annul' the past by 'destroying surviving heritage of the earlier times' (p. 61). She calls it a 'crass effort' to 'redefine people, their culture and their history' (p. 61). This analysis logically leads to the core concept of nationalism perceived and implemented in the past and being propagated today. Her text echoes the concern that 'the religion based- one culture-one nation' discourse would not only lead citizens to reject the pluralistic past but also lead to closing of minds of the young generation.

The author highlights that the idea of one Hindu religion is a colonial idea, which had an influence of Semitic religions. This attempt to

1 Ideology of Hindu nationalists stressing Hindu as the one common culture of India.

organize Hinduism has now taken the identity of *Hindutva* in the present times (Chapter II).

This idea of *Hindutva* and the attempt at homogenization of the religion has been explained in great depth by social historian and Professor Badri Narayan in his book titled *Republic of Hindutva: How the Sangh is Reshaping Indian democracy*. Published in 2021, this book has tried to understand the 'Hindutva Project' of bringing marginalized communities in the fold and creating a Hindu identity that is beyond the caste identity.<sup>2</sup> *Hindutva groups require a broad-based Hindu support to succeed electorally. This means the subsuming of caste identity into a larger religious framework and the promotion of a Hindu community with shared interests that rises above caste considerations.* (Ch. 2). This project, according to the author, is not only reshaping the Indian democracy but also contesting the caste identities, especially that of the marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

While theoretically, and even at the grass root level, this project may sound like leaning towards multicultural nationalism, in India after 2014, when the *Hindutva* leaning party came to power, a lot of *Hindutva* fringe elements initiated caste and religiously fuelled lynchings,<sup>3</sup> beatings and atrocities. At the centre of these incidents are young people, the prominent participants of such incidents, who are not able to find employment or opportunities to succeed and hence becoming vulnerable and deeply influenced by the dominant narrative. This also confuses the young, with the question of what exactly is one Hindu religion or culture? Most of them are raised to follow their caste based culture. This confusion and vulnerability makes inroads into the possibilities of considering brahmanical culture<sup>4</sup> as the culture to be followed by everyone.

The larger argument being made here is that the religion is being fronted as the counterpoint to secularism. The idea of secularism perceived today is about 'banishing' every religion. Whereas, the author makes an argument that if India's ancient history is looked at carefully, there is no evidence of 'one' Hindu religion. There were several sects that were followed without having a one single identity. The censuses done by the British in the colonial period grouped all the sects under Hindu and different Islamic traditions under Muslims. This is where the segregation of two groups began and gave rise to what we understand as today's communal politics. Culture and identities are not neutral or apolitical. They are often the contested field of social networks and expressions. Desiring a singular identity of one religion and terming it as national identity would rather lead to extremism than to unity. Emphasising the plural nature of indigenous religions, the author states that 'often enough we are imposing present identities on to the past' (p. 109).

Another confrontation emphasised in Thapar's book is that between faith and knowledge. This confrontation leads to debates around the origins of Aryans, were they indigenous or did they migrate to India? The second is if the mythologies, especially the epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* could be called India's history? Can history be constructed based only on the 'one' narrative or faith? (Chapter III).

The author illustrates this confrontation with an example of *Ram Setu*,<sup>5</sup> which is a 48 km chain of limestone shoals between India and Sri Lanka. In 2005 the Indian government proposed the construction of a shipping canal in the same area; many Hindus in India opposed it because they believe it to be cultural heritage. The author argues here that opposing a project based only on faith is not enough. There are

2 Caste is a social hierarchical class. Here it is mentioned in the context of Hinduism, in which caste is assigned at birth.

3 Cow lynchings are incidents where people from the upper caste communities have used physical force and abuse against Muslims and Dalits who are accused of illegally slaughtering cows or related activities.

4 A culture based on set of practices followed by the upper caste (known as Brahmins) in order to continue their hegemony.

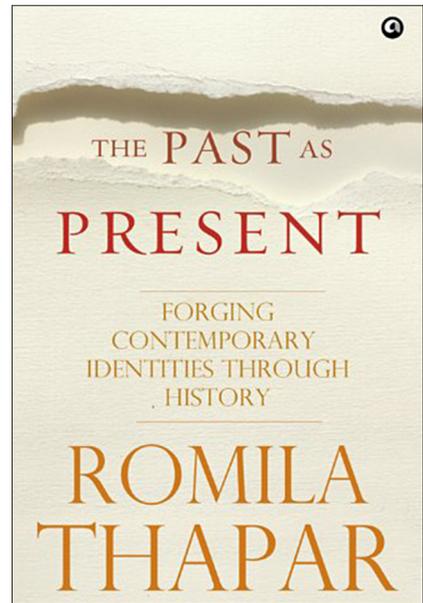
5 According to one of the mythological versions of *Ramayana*, a bridge was built by the army of *Vanaras* (monkeys) for Rama to cross over to *Lanka* to fight with *Ravana* (king of Lanka who kidnaps Sita in the story) and rescue his wife Sita. This structure has been believed to be that bridge by many Hindus in India.

other crucial questions about the ecology, livelihoods of local people and the damage that it might do for the future generations. 'These crucial questions require neither faith nor archaeology' (p. 240). The same argument could be used to make sense of the discourse of considering mythologies as histories; it is more of a belief than knowledge. Faith should not be formulated to beat down knowledge or it should not be considered as fragile to get hurt easily.

It cannot be ignored that for the young Indians the line between the faith and knowledge might be very thin, as the discourse is popularised, they may be willing to cross the line, if not compelled to. As the author states, it all comes down to the 'contemporary culture eliciting legitimacy from the idioms of the past' (p. 203).

While talking about identities of the past and present, the author brings about the role of women in the Indian past. The author discusses women of the Indian past in the context of the traditions like *Sati*<sup>6</sup> and the concept of violence. The chapter titled 'Women-Then & Now' illuminates different understandings of gender roles and their intersections with religion and caste.

The chapter talks about the subordination of women, right from the ancient Indian society to the contemporary times. While citing the contemporary era, the author highlights that as a society we have let Rape become a culture in India and a mind-set wherein women, if they become liberal will be raped. This is one of the crucial causes of their subordination. She cites examples like *Dasis*<sup>7</sup> from the *Vedic*<sup>8</sup> period, *Sita* (wife of the king *Rama*) from the epic *Ramayana*, wherein the former has no social status while the latter's problems begin when she crosses the line drawn by a man (known as *Lakshman-Rekha*). She also cites how rape has been used as a weapon against women from minority communities. Unless and until this mind-set changes, there cannot be a visible change in the state of women. The only hope,



as the author states lies in the hands of young women and men who came out and protested against the violence. The author ends on the note of hoping that the young would continue to resist.

Talking about the mind-sets of the young, a book titled *Youth in India: Aspirations, Attitudes and Anxieties* edited by academic scholar Sanjay Kumar, explores the attitudes, anxieties and aspirations of India's burgeoning young population in a globalised world. Drawing upon time-series survey data of the Indian youth aged between 15 and 34 years across 19 Indian states. One of the explorations is in the area of social attitudes wherein gender inequality and the question of women has been emphasized. The findings were complex such as *on one hand one observes a modest liberal attitude amongst youth towards women acquiring higher education, attaining leadership roles and having the freedom to wear what they want; on the other hand, one also observes that men display strong resistance towards women acquiring an equal position vis-*

6 The tradition of a wife immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. It was considered as the act of real devotion by women from certain upper castes and royal families. It was not widely practiced among Hindus.

7 Serving maids in the homes of upper castes, royal families.

8 A period when the *Vedas* – ancient texts were composed.

*à-vis men within the household* (Banerjee, 2019: 60). The study also found that one out of three women (who were interviewed) also agreed with the idea of being a devoted wife. This book further illuminates that Indian youth cannot be categorised in binaries of conservative or liberal. Their social, political and religious attitudes are complex, multi-layered and need to be given a more nuanced understanding than a straightforward solution.

Certain questions such as are the past traditions shaping today's identities? What do the young perceive when history textbooks are constantly part of the media debates about their credibility and legitimacy? What does their participation in the protests for women's rights mean? Also, how can they assume a religion to be open, non-violent and homogenous when it has a history of untouchability and caste based discriminations? These confusions and anxieties among the young people may cloud their judgment of themselves, of society and the nation.

The reading of this kind might help provide context to such anxieties and may guide them to not opt for the simple solutions fuelled by bounded identities. Reading it, especially for the youth, would definitely help make meaning of where they have come from and where they stand today. Each essay by Thapar has the depth of taking every reader on a journey that begins from the past and ends on the hope for future.

As the author states – 'we cannot change the past but if we intelligently understand the past then the present and the future can be better directed' (p. 61).

#### Acknowledgement

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#### OKSANA KOVZELE:

**Svētku kultūras transformācijas pierobeža: Latgales un Pleskavas apgabala piemērs**

**[Transformations of Festive Culture in the Borderland: The Case of the Latgale and Pskov Regions]**

*Daugavpils: Daugavpils Universitāte, 2020, 271 pp.*

The monograph by Oksana Kovzele *Transformations of Festive Culture in the Borderland: The Case of the Latgale and Pskov Regions* published in Latvia presents the results of three years of research carried out in the borderland of Latvia and Russia, i.e. in the eastern part of Latvia – in the multi-ethnic cultural environment of Latgale and western part of Russia – in the mono-ethnic Pskov region. This monograph helps explore today's cultural processes in which festivals play a major role, firstly, as a structure regulating worldview and social participation (Picard, 2016) and, secondly, as a way of accumulation and transfer of social experience (Bennett, Taylor, Woodward, 2014).

The monograph analyses the festive culture on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data obtained during the field work carried out in the borderland of Latvia and Russia. Although people representing different age groups were surveyed (n 810) and interviewed (n 96), the isolation of data on young people aged 16–25 (n 134) has allowed the author to draw conclusions on their attitude towards various festivals, participation in the festive culture and other issues.

The book begins with a chapter on the different ways people perceive festivals, with an insight into the supply and availability of festive events, as well as with the analysis of factors determining participation. This chapter includes analysis of the festivals prevailing in the Latgale and Pskov regions. In Latgale, Christmas, Mother's Day, International Women's Day, town/city festivals and the Assumption of Mary on the 15<sup>th</sup> August were mentioned by interviewees as the most important festivals, whereas the most significant festivals cited by the interviewees in the Pskov region were birthdays, the Victory Day of World War II on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, International Women's Day, town/city festivals and the New Year. The major difference between the two regions highlighted by the author is that religious festivals (Christmas and the Assumption of Mary on the 15<sup>th</sup> August) are ranked among the key ones in Latgale, while this is not typical of Pskov, which still bears the imprint of Soviet atheistic education. Religious education in Russia was replaced by 'scientific' atheism for more than 70 years. Therefore, religious continuity in families has disappeared in the Pskov region due to the pressure exerted by communist ideology. Although the author claims that Latgalian families have preserved religious continuity, she points out that today Latgalian youth is unable to provide a clear definition of the meaning of Christmas, it does not distinguish between Orthodox and Catholic Christmas traditions and willingly celebrates festivals of both denominations. From the one side, this suggests that Latgale was not bereft of 'scientific' atheism either, from another side it should be pointed out that secularism played a more important role in the formation of young people.

Therefore, the author highlights the contradictions between the assurance of interviewees that traditions of religious festivals remain unchanged and the festive transformations observed during the field work. The researcher has measured the intensity of practising particular celebration traditions by people of different ages. She has identified the traditions that are starting to fade or those that are taking deeper roots, e.g. 39.4% of Latgalian interviewees observe Lent before Easter on an annual basis, and



only 10.53% of them are young people. In contrast, the picture is inversely proportional in the Pskov region: only 14% of the interviewees, of which young people account for 32%, observe fasting. The data from Kovzele's research are consistent with the conclusions drawn by other researchers concerning religious awakening of youth in Russia (Pronina, 2014).

Young people on both sides of the borderline get exposed to traditional culture. However, promotion of festivals related to traditional culture is stronger and more targeted in the Latgale than in the Pskov region where traditions and customs have been kept alive mainly in the countryside. Folklore groups led by both enthusiasts and professionals are active in both territories, but the groups in the Pskov region face a lack of financing for their activities. In contrast, funds for the preservation of traditional culture in Latgale are provided by state programmes and grants.

The publication focuses on both the issue of practising festive traditions and the entry of new festivals in the Latvian-Russian borderland, and this issue is addressed in two central chapters of the book. A detailed analysis of festivals as a mediator of social changes (Picard, 2016; Kreinath, Hartung, Deschner, 2004) and a way of integrating changes in public life (Der-

rett, 2003) allows the author to conclude that several transformations affecting various levels of festive culture are ongoing or have already taken place due to the impact of today's globalisation and lifestyle of consumption society. Firstly, festivals are gradually losing their initial exclusivity, i.e. their elements make a mass entry into people's daily lives. The term *hyper-festivity* (Muray, 1999) is used in the academic literature to represent this phenomenon – the process when festive symbols transcend the boundaries of the festive ritualised space. This enhances social changes: the number of festivals and other mass events is increasing (masquerades, carnivals, film festivals, presentations, shows, etc.); an active use of festive symbols is made in advertising and marketing campaigns, leading to a feeling of a “plethora of festivals”. It should be noted that 69.57% of the interviewed young people consider possibilities of engaging in mass festive activities particularly attractive. Secondly, the hyper-festive reality makes it necessary to change the initial content of festivals: preference is given to events for entertainment purposes (by 100% and 80% of the interviewed youth in the Latgale and Pskov region respectively), to an original performance associated with a particular festivity and often representing a synthesis of different festivals and genres. This enhances simplification of the foundations of festive culture and facilitates desecularisation in certain cases. The author of the monograph concludes that festivals based on ethnic culture (calendar traditions, customs, etc.) are gradually becoming obsolete in the hyper-festive era, particularly in the urban environment and among young people. It is only the young people – members of cultural associations and ethnographic groups that are interested in the above festivals.

The author indicates that it is typical of young people in the Pskov region to focus on historically marked festivals celebrated in the spirit of patriotism, since they get involved in such events in a targeted way at educational institutions and are exposed to strong pressure from the older generation in families. Engagement of Latgalian youth in patriotic events is much lower, but it prefers commercial events: these young people are regular visitors of fairs

and active consumers of different articles related to festivals. The data analysis presented in the book reveals peculiarities of the dynamics of commercialisation of festivals in the Latvian-Russian borderline: 52.7% and 25.3% of the interviewees in the Latgale and Pskov regions respectively participate in festivals for the purpose of visiting festive markets. According to the author, Latvians have already become accustomed to being part of the consumer society, therefore, they willingly pay for entertainment and recreation. This has led to the emergence of a certain section of the population that attends festive events for the sole purpose of visiting fairs, taking children to fairground amusements, etc. and that ignores the meaning of the specific festival. In contrast, the number of interviewees who want to participate actively in festive markets and earn money during festivals is almost the same in both locations (14% in Latgale and 14.7% in Pskov region). The study by Kovzele demonstrates that the nature of consumption society is more pronounced in the borderline of Latvia than in that of Russia, and this could be one of the factors influencing the low participation rate of Latgalian youth in business compared to other regions of Latvia.

Defining festivals as a multifunctional phenomenon, the author has analysed their diverse functions: socialisation, preservation of cultural heritage, focus on values, education, entertainment, etc. Although the opinion prevailing in Latgale is “the more festivals, the better”, the author has noticed a significant peculiarity in the region's multi-ethnic cultural environment: Halloween is not very popular among Latvian young people here. They try to stick to cultural heritage more than other ethnic groups and take an active part in discussions about preserving their ethnic identity. Thus, celebrating or not celebrating festivals is related to the maintenance of ethnic identity. Meanwhile, in the Pskov region, those interested in festivals adopted from other cultures are mainly students. Young people in the Pskov region, by accepting “American festivals”, take a stand against the view prevailing in Russia that Halloween is a “satanic” festival, and celebration of Halloween in the Russian borderland thus takes the form of a social protest.

The author comes up with an intriguing conclusion, i.e. the adoption of other peoples' cultural realities, in this case festivals, contributes to cultural unification: the cultural boundaries of ethnic and national festivals become blurred in the context of a globalising world and multicultural society. Younger interviewees recognise only the names of traditional festivals, but they fail to explain their meaning due to the lack of experience of participation. This leads to a certain backlash from society: on the one hand, people try to withdraw into themselves and experience festivals individually, while on the other hand, general interest in ethnic and national culture is growing.

Since the monograph has been published in Latvian, its circulation in a wider academic environment is limited. The monograph will be translated into Russian in the near future, but I would like to encourage all those interested to follow publications by the book's author which have already been or will be published in various academic journals in English.

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**TATIANA ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ**  
**Marian Devotion Among the Roma in Slovakia: A Post-Modern Religious Response to Marginality**  
*Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, 166 p.*

Although Jesus had only one mother, and even though she is the only Virgin Mary, her mundane faces and the expressions of devotion to her have taken on a kaleidoscope of diversity through time and space in countless multitudes of different variations – as many as there are people and communities (national, ethnic, religious, regional...) that honour her. It is exactly this observation that the author and editor Tatiana Zachar Podolinská makes in the introductory study of the publication *Traces of the Virgin Mary in Post-Communist Europe*, in which a number of authors examine the current diversity of the forms of Marian devotion in post-Communist countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, etc.) (Zachar Podolinská, Ed., 2019). This edition shows all the many ways that the Virgin Mary, in different cultures, answers the hunger for spirituality, gives a voice to unofficial religious interpretations, revitalizes and redefines old cult sites and creates new ones, calms conflicts and speaks in the name of marginalized individuals and communities. In the monograph under review the author Zachar Podolinská builds her study of Marian devotion among the Roma of Slovakia, on the above observation, deepening and supporting it with plentiful data from the field. The work explores how the Roma, as a multiple marginali-

zed community, cope with that marginalization by creating their own islands of “marginal centrality” and the role that the post-modern Virgin Mary plays in the internal processes of self-centralization.

The monograph is based on extensive multi-sited fieldwork among members of the Roma communities in Slovakia. It is the result of author’s long-term experience in the research of religiosity in Slovakia, in particular the religiosity of people belonging to Roma communities. The fieldwork material is supplemented with other available sources of data, principally those from the media.

The book consists of four chapters. In the first of these, entitled *Traces of the Virgin Mary in the modern world*, Zachar Podolinská presents a detailed review of the roots of the cult of the Virgin in the tradition, stressing the enigma that she is both a virgin and the mother of Jesus, which scholars have attempted to explain with comparisons to pre-Christian and non-Christian female deities of the Great Mother Goddess type. The Virgin Mary is traditionally experienced as a potent and miraculous protector and healer, whose mercy and power of healing is channelled and becomes effective through material objects (statues, icons and pictures) – the phenomenon of miraculous statues and icons is known the world over. Also in this chapter the author considers the role of the Virgin Mary in the context of the nation-building process – in many countries and at many times, she has become an important national symbol.

Particular attention is given to the many ethnicized and enculturated versions of the Virgin Mary. Marginalized individuals and communities, in the attempt to attain visibility and gain a voice, tend to adopt the transcendent and transethnic Virgin Mary so that she may become culturally and visually ‘one of them’ and aid them on their way “from the periphery to the centre”. Official religion excludes and silences versions of the Virgin Mary other than that which it espouses itself “ignoring the right to approach Mary, Jesus, and God with the eyes, tongues, and hearts of different cultures” (p. 16).

Tatiana Zachar Podolinská explains further how the Virgin Mary is perfectly accommo-

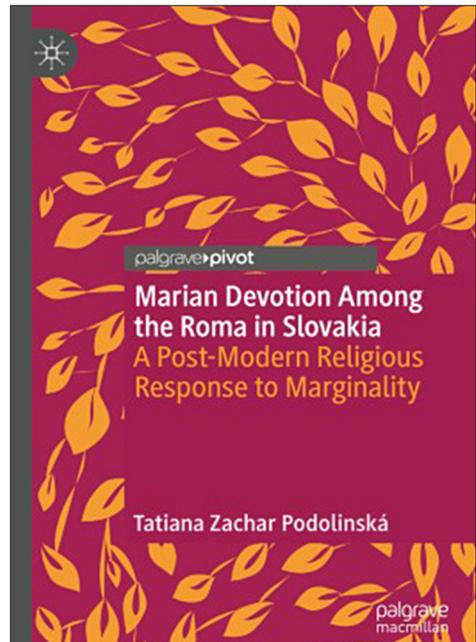
dated in the modern era. Under the floodlights of modernity, she remains traditional, preserving and developing pre-modern associations to heavenly phenomena, miracle-working springs, healing and similar. In modern secular societies she is seen as the miraculous healer in situations when official medicine proves unable to offer any solution. She offers a religious and spiritual answer to the secularism, consumerism and rationalism of modern society. The author continues, “Modern Mary is global and transnational. [...] In the twentieth century, the Virgin Mary literally conquered and colonised the entire globe by reaching all continents” (p. 19). In the unstable and unpredictable post-modern and post-secular world, in the early years of the twenty-first century, people still have a need for miracles and mysteries, and for the continuity of local and national traditions. In the post-communist countries in the 1990s there was a revitalization of religion, a “phenomenon of demonstrative resacralisation” (p. 30), as a response to the preceding period of enforced atheisation, which led to the restoration of the Church. The author explains that post-communist Mary “speaks to her people in the ‘national(istic)’ and ‘traditionalistic’ language, mobilising traditional, national, and conservative values against globalisation, westernisation, and liberal values” (p. 34). She concludes this chapter with the explanation that, in the post-communist countries, as in the West, Mary unites and blends pre-Christian female goddesses with the ultra-modern millennial and spiritual concepts of Mother of Earth and Mother of Universe. Moreover, Marys in the post-communist countries unify within themselves quite contradictory roles – representing ultra-conservative values, and at the same time ultra-modern alternative religious movements, charismatic, millennial or New-Age forms of spirituality, using apocalyptic or ethno-pagan esoteric vocabulary.

The next chapter, *Romani Christianity in Slovakia: religiosity of those on the periphery* is concerned with the contextualization and then the analysis of the religiosity of the Roma in Slovakia. Slovakia is a country with deeply rooted Marian devotion, dating back to the times of the mission of Cyril and Methodius (end of the

ninth century A.D). Zachar Podolinská explains that the Virgin Mary phenomenon is largely encountered on the social periphery, associated with liminality, vulnerability, laity, the poor and the colonized. In this context, as the author explains, the Virgin Mary in her specific form as the *Virgin Mary of Seven Sorrows*, has played an important role in the processes of the emancipation of the marginalized Slovak nation on its way “from the periphery to the centre” (p. 44). The author points to the standpoint of the Church according to which the struggle of the Slovaks for their own national form of the Virgin Mary culminated in 1927, ten years after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The author defines the Roma in Slovakia as a silent (without a voice) and invisible minority (see more Podolinská, 2017), which, for centuries, has remained on the social margins.<sup>1</sup> In this historical, social and religious context she researches Romani Christianity as a cultural translation of mainstream Christianity – a “unique system of unwritten rules and values that are fundamentally based on Christian faith in God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary” (p. 50). Most members of the Roma community are very religious, they practice their religion on a daily basis connected to the private sphere of home and family. In their understanding, what is most important is the intensity of religious experience (“faith in the heart”) and not frequency of attendance at church. They have a critical view of the traditional Christianity of the majority community, viewing it as very formal.

With great nuance Zachar Podolinská explains the complexity of the situation which the umbrella term Romani Christianity covers. She stresses that the content and type of religiosity among various Roma groups is highly heterogeneous; variation and bricolage are important characteristics and tendencies. Although the Catholic pattern of religiosity has dominated among the Slovakian Roma since 1989, Neo-Protestant and Pentecostal churches and movements have radically effected and changed many Roma communities, offering them a new



concept of ethnic and cultural translation of Christianity.

At the end of this chapter two possible methods of overcoming the marginalized position of the Roma in Slovakia are considered: the *Mary-centric one* – under token by the ethnicised and enculturated Virgin Mary within traditional Romani Christianity (Catholicism) and the *Mary-peripheric one* – within non-traditional Romani Christianity (Neo-Protestant and Romani Pentecostal churches and movements). The chapter ends with the question which of these has the potential to draw the Romani from “the periphery to the centre”, recalling that both lead to “marginal centrality”, offering the Roma dignity, but on the social margins (pp. 67–68).

The chapter *Marian Devotion among the Roma in Slovakia: Ethnicised and Enculturated Mary* focuses on Marian devotion in the concrete cultural context of the Roma communities in Slovakia. Acts of ‘appropriation’ of the Virgin Mary are examined in the context of traditional Romani Christianity, in particular acts of

1 There are numerous valuable studies in the Roma of Slovakia; here I would draw attention to: Podolinská, Hrustič, *Eds.*, 2016.

ethnisation and enculturation in which the 'White' Virgin Mary is ethnically 'transcribed' and culturally 'translated' to bring her closer and as such, render her better able to offer a fuller answer to their hopes and needs. The author recalls that during her fieldwork among members of the Roma community, she encountered a plethora of local and familial examples of transcription and translation of the Virgin Mary. However, certain features and elements of Marian devotion were also common to Roma communities spatially very distant from one another.

The author characterizes traditional Romani Christianity as Mary-centric. Members of the researched Roma communities are deeply attached to the Virgin Mary, visually represented in a multitude of pictures, reproductions, tapestries and similar. She is seen as the transcendent Mother of God, and in the fieldwork interviews, is often described using transethnic vocabulary and in the aesthetic categories of beauty.

Zachar Podolinská notes the critical attitude expressed by several members of the Roma community on the mainstream interpretation of the Virgin Mary as white-skinned. She records cases where the Virgin Mary is described as a beautiful Romani woman with dark skin and brown eyes, and describes the ethnicised depictions of Mary she encountered, with certain ethnic or racial characteristics which differed greatly from the habitual iconography of the Virgin Mary in the region of Eastern Slovakia. In this context the statement of one interlocutor is particularly significant. She was convinced that the Virgin Mary must be like her – dark-skinned with dark hair and eyes. When describing the colour of the Virgin's skin, and of her own, this interlocutor used the adjective "chocolate" (in a positive context, connecting the colour of their skin to the flavour and taste of chocolate). The phenomenon of the Chocolate Mary – the ethnicised and enculturated Romani Virgin Mary is, in its own way, a post-modern religious response to the pronounced marginalization of the Roma in Slovakia.

The final chapter of this book *Marian Apparitions among the Roma: From the Periphery to the Centre* turns to the question of the nu-

merous and increasingly frequent Marian apparitions among the Roma in the past few decades. The strengthening of Marian devotion among the Roma is closely connected to the post-communist rehabilitation and general re-strengthening of Marian devotion among the majority population of Slovakia. On the basis of her fieldwork and media analysis, the author examines the ways in which the Virgin communicates with the Roma, how they experience her and how they react to the apparitions, and also how representatives of official structures, both political and religious, and the media comment on local apparitions among the Roma. All of the apparitions detailed in the book had a specific context, but a common feature they all possess is that they occur in the private spaces of the household (on house walls, furniture, doors and stove doors) or in their immediate vicinity of the home. Carefully analysing their *emic* perspective, the diversity and often conflicted nature of individual viewpoints and experiences of those belonging to the researched community, the author concludes that the "way 'from the periphery to the centre' is definitely not simple or linear" (p. 140).

Roma religious culture is Mary-centric, but Mary's centrality has been seriously challenged in recent decades by the growing Neo-Protestant and Pentecostal movements at work in post-communist Slovakia, and directing their mission mainly towards the Roma community. These movements offer the Roma ethnic emancipation on a religious basis, calling for a break with the old "Gypsy story" laden with negative connotations. In this way they radically redefine traditional Romani Christianity. Zachar Podolinská directs our attention towards the fact that the peripheralisation of the Virgin Mary can be a cause of tension and therefore polarization within the Roma communities.

Roma communities in Slovakia construct their identifications in the manner of other peripheral groups – in a centric manner. As the author explains, those communities that the majority considers marginal or peripheral often build a parallel, closed world, and place themselves at the centre of it. The experience of marginality is thus mitigated by the experience of their own community, accompanied by feelings

of unity and exclusivity that are reserved for members of the group alone. With their unwritten system of values and rules, the Roma position themselves at a centre where traditional Christian transcendences – God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary are key structural elements. Their deep devotion to the Virgin Mary allows them to create a secure niche in the framework of their communities where their ethnic, cultural and religious system of values becomes central.

Finally the author opens many questions, calling for discussion and continued research of the issues under investigation. Of particular importance are questions connected to the ethnicised Chocolate Mary – will she one day help Slovakian Roma to find their road “from the periphery to the centre” or will she herself be marginalized, and watch over the Roma from the religious periphery? It is ironic, as the author concludes, that the creation of the Chocolate Mary as a voice of internal Romani emancipation in Slovakia has been threatened by the religious pluralism following 1989 and the arrival of the Neo-Protestant Evangelical movements.

In her new book Tatiana Zachar Podolinská presents a profound and comprehensive analysis of the religiosity of the Roma in Slovakia, with a particular focus on Marian devotion. The work takes a systematic approach to the phenomenon of Marian devotion, utilizing a combination of various theoretical perspectives in order to explain the specific and hidden aspects of the issue, and the processes that are underway. The book presents a very wide picture of Slovak society, particularly in the period after 1989 and the post-communist transformation. It presents copious field material and both the style of writing and the numerous photographs that illustrate and document the presentation allow the reader to experience the process of fieldwork themselves, conduct in-depth interviews with the Roma and ‘visit’ their homes, decorated with pictures and statues of the Virgin Mary. The book represents a unique contribution to both Romani and Religious Studies.

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**JANA LINDBLOOM:**

**Transformácia a zánik poľnohospodárskych družstiev**

**[The Transformation and Cessation of Agricultural Cooperatives]**

*VEDA, Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 2019, 255 p.*

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Slovak countryside underwent radical changes in the way of life, being forced not only to cope with the relicts of feudalism and collectivisation in the search for solutions for the living strategies of its inhabitants within a historically short period, but also to handle modernisation issues that marked the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this time in their globalised form in the context of the European Union.

The changes in people’s life strategies tied to agricultural production can be understood only on the basis of knowledge about such production of the previous decades – the period before and after the transformation of Slovak agriculture – since today, it is not only modernisation, but also various institutional pressures that make people intrinsically linked to agricultural primary production seek new ways of adaptation to the emerging social reality. They

Jana Lindbloom



## Transformácia a zánik poľnohospodárskych družstiev



thus co-create a new structure of rural society with its own ambit of social phenomena that become the subject of often interdisciplinary research in the field of social sciences, including sociology and ethnology. After all, what other scientific disciplines have better preconditions for their intellectual mission in the original sense of the word – observe and reflect in order to be able to understand?

It is obvious that the impacts of political decisions on the rural development increased along with the level of civilisational development. This tendency culminated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Politics is said to be the rational management of public affairs. The two socio-economic discontinuities of the Slovak countryside in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show that this fails sometimes.

The post-1989 period was an important milestone in the life of the Slovak countryside, representing the second discontinuity of its development after the 20<sup>th</sup> century collectivisation period. Like the collectivisation of Slovak agriculture, it was realised as a political model in which the previously existing dynamics of changes was distorted, resulting in the idea

about the possibility of random acceleration. I think that, in both cases, the elementary experience of human history was confirmed, according to which political changes can take place in a few days, economic ones in a few years, and social changes in a few decades (Lip-ták, 1999: 276).

In both cases, the ideologisation of the countryside's economic issues affected the formation of the life strategies of individuals, families, and entire rural communities. The gnoseological intention of the book by Jana Lindbloom was to offer a testimony about the crucial moment of this process – the transformation as well as the cessation of existing agricultural cooperatives, and about the complexity of the changing post-socialist cooperative world. The key question of the research was how this transformation had taken place. From the methodological perspective, the author's work was complicated, as it was both retrospective and real-time research focusing on still living memories and circumstances. Despite these facts, the key source of information was interviews with respondents. Their selection was motivated by obtaining information and opinions from the representatives of the different aspects of the transformation process. The topic that needed to be addressed, though referring to 30-year-old events, was still very delicate. Any researcher conducting similar research is aware of this difficulty. The narratives published in the book and obtained from the interviews with the respondents not only suggest that Jana Lindbloom has succeeded when it comes to this research aspect, but they also give the necessary authenticity to her texts. The transformation of cooperatives, their cessations, as well as the new forms of legal existence formed the core topic of the author's interviews with many representatives of agricultural associations, private farmers, or former cooperative functionaries.

The publication will surprise the reader with the author's admirable heuristics. The extent of domestic and foreign expert literature and its argumentative and factual use in the book is unique. The reader thus receives comprehensive and highly objective information about the period that was of great importance

for the inhabitants of the Slovak countryside in its socio-cultural contexts. The work by Jana Lindbloom is a chronicle of an era that was understood and realised politically. In the context of the Slovak countryside, it meant an oscillation of its value system. It was connected with the process of depriving the lives of entire social and generation groups of rural communities of the sense and meaning of the years they had lived previously. The social objectives pursued by their individual life efforts also went in vain. Individuals as well as entire social groups found themselves in a new social space where previous values turned to be overcome, irrelevant, and, briefly said, 'meaningless' (Slavkovský, 2016: 89–105).

The aim of the book, as noted by the author herself, was to "describe the complexity of the changing post-socialist agriculture of the cooperative world. She believes that she has managed to capture the key aspects of the transformation of cooperatives and the key milestones of this process" (Lindbloom, 2019: 25). As far as my professional competence allows me to judge this approach, I think the author has succeeded in fulfilling her intention. She guides the reader in a complex manner through the pitfalls of legal and various administrative regulations, which accompanied the political decisions about the transformation of the then Czechoslovak agriculture. However, she herself realises that her explanation of the transformation of former cooperatives is not so comprehensive as there is nothing to add, and modestly encourages the readers to do so.

It was this appeal by Jana Lindbloom that made me think about how to increase the informative potential of her book. I have remembered a reflection by E. Bondy, an important Czech philosopher and dissident of the 1990s, which he published in his book *Agony – Episode '96*: "...a UN expert told me what Western economic experts were talking about: what caused most thorns on their side was our effectively working agricultural industry. Not those several hundred tanks that we produced; it was the agricultural industry that threatened Western interests" (Bondy, 1997: 98–99).

Can there be a more positive evaluation of the Czechoslovak agricultural industry of the

1980s? Its quality was also related to the socio-cultural aspects of life of the rural population. This gives rise to the question of why it was necessary to transform something that worked in this way. The answer may emerge from the results of the targeted, depoliticised, interdisciplinary research by historians, ethnologists, and sociologists, which would certainly also increase the informative value of the publication by Jana Lindbloom. However, we need to hurry. Objective testimonies about this period at the human level can be provided only by the oldest generation of the inhabitants of the Slovak countryside.

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KATARÍNA ŽEŇUCHOVÁ (Ed.):  
Etnolingvistický výskum na Slovensku. Súčasný stav a perspektívy  
[Ethnolinguistic research in Slovakia. Current state and perspectives]  
Bratislava: Slavistický ústav Jána Stanislava SAV, 2020, 168 pp.

K. Žeňuchová's work titled *Etnolingvistický výskum na Slovensku. Súčasný stav a perspektívy* [Ethnolinguistic research in Slovakia. Current state and perspectives] as an output of Scientific Grant Agency VEGA's project titled *Stav a perspektívy etnolingvistického výskumu na Slovensku* [State and perspectives of ethnolinguistic research in Slovakia 2/0045/17] is a collection of eleven studies. Some authors partially summarize the existing research findings in the area

of ethnolinguistics in Slovakia (Žeňuchová, Dudová, Valencova, Žeňuch and Strýčková), others focus on specific questions concerning the relationship between language and culture (Gábor, Kmecová, Vašíček, Vashichkova, Zakrzewska-Verdugo) and two articles provide an overview of the development of ethnolinguistics abroad (Vojtechová Poklač, Djordjević).

The collection of the studies is of a summarising nature. In the introduction titled *Etnolingvistické výskumy na Slovensku: vývin, perspektívy a úlohy* [Ethnolinguistic Research in Slovakia: development, perspectives, and tasks] the author already states that Slovak ethnolinguistic research is underdeveloped and, in comparison with its level of development abroad; for instance, when compared with the Moscow, Lublin or Sofia schools, we are struck by its fragmented character. However, despite numerous shortcomings, partial results have been achieved and they are summarised by the author in her work. In the first part, she focuses on activities that took place at the Jan Stanislav Institute of Slavistics SAS in the last five years. She highlights international cooperation, domestic projects and conferences with international participation. She also provides a retrospective view on results achieved within ethnolinguistic research and emphasises the contribution of foreign ethnologists: N. I. Zajcevova, M. Valencova, V. Kolosova, T. Volodzinova, I. Shvedova and M. Kitanova. She describes resource material concerning the relationship between language and individual aspects of folk culture (*Encyklopédia ľudovej kultúry Slovenska*, 1995; *Slovensko*, 1975; *Tradičná kultúra regiónov Slovenska*, 2005; *Etnografický atlas Slovenska*, 1990; *Atlas slovenského jazyka*, 1968–1984; *Slovník slovenských nářečí*, 1994, 2006; *Slovenský historický slovník*, 1991–2008) and points out the varying extent of content appropriate for ethnolinguistic research in these resources. Her work also focuses on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century lexicographical works. She highlights the dictionaries *Idioticon Slovacicum* by J. Ribay (1808, published 2017) and L. Rizner's *Dialektický slovník bošácky* (1896, published 1913) as potential, so-far unused, resources for ethnolinguistic research. In her work, we further find a brief introduction to ethnographic

works partially describing different aspect of Slovak folk culture from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century up to now. In her view, taking inspiration from the Russian and Polish ethnolinguistic school, continuing with research activities in ethnophraseology established at the Department of Slavic Philology at Comenius University in Bratislava and processing semantic units of the Slovak language connected with ancient mythology and rites are all potential ways forward for the future.

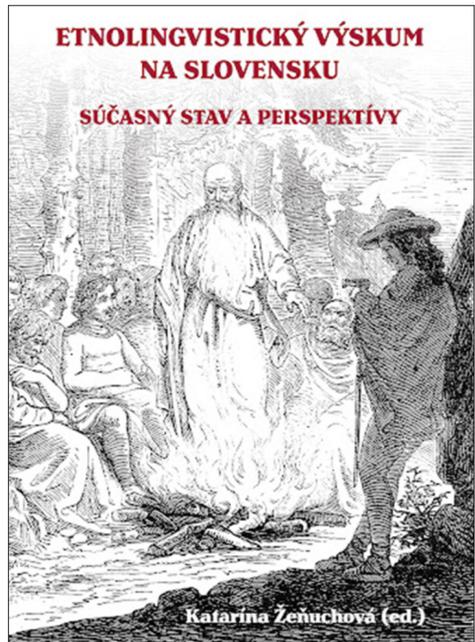
In her study titled *Participácia slovenskej etnolingvistiky na medzinárodných výskumoch európskeho jazykového obrazu sveta* [Participation of Slovak Ethnolinguistics in International Research concerning European Language Worldview], K. Dudová presents cognitive ethnolinguistic research of the linguistic worldview under projects EUROJOS (The cultural and linguistic worldview of Slavs and their neighbours in a comparative perspective) and EUROJOS-2, in which Slovakia has been involved since 2013. The author defines the methodology and goals of the project and mentions the most significant published outputs. She also describes in detail the Slovak participation in this project as well as the way of approaching the terms *práca a česť* (work and honour). In her concluding remarks, she points to the importance of linguistic worldview research in university education, namely at the Faculty of Arts of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. When looking at the bibliography, it is evident that the author bases her work mainly on J. Bartmiński's Polish school, but it also provides a good overview of the Slovak body of research on the linguistic worldview.

M. Valencova has been carrying out field ethnolinguistic research in different Slovak regions: Orava, Liptov, Zemplín and Rusyn villages for fifteen years. In her article *Súčasné terénne výskumy ruských etnolingvistov na Slovensku a otázka dynamiky hodnotenia a hodnôt* [Current Field Research Carried out by Russian Ethnologists in Slovakia and the Dynamics of Opinions and Values], she focused on a shift in the perception of mythological ideas and rites. The shift is visible when the collected material is compared with Slavic cultural concepts, archetypes and symbols processed primarily

in the ethnolinguistic dictionary *Slavianskye drevnosti* [*Slavic Antiquities*]. M. Valencova clarifies that although the tradition of demonology remains, a true faith in demons has been disappearing. As a result, supernatural beings are perceived more in the relationship with the man rather than with nature, this concerns mostly the concepts of jinx, hex, or malefice (p. 43 and 48). The image of demons in folk culture becomes blurry (*upír* or *víla*, for instance) and the way their role is viewed has shifted from bad demons to peaceful or helpful ones (e.g., *svetielka*), but also vice versa (*zmok* in villages Bobrov and Liptovská osada, pp. 47–48). Nevertheless, the author adds that values like family, society, and tradition are stable and remain unchanged.

In L. Gábor's article titled *Metaforická projekcia cnosti v slovenskom jazyku z pohľadu etnolingvistiky* [*Metaphorical Projection of Virtue in the Slovak Language from an Ethnolinguistic Point of View*] there is an analysis of a cognitive view of the abstract notion of *cnosť/čnosť* (*virtue*). The introduction focuses on the etymology and basic definitions of this notion, which is followed by the types of cognitive and conceptual metaphorical structures that include *cnosť/čnosť* with the national Slovak language corpus as a source. Based on his research, the author concludes that virtue is understood as a semantically positive value but what is considered as virtuous remains highly individual. L. Gábor therefore finds it impossible to establish a detailed definition of this value. The individual performatives of virtue in a person's life are connected with positive connotations. However, virtue can also be found in the context of sarcastic or critical comments regarding a value mind-set. Virtue is not exclusively viewed as a value, sometimes it can also be found in the context of human skills, characteristics, or means to perform specific actions.

S. Kmecová studied the house/home as one of key concepts of the linguistic worldview in each culture. As stated by the author, this concept has been studied fairly extensively within Slavic linguistics (see Barmiński, 2008; Pintarić, 2007; Avramova, 2007 and others). Her article focuses on the Slovak-Slovenian comparative aspect. She studies how the concept of house/



home is anchored in Slovak and Slovenian paremiological units. The author emphasises that house and home are closely knit as concepts, which has been proven by phrasemes containing parts of a house (threshold, roof, hearth, fireplace, furnace) each of which co-creates the symbolism of a house being a home. The concept of a home is inseparably connected with the concept of a family, which is why the author states proverbs including the components *žena, muž, dieťa* (*woman, man, child*) whose semantics gives reference to their traditional role within a household. This way the author expanded her research subject which has been the woman in Slovenian and Slovak phrasemes (see Kmecová, 2018, 2019 and others). The presented phraseological material confirms the idea of a home as a sacred space that represents a top human value and is connected mainly with positive connotations.

In their joint study, P. Žeňuch and M. Strýčková present several projects which reflect specific cultural aspects of Byzantine and Latin texts as a part of the national and confessional tradition in Slovakia. The existing research has proven that the Byzantine written and spiritual tradition forms an inseparable part of Slovak

culture, the possible examples of which are bilingual texts, translations as well as religious and ceremonial texts. New findings and facts rectify the so-far applied stereotypical interpretations connected with the processes of Latinization and influences of the Eastern Orthodox Church or Uniatism in Slovakia. The authors underline the need for research to be comprehensive and of a complementary nature, which they clarified by providing examples of lexis connected with a specific language and confessional environment (e.g., lexemes *pan*, *pop*, *sakristia*, etc.) and by pointing out to the specific nature of translating biblical and liturgical texts into a standardized language variety. The Jan Stanislav Institute of Slavistics SAS's electronic database of Latin and Slavic ecclesiastical sources that has been gradually processed and published in the form of books and in journals is an important resource of ethnolinguistic research. In the end of the study, there is a bibliographical reference to the parts of the database which have been published.

M. Vašíček describes a part of agricultural terminological lexis in Rusyn dialects in the Slovak territory related to the traditional farm carriage and horse-drawn carriage. This part of vocabulary had already been partially processed (see Hanudel, 2001), but the author has added lexemes from so-far unprocessed archive material of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic as well as his own records from the field research he carried out between 2011 and 2019. He presents material from altogether 50 Rusyn villages in Eastern Slovakia. The author has managed to localize the geographical reach of individual expressions and, where possible, he indicates their origin or common features with other languages and dialects.

Another analytical study contained in the present conference proceedings is the study *Vybrané prípady polysémie a homonymie v rusínskych nárečiach (na príklade názvov motýľov)* [Selected Cases of Polysemy and Homonymy in Rusyn Dialects (Illustrated by the Examples of Butterfly Names)] by D. Vashichkova. The source of the analysis was I. Pankevič's lexical database of South-Carpathian dialects that is archived in the Institute of Slavic Studies of the

Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The author has divided the analysed lexemes into four groups: interdialectal polysemy, intradialectal polysemy, interdialectal homonymy and intradialectal homonymy, and one of the meanings of each described language unit always denotes a type of butterfly. Intradialectal homonymy is the most numerous of the four categories, which indicates the diversity of the contamination of meanings of dialect units as well as the intensity of lexical interferences from the dialects of neighbouring languages.

S. Vojtechová Poklač presents specialised Slovenian literature that took various approaches to studying and interpreting theoretical and methodological outputs of ethnolinguistics from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present. As pointed out by the author, the term *linguistic anthropology* was the first one used in the Slovenian academic and research context while the term *ethnolinguistics* started to be used once this academic discipline was formed in Europe in the 1970s (p.129) and later the term *linguo-culturology* was introduced. S. Vojtechová Poklač points out the fact that Slovenian linguists do not perceive these three terms as denoting the same academic discipline. Although they overlap and complete one another, they are not completely identical (see Babič, 2011; Kržišnik, 2005). The author presents Slovenian field research, most significant ethnolinguistics monographs and dialect dictionaries as important sources of ethnolinguistic research. In 2017, the first comprehensive work on Slovenian ethnolinguistic was published – M. Stanonik's *Etnolingvistika po slovensko* [Ethnolinguistics in Slovenian].

K. Djordjević details the development of ethnolinguistics in Serbia between the 1990s and present day. 1996 is considered a breakthrough year for Serbian ethnolinguistics – several monographs were published and the journal *Kodovi slovenskih kultura* [Codes of Slav Cultures] began to be issued. K. Djordjević briefly summarised key Serbian names, publications and periodicals connected with ethnolinguistics, but she added that not even after three decades has a special ethnolinguistic school been constituted in Serbia. In Serbia, this academic discipline has been developing

mostly individually or within project tasks. Dejan Ajdačić plays a significant role in this area of research – he defined ten areas Serbian ethnolinguistics should focus on. K. Djordjević focused mainly on ethnophraseology which has been successfully developing in Slovakia mainly thanks to projects lead by M. Dobříková (see Dobříková, *Ed.*, 2014, 2019). The author specified no further comparison between Serbian and Slovak ethnolinguistics, however, she dealt with this topic earlier (Djordjević, 2018).

The proceeding book concludes with the study by M. Zakrzewska-Verdugo, who, amongst other things, focuses in her research on teaching Polish as foreign language. In her article, she interconnects glottodidactics with ethnolinguistics. As she writes, teaching a language is firmly connected to its culture, which has to be taken into consideration when creating didactic material. The author presented a method for creating a B1/B2-level lesson that thematically focuses on the supernatural, faith and different religions. Her article may serve as an example for further research of this kind. She successfully applied her methodology in other thematic areas when she published her Polish language textbook (Zakrzewska-Verdugo, 2020).

On one hand, the proceedings book follows-up the preceding publications under the auspices of Jan Stanislav Institute of Slavistics SAS (see Žeňuch, Uzeňová, Žeňuchová, *Eds.*, 2013; Žeňuchová, Kitanova, Žeňuch, *Eds.*, 2017). K. Žeňuchová, K. Dudová and M. Valencova have expressed concerns regarding the globalisation process, which is causing the gradual disappearance of folk culture and its specificities together with individual ways of reflecting culture in the language to fade. M. Valencova calls on the need to continue with field research, which records various aspects of folk culture. However, it seems that mostly scholars from abroad do the field research in Slovakia – represented by M. Valencova and M. Vašíček in this proceeding book, earlier by E. Uzenova (2013) and others. All of them apply the Moscow school principles.

On the other hand, new possibilities of ethnolinguistic research in combination with other scholar disciplines are outlined in the proceeding book. The interdisciplinary approach

was applied by E. Gábor and M. Zakrzewska-Verdugo who followed the Lublin school of J. Bartmiński. His key publications have not been translated into Slovak, though. Publishing foreign literature in Slovak could bring new impulses. This concerns the works by D. Ajdačić, too. The areas for modern ethnolinguistic research he pointed out lie on the intersection point of several disciplines and do not refer to the folk culture only, but also the concept of city or future, for example.

The proceeding book undoubtedly provides an overview of Slovak ethnolinguistics in a broader Slavic context. Despite the fact that the picture seems comprehensive, the heterogeneity of ethnolinguistic research in Slovakia is fully visible. K. Žeňuchová states in her article “Slovak ethnolinguistics has not been developing systematically and harmoniously but is rather an ensemble of individual studies focused on different thematic areas. Slovak ethnolinguistics lacks a unified programme and an internal homogeneousness of the academic paradigm (...) with a clearly defined theoretical and methodological basis.” (p. 19). The present proceeding book serves as proof of that.

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