



ANDREJ GOGORA, JAROSLAVA PANÁKOVÁ (Eds.):
Understanding Slovakia: Contemporary Approaches in Local
Anthropology
*Bratislava: Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak
Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, 2024, 230 p.*

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It is understandable that the continuity of scientific interests gradually changes over the years in every field of study. The new generations of researchers react to the demands and issues of society. The nature of anthropology's interests develops as society faces the current challenges and realities in Slovakia. Socio-cultural anthropology (or ethnology, ethnography, folklore studies) evolve from an early emphasis on traditional folk culture to encompass pressing contemporary social and political issues. As Peter Slavkovský mentions: "Ethnography in Slovakia could not come into existence before the problems with which it concerned itself" (Slavkovský, 2012: 124). While classic themes of traditional folk culture remain relevant, the discipline has expanded to address topics resonating across the broader field of anthropology.

This expansion in thematic breadth has been accompanied by increased methodological sophistication, utilizing interdisciplinary approaches to advance research practices. The book titled *Understanding Slovakia: Contemporary Approaches in Local Anthropology* exemplifies this trend and provides a current overview of the discipline. Edited by Andrej Gogora and Jaroslava Panáková, the volume compiles diverse perspectives to examine the complexities of Slovak society through the field of study called local anthropology. The book is the first part of the broader series called *Challenges and Directions in Slovak Ethnology and Anthropology*. The series seeks to provide a comprehensive exploration of contemporary anthropology and, as the editors mentioned, it is a celebration of "the discipline's resilience and capacity for innovation" (Gogora, Panáková, 2024: 24).

The book is well-structured, divided into two main sections. The first one shows recent inquiries focused on contemporary challenges in Slovakia, while the second chapter echoes the emerging methodologies. It is worth pointing out the positive first impression from the book, since all inspiring studies are wrapped up in a remarkably creative and modern graphic design by Matúš Hnát.

This collection of texts highlights a deliberate and thoughtful application of contemporary methodological approaches of local anthropology. In the first case study, Justin Lane and Pavol Kosnáč analyse the attempted assassination of Slovak Prime Minister Róbert Fico within Slovakia's socio-political climate. The research examines how political rhetoric and media narratives influence public perception and emotional reaction, underscoring the link between political violence and the erosion of social cohesion in Slovakia (Kosnáč, Lane, 2024). Another pair of authors, Martina Wilsch and Miroslava Hlinčíková, investigate the housing experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, framing their study within the broader context of housing issues and the temporality of displacement. By examining local experiences, the study sheds light on the interaction between national housing policies, individual vulnerabilities, and refugees' perceptions of temporality, shaping their housing strategies and integration paths (Wilsch, Hlinčíková, 2024). The first section of the book is concluded by Vladimír Bahna. In the study, he discusses theoretical perspectives on Marian apparitions and pilgrimages, synthesising insights from religious devotion and pilgrimage studies. The author advocates for an integrated perspective, recognising pilgrimages and apparitions as powerful social forces capable of challenging authority, fostering egalitarian bonds, and creating opportunities for different social actors to reclaim influence (Bahna, 2024).

Methodological questions, which are the content of the second chapter of the book, begin with Ľubica Voľanská and Soňa G. Lutherová's autoethnographic reflection on the complexities of conducting research within their own communities. They explore ethical and methodological challenges linked to balancing power dynamics and researcher subjectivity, particularly when pre-existing relationships influence fieldwork (Lutherová G., Voľanská, 2024). They refer to Reyes' work (Reyes, 2020) and his premise of the impossibility of the "true insider". They call for a more nuanced and reflexive approach to ethnographic research in Slovakia. The next chapter, written by Jaroslava Panáková, shows sensory methodologies in environmental anthropology. As she points out: "...sensory experiences not only shape individual and collective identities but also influence how people relate to their environment and make decisions about its use and conservation" (Panáková, 2024: 183). Finally, Andrej Gogora examines the potential of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI),



specifically ChatGPT, to enhance metadata curation within digitised ethnographic collections (Gogora, 2024).

The year 2024 was fruitful in the sense of publications concerned with methodological issues and research-direction diversity. For example, the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, published a pair of books focused on ethical dilemmas in ethnographic research (Kinczer, Zachar Podolinská, 2024; Zachar Podolinská, 2024), also monographies concerned with minorities (Salner, Štelmachovič Bumová, 2024), demographic analyses of a specific church community (Majo, 2024) and much more. Although these books are not a part of the series mentioned above, they are a showcase of challenges and contemporary issues in Slovak ethnology/anthropology, as well as “understanding Slovakia”.

To conclude, the book *Understanding Slovakia: Contemporary Approaches in Local Anthropology* is a valuable resource for scholars, students, and anyone interested in gaining a deeper understanding of contemporary issues as well as currently emerging methodologies in anthropology's inquiry. The book provides a nuanced portrait of Slovakia's research interests from the perspective of local anthropology.

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JOHN HARTIGAN Jr.:
 Shaving the Beasts: Wild Horses and Ritual in Spain
 Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, 272 p.

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Hartigan's book tackles one of the central problems of multispecies anthropology – how to open up the science that was founded upon *anthropos* to more-than-human worlds. To this extent, the book follows a post-humanist line of thought. In *Shaving*