

Recenzie

Dilbar Alieva: Sociology of Everyday Life

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In Slovakia Dilbar Alieva is considered one of the most exceptional and key experts in the field of sociology and sociological theory. After her until now unprecedented monograph *Contemporary American Sociology* (*Súčasná americká sociológia*) published in 1985 an additional work is being brought to the public. Like in her first book, the author shows extraordinary insight and depth of knowledge of the situation in the field of sociology; its current debates, fundamentals and direction. Her second publication *Sociology of Everyday Life* focuses on developing a second line of professional interest – the sociology of everyday life. Within the framework of the Central European sociology, this book is likely placing the author in an exclusive, but at the same time isolated position as a founder of this line of sociological reasoning (if we do not take into account the work of a cosmopolitan, by origin Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller, which resonates rather in philosophical than sociological circles).

It should be noted at the outset that although not formally a standard monograph, it fulfils all the requirements of a monographic work. It is essentially a selection of her key texts focusing on theoretical reflection of everyday life as an object of sociological interest as well as a development of sociology of everyday life as a sectoral sociological discipline and partly a separate approach to the sociological view of social life. In addition to already published texts in Slovak or English, the book also contains unpublished texts which can be considered, besides the sociology of everyday life, as contributions to the sociology of art. The texts delineate the creative publishing period from the end of the eighties (essentially from the publication of *Contemporary American Sociology*) to the year 2015 when the book was published and when it was supplemented by two previously unpublished texts. Although most of the texts have already been published, in a number of cases they have been published in today not easily accessible collections or collective publications, so for most contemporary readers the texts will most likely be unknown and difficult to access. The monograph is therefore more important for not only contemporary Slovak sociology. Perhaps the greatest damage to the book is what the author herself explains, that there was not enough space to fit all the relevant texts focused on the analysis of everyday life into the final compilation. Regarding one such text, the author mentions one of her key studies on this topic which was published in the journal *Sociológia – Slovak Sociological review* No 5/2012– Weber's *Contribution to the Sociology of Everyday Life*. It would be an excellent conclusion to the arc of theoretical reflection of the theme starting with classical works, passing through the most recent postmodern reflections building on, among other things, classical sociological works. A text *Catching in everyday life* published in the *Sociologický*

časopis – Czech Sociological Review No 5/2008 would be a good choice for the selection. For the more demanding readers who want to have everything topic-relevant in one place, it would be good to add a phenomenologically inspired study about Mozart, which was published in 2012 in a monograph on the contribution of Alfred Schütz to the development of sociology (*The Contribution of Alfred Schutz to the Sociological Theory*, SLON, Prague, Institute for Sociology of SAS, Bratislava), to the two texts dealing with the world of art, which were published at the end of the book. But given the relatively large extent of these three in the book of unclassified studies and the extent of the book already published it is clear that often the reality of everyday life, pragmatically pressed for both financial and spatial efficacy, wins over the idea of ideological and conceptual purity. In any case, it is recommended to the readers of the book to read the three mentioned studies as an conceptual component of the book.

The book as a whole is very didactically structured allowing it to be considered a kind of textbook from sociology of everyday life for more advanced and demanding readers. It consists of an introduction and five thematically-defined sections which contain fifteen studies in total. These gradually suggest a path from the subject itself, everyday life, to examples of social phenomena analysis and works of art as examples of sensitive processing of sociological themes by artists. It is very important to show appreciation for the work done (although the editors are not mentioned in the printer's mark, in the introduction Dilbar Alieva suggests significant help by Zuzana Kusá), who made it possible to create a book with very well developed logic in its individual parts with continuous and logical sequence. As a result, there is a compact and despite quite intellectually demanding compilation of texts, a book that can be enjoyed and read smoothly. The fact that the book contains separately published texts also allows for the author's very professional approach to studies writing. Even though it deals with a very similar theme or subject matter in more than one text, each text is original in its nature and brings a new perspective or argument regarding the topic. What, by names, may seem like a common bad habit in social sciences that one text is repeatedly published under several names, in the case of this book, is rather a further deepening of the knowledge about the author or phenomenon under analysis. The author's longstanding pedagogical experience is seen here where one of the most important psychohygienic strategies of how not to bore either oneself or the audience is employed through creative reflective work and avoiding "stiff" formulations and theorems that have been used for years or decades. Each of the published texts is a very lively, independent and original contribution to the topic of everyday life.

As it has already been mentioned, the book consists of five separate parts. The first part, very concisely called *Everydayness as a structure and a process*, contains three very well and didactically selected texts. The first study represents everyday life as a subject of sociological exploration, and from a historical point of view it is the author's first text that was devoted to this topic and published in 1987.

The view of this already thirty-year-old text shows its topicality and timeliness. The author writes with a characteristic style on the topic of everyday life when, in addition to a very detailed and non-trivial analysis of the topic of classical scholars, in this case Marx and Engels, it also indicates current debates on the subject, especially in the work of the French analyst of the postmodern society Michel Maffesoli. (When returning to this text, the reader will realize the pioneering work of Dilbar Alieva in bringing up-to-date debates to Slovak sociology even in the period before 1990.) Her work with classical scholars also in other texts points to a very original revelation of commonly neglected aspects of classical sociological theories and also shows the tremendous potential of such scholars in explaining current sociological problems. Her first study also highlighted some of the topics which, unfortunately, are still little reflected in Slovak sociology but still retain huge explanatory potential in explaining a number of current problematic phenomena such as riotous conduct, gambling, non-utilization of creative potential of people at work or other forms of anomalous and escape behavior. What is helpful, among other things, is the creation of dual social time, two basic ways how to survive everyday life – cyclical (repetitive) everydayness and ascendant everydayness. Both are associated with the specific historical functioning of society or the life cycle of an individual. The second chapter deals with the structures of everyday life in sociological reflection. In this study, before the penetration of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of postmodern fluidity into sociological awareness, she defined the essence of everyday life as extraordinarily individualized, literally "fluid", but in theory she managed to reconcile it despite the high degree of resistance of the concept to the structural-procedural categorization. The study is essentially the first thorough familiarization of the Slovak reader with phenomenological theory of Alfred Schütz and his disciple Thomas Luckmann. The author has also proved her good knowledge through the integration of a nowadays already classical theory of the historian Fernand Braudel with the sociological reflection of everyday life. The third and final study in the first part of the book is from the "post-revolution" period and after prior analysis of structures, the author focused on the *processiveness* of everyday life. It focuses on analyzing parts of everyday life such as reproduction trends, the effects of whole society changes, but also on various issues touching everyday life, either horizontally among contemporaries or vertically among generations. Already in this study, she deals in more detail with the transcendence of human life which later appears in the book also in relation to other topics and which she deals with in a very detailed way in an unpublished study on Max Weber into this book.

The second part of the book explores the plurality of sociology of everyday life. There are mostly newer texts allowing her to reflect on research of everyday life in Slovakia, which is what she begins her first study with. Although the study was published in 1993, her then-conclusions could also be used to describe the current state of sociological research of everyday life in Slovakia. At that time she stated that attempts at such research were hindered "at the level of trivial understanding

of 'everydayness' as a simple documentary resource for the formation of so-called realistic view of life that would deny common stereotypes of official ideology". (p. 69) She points to the period of absence of strong theoretical grounds of such a research, to its essentially naivety and impudence in understanding everyday life "as an occasional set of empirical circumstances and experiences encountered by the researcher in question and which, for the sake of its factual undeniableness appears to him as the last instance of the validity of his statements". (p. 70) She therefore offers something of an overview of the current state of sociology of everyday life in the Western sociology where she relatively and comprehensively approximates the plurality of these approaches which differ in a phenomenological and ethnomethodologically inspired approach from existentialist and neo-Marxist to sociology of Michel Maffesoli focusing on postmodern conditions. In particular, she devotes a rather broad attention to the presentation of his sociology as an important part of relatively independent French sociology. The second study of the second part of the book focuses on a postmodern turn in sociology with which sociology of everyday life is closely related. The sociology of everyday life is described here as "one of the most flexible components of modern sociology". (p. 95) Further details of Michele Maffesoli's rather holistically focused contribution to the development of contemporary sociology, in particular the overcoming of until then relatively more individualistic phenomenological concepts, are also presented here. The third and fourth text in the second part of the book are further reflections on the contributions of Michel Maffesoli to the development of sociological knowledge and sociology of everyday life in particular. *Praise of everyday life* was originally published as a preface to the only translation of Michel Maffesoli's book into Slovak. *Invisible College* was a reflection of the influence of his sociology within a self-formed school in contemporary sociology, with the presentation of a very original Research Centre for Current and Everyday Life "CEAQ" at the Sorbonne in Paris.

The third part of the book is called *The ordinary and extraordinary in everyday life* and contains one comprehensive study of adventure and two freer considerations about virtualization and changes in everyday life under the influence of technological advancement. Specifically, where the sociality spontaneously emerging in quest for various goods and services was replaced by spontaneous internet "civic" debate and normative forums after the gradual collapse of socialism. In particular, the first of these three texts shows the strong potential of classical sociological theories, in this case the approach of George Simmel, for explanation of such contemporary phenomena as the *massification* of travel to exotic destinations, interest in adrenaline activities or areas such as reality shows, television adventure programmes or playing computer games. This study, by the depth of analysis, basically lies between focusing on the processiveness of everyday life, which was developed in the first part, and using the paradigm of everydayness to describe one of many and not just present phenomena. Contrary to the theoretical first contribution, the next two are more relaxed in style and show

author's sense of literary framing of sociological topics. It should be emphasized that although the subject of her analysis – reflection on the home in *Virtualization of everyday life* or on the creation of self-organizing normative and moralizing units in more or less random encounters in front of shops or on internet forums are not common sociological themes in our country, the author shows the power of sociological imagination when she can move such topics into the centre of sociological analysis and point out their importance and in certain situations a privileged place in human lives. This part of the book (along with the last one) rehabilitates the neglected tradition of sociological writing in Slovak sociology – the sociological essay. The relative freedom of the genre combined with a disciplined mind, impressive literary style and polished thoughts allow the reader an intellectual and aesthetic experience similar to that of essays by George Simmel, or more recently, the late Zygmunt Bauman.

The fourth part of the book – *Identities constructions in everyday life* – is again a return to the more discussed topics in Slovakia, which is also a return to the core of contemporary Slovak sociology. Already the first study *Designification of human life as a generational problem* indicates the core of this part, which is identity. However, the author has been sensitively circumventing this from 1990's trendy term and prefers to think about self-conception of man. This, as if only a terminological shift, makes it possible to circumvent the widespread essentialist and ahistorical understanding of the term identity that over the past twenty years has grown in our country and the self-conception of man is also associated with such macro-social changes such as major political changes and regime change as we experienced in 1989 also in Slovakia. Although it is a text from 1994, written just a few years after the change in political regime, it points to many not only personal but also political issues that we start to see at the moment when all groups of people are again fond of big, mythological narratives that allow us to place a personal story into wider socially and historically anchored narratives. It is very surprising that, although the problem of aging and the search for a model for the quality of life of older generations is again the topic of the day, the important study of these issues remains essentially unreflected and unused in Slovak sociology. Therefore, it is only to be hoped that publishing the book will bring it to the attention of all those who deal with these topics. Similarly, the second study in this section – *Self-interpretational strategies of today's man* – can serve as a more reasonable understanding of a person's life in a post-socialist society which once placed the working man on a pedestal that has now been replaced by a market system where the underlying principle from which everything else is derived is an impersonal market. In this text, the author returns to her earlier models of *cyclicity* or the rise of everyday life as an important framework of human life. The last study of the fourth part of the book – *"Ethnohistorism" and the identity of the epoch* – besides the theme of identity and self-identity also deals with the critical reflection of contemporary Slovak historiography, which "lost strong conceptual points for the proper identification of the post "velvet relolution" period in the history of

Slovakia and for dealing with the question of its current situation". (p. 227) It is essentially a more detailed and concrete indication of the relationship between individual identity and "great history" which in theoretical terms the author has discussed in more detail in previous texts. Although the text dates back to 1997, today it shows in full strength the weakness of anchoring Slovak history in world history, and the power and influence of amateur historical interpretation in the public and the ease with which politicians can purposefully take out historical events from contexts show how shrewd Alieva's comments were twenty years ago. The way how the author has sensitively captured the change in Slovakia after 1989, provides a great source of inspiration today when the entire post-revolutionary period narrows only to the struggle for a democratic form of society which weakens the possibility for individuals to identify themselves with the present time, and thus weakens the identity of individuals.

The last part of the book is titled *Images of everyday life*. There are two studies focusing on the reflection of works of art that arose in the second half of the 19th century. In the case of the first study, however, it is a reflection through the modern-day presentation of the classic Verdi opera *La Traviata* which was presented at the Zurich railway station in 2008. Just as the classic opera was brought up-to-date, in the second study Alieva updates other classical literary works – *Poor People* by Michail Fyodorovich Dostoyevsky. It not only points to the highly discerned sociological imagination and ability of sociological observation of Dostoyevsky, but also to the fact how the basic phenomena captured by Dostoevsky at the end of the 19th century during a time of rising capitalism in Russia are present in contemporary society with similarly ferocious naturalization of capitalism and a media culture holding a strong influence on public opinion. In her study, she also emphasizes (also visually) important sociological concepts that Dostoevsky has very thoroughly described, such as: survival strategies, hypercompensation, alienation, resistance, relativisation, relative deprivation, social injustice, social structure, stigmatization, social exclusion, social protest or social care. It shows how classical artwork can be inspirational to sociology in understanding society, but at the same time it shows sociological awareness of today's artists who interpret works of art as if antiques. As the author states at the conclusion of her study, it is actually a "fictitious version of a case study of poverty that could come from the text of Dostoyevsky's *Poor People* if a thorough sociological reading was done." (p.290) After reading this reflection on the literary work, we can only agree with the author when she says that literature obviously outperforms sociology and, in some cases, even today's multidisciplinary knowledge of poverty, which could be supplemented by science on other current social phenomena.

As a whole, the book shows the author's extraordinary synthetic ability not only to connect or bring the different sociological theories of different periods into a dialogue, but an ability to use creatively different methodological tools, which in Slovak sociology is very unique for its range and depth. The book is an example of

a renaissance personality who is able to capture in extraordinary detail the complexity not only of individual human life, but whole groups in the present world.

Although the author states in the introduction that her book is not a textbook, it can very well perform this function. Not only because of the didactic structure but also due to the comprehensive reviews of the topic of world sociology in several texts. Many texts testify, and the author also admits it in the introduction, that the idea came up during preparation of a university course.

Attractiveness of the book, not only for students, is enhanced by theme-oriented illustrations by Jakub Suchý. The fact that cartoons were chosen to illustrate the book is very much in line with the very content of a book that attempts to show everyday life in its ambiguity and complexity, thus it includes the often hidden, unreflected or extruded form that can be so easily and concisely depicted by good cartoons. A critical review of a book of this kind, if it really wants to be honest, ends up with a very strong recommendation for making it a part of the library of every sociologist who wants to do science that contributes to the understanding of the world we live in.

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