

A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR MARTA BOTIKOVÁ ON HER SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY



It is with great honour that I have accepted an invitation to say a few words marking the sixtieth birthday of Professor PhDr. Marta Botiková, CSc. (* 29 October 1955), for such events are like a stop at a crossroads--the crossroads of life with one path behind and other potential paths stretching ahead like ribbons. The thought of writing this tribute gave me pause as

I was very much aware of how difficult it would be to choose what to include, what to focus on, what to highlight.

Family and kin, fascination and understanding

My first encounter with Marta Botiková dates back to my university studies at the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University, when she taught a course on the ethno-cultural aspects of the family. With the utmost erudition, insight, and critical questions, and through intertwined social and historical contexts, she endeavoured to explain to us students the ambiguity of concepts such as marriage and family. Her emphasis on primary human experience tied to life in families that differ in gender, age and structure, proved to be a major contribution to an evolving knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity which we, as young people, acquired from her during our studies in ethnology.

Over time we came to understand that family and kinship represent the key themes that Marta addresses in her works through a range of perspectives and methodologies. It is no accident that it is she who represents ethnological studies

on family in Slovakia. First, as she was mentored by Dr. Emília Horváthová, there was her research into family traditions, and later the application of statistical methods particularly in research on birth-rate regulation and single-child families which she did in the linguistically and ethnically mixed regions of southern Slovakia. Her use of research methods hitherto unknown in Slovakia are a proof of Marta's courage to engage in less familiar or proven disciplines. This tendency remains present in her approach up to this very day, as she moves with ease from family and kinship to gender, and to the status of women and an analysis of their life experiences. All of this was apparent as early as in her dissertation entitled *The Status of Peasant Woman in Family and Community (An Attempt to Identify Ethno-Differential Factors)*, which she completed in 1986 at the Department of Ethnology in the Comenius University Faculty of Philosophy. In accord with her research focus on the history of everyday life, micro-history or history from below, she has drawn from her long engagement with the life experiences of women in biographical research particularly in the Communist era. She did her biographical research with women from rural and urban contexts and published it within the framework of a project entitled the "Memory of Women." Her reconstruction of experienced and narrated life stories touches upon the different contexts of the individual and social life of women.

In the presentation of her material, Marta painted a vivid portrayal of and gave voice to these women. It is likely that the very choice of research topics, raising questions, and the critical assessment of arguments in a discussion within the context of family and kinship, gender and women, is evidence of the unobtrusive, yet emancipated aspect in Marta's works. The same applies to research projects within medical anthropology which she has taken under her expert auspices.

The Lowlands, Martin Jonáš, America, and totem poles

Another major thread in Marta's research is the extensive theme of ethnicity, ethnic identification, and migration, about which she also lectures. She researched the plurality of ethnic relations within the family and larger community in southern Slovakia and among Slovaks living in the "Lowlands" – Hungary and Vojvodina. Her research into ethnic relations has focused on exploring what brings people together rather than what divides them. Her lectures on migration and ethnic processes use plenty of visual materials which help students immerse themselves in contemplation about the value of coexistence and overcoming differences, as well as about the dangers of ethnic conflict. She might use, for example, a quotation from the film *12 Angry Men* or introduce a discussion about painting by the naive painters from Kovačica, Serbia. Expressive paintings by

Martin Jonáš and the stories contained within still decorate the walls in her office. They have served many as a valuable tool when reading the lifestyle map of Slovaks in the Lowlands.

Marta's personal and professional path includes two long Fulbright sabbaticals that enabled her to research and lecture in the United States. She used the material gathered from research into the traditions of American Indians on America's northwest coast to develop a lecture series and write an academic publication. Moreover, specialists and the wider public had an opportunity to enjoy her successful exhibition "In the Land of the Totem Poles" with photographic contributions by her husband, Professor Ján Botík.

Her "Own Room"

When I ask myself about what is unique and significant about Marta Botíková, the answer is: her autonomy. Her need for her "own room" as an essential condition for self-realisation ultimately has led to her ability to support the self-fulfilment and growth of others. Openness in communication, honesty in intentions, and, at the same time, an effort to be in touch with others – all these are attributes that have helped Marta enhance common work and achieve synergy.

Marta's work and endeavours are closely linked to others. First, she inspires her students, motivates them towards their first independent research, and provides them an opportunity to publish. She helps them acquire invaluable editorial, publishing, research and grant-writing skills. She supervises a number of student works, including successful dissertations at all levels – Bachelor, Master and Doctoral theses. Since 2003, as Head of Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, now named the Department of Ethnology and Museology, she has continued to enhance cooperation between instructors and students. She knows each student by name even years after their graduation. This shows her lasting interest in them, far above and beyond her academic responsibility. It is with equal commitment that she dedicates her time, energy and professionalism to building friendships, collegial relations and partnerships. She does it all with an abundance of humour, sharp observations, sensitivity, and readiness to share and lead a dialogue no matter the circumstances.

Our account of Marta Botíková's human and professional qualities can go on and on. It is with utter delight that I have the opportunity here to wish her--my teacher and friend--a continuing abundance of creative energy, work inspiration and plenty of joy in all that life has to offer. Many happy returns, Marta!

Miroslava Bobáková