UNIVERSITAS COMENIANA BRATISLAVENSIS
FACULTAS PHILOSOPHICA
Tomus 41 ETHNOLOGIA SLOVACA ET SLAVICA 2020

LADISLAV LENOVSKÝ
(2016, 2017, 2018)

NAŠI VO SVETE – SLOVÁCI JUŽNE OD HRANICE SLOVENSKA I. – III.
[OUR FOLK ABROAD – SLOVAKS TO THE SOUTH OF SLOVAKIA'S BORDER I. – III.]

NADLAC: EDITURA IVAN KRASKO, 166 pp., 147 pp., 201 pp.

At the beginning of my review essay I will try to give objective information in order to be able to be personal and subjective at its end. Prof. PhDr. Ladislav Lenovský, PhD. is an ethnologist and culturologist. He worked at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra and is currently a professor in the Department of Ethnology and non-European Studies of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. His academic research focuses on the issue of Slovaks abroad, Slovak cultural heritage, issues of interculturalism and multiculturalism. He is the author and co-author of over twenty academic monographs and specialist publications and more than sixty academic papers and specialist articles published in Slovakia and abroad. In the last century, he carried out field research in fourteen Slovak communities in Hungary, Serbia, Romania and Croatia. Recently, his field of interest has expanded, and he deals with the problem of Slovak enclaves across the Atlantic – specifically in Argentina, and most recently in Canada.

In his three-volume monograph synthesis, which we are formally presenting today to the public, "Our Folk Abroad – Slovaks to the South of Slovakia's Border I-III", the objects of his interest are Slovaks living abroad, specifically those who

found their new home to the south of the borders of Slovakia. Colloquially, we most frequently refer to this area as the Low Land [*Dolná zem* in Slovak]. However, in the introduction to his synthesis Ladislav Lenovský points out problems caused by this label, most importantly the fact that to the south of the borders of Slovakia there are also Slovak communities which do not feel part of the Low Land, just as the rest of the Slovak Low Land does not see them as an organic part of their Low Land milieu. In such a situation when Lenovský's academic research also focuses on such non-Low Hungary communities, it is more accurate to speak of Slovaks living to the south of Slovakia's border. In his research, Lenovský starts from the need to describe and define the identity – or identities – of these Slovaks, on which he also bases the methodology of his work:

> As well as visible acts and products (artefacts, activities, rituals, behaviour), there are also (invisible at first glance) opinions, attitudes, values and norms which evoke and define the acts themselves and their production. The latter are determined by (usually hidden and unconscious) ways and mechanisms of thinking, the formation of a world view and basic ideological starting-points for understanding themselves, as well as the surrounding natural and socio-cultural environment. To record the first – visible – layer of their culture and, by using its analysis, to determine and identify the second layer and by interpreting, inducing and deducing these to reveal the third layer is the demanding, but essential task/challenge of culturology research.

In his research, the author has placed the emphasis on the emic principle of research: this research principle, as well as the approach to looking at a certain phenomenon theoretically and methodologically, was developed by Marvin Harris, finding its place not only in ethnography, but also in anthropology, sociology etc. The emic principle comes into play when "in order to understand and describe a certain phenomenon, it is necessary to base ourselves on "folk category", on the understanding of the actors of the described fact themselves. Members of different social, ethnic, professional, religious and other groups also have such "folk" categories. Those categories in particular in which the minorities differ from the majority society are significant."

Using a method as set out above, Lenovský was able to obtain the confidence of numerous informants, which was expressed by them "appreciating" the interest shown by the researcher in their opinion, which "motivated them to cooperate". In terms of Lenovský's methodology, we must point out two more factors: he carried out his research on the one hand in sites which had been on the margins of academic interest in research to date (in Hungary the Transdanubian village of Jásd (Jášť), Senváclav in Pilis, Vanyarc (Veňarc) in Novohrad, Sári (Šára) near Budapest, Dunaegyháza (Eďháza) on the Danube; in the Vojvodina area: Pivnice (Pivnica), Silbaš, Boljevci (Boľovce), Vojlovica; in Romania Butin (Butín), then

the two Bihor county villages of Borumlaca (Borumlak) and Varzari (Varzaľ); in Croatia Soljani (Soľany) and – on the other hand in representative sites (such as Békéscsaba (Békešská Čaba), or Nadlac (Nadlak)), which then gave him the opportunity to "verify existing stereotypes applied in history, and compare them with the current situation and real perspectives".

The second important feature of Lenovský's monograph is – and I consider it a key and fundamental feature – the comparison, confrontation, or "thematic synthesis of individual contexts of identities across locations – which became the main challenge for the concept of the present publication".

After the introductory part, in which he explains the theoretical and methodological basis of his work, Lenovský comes to the issue of settlement. He deals with the latter at the level of wider historical contexts, but is fascinated in the first instance by the specific features of individual communities, so even in this chapter we find four sub-chapters in which the author reflects on the personalities of the settlement, as well as the additional settlement, foundation, re-foundation etc of Slovaks in Borumlaca and Varzari, Pilisszentlászló, Pivnice and Vojlovica.

The core of this part of the monographic synthesis, however, is the analysis of the Low Land communities via the prism of the phenomenon of identity. Lenovský shows that a person has as many identities as groups of which he/she is a member, and that the complex identity of a specific person or society is composed of many partial identities. In this part of the monograph, the author focuses specifically on local and socio-professional identity. Since this monograph indicates already in its title that it is the first part of a broader analytical survey, the author explicitly states that further forms of identity, such as ethnic, confessional and cultural identity, will be the object of interest of the second and third parts of this monographic synthesis.

Belonging to the place of birth and residence is the basis for local identity, and on the other hand, "the socio-professional identity expresses a person/group's belonging to a profession or professional group, which then influences their status in the social hierarchy and inclusion in the social class within the community." In his synthesis, Lenovský presents us with wide-ranging research material on how selected Slovak communities south of Slovakia's border approach these two phenomena, what identity they create and to what extent the latter are an identifiable expression of their essence and being.

In the second part of the monographic synthesis ("Our Folk Abroad... II") Slovak communities south of Slovakia's border are analysed from the point of view of ethnic and religious identity; in the third part of this synthesis, Lenovský places the emphasis on issues of cultural identity, focusing his research and conclusions on two main fields: the first contains the customs of the cycle of life (such as customs at birth, childhood and adolescence, and wedding customs), and the second field of interest deals with customs of the calendar cycle – divided into individual seasons).

In relation to the aim of researching religious and confessional phenomena, Lenovský states in his methodological notes: "The real world, way of life and thinking, as well as the identity of members of the communities studied do not exist solely in minority ethnic and religious contexts, but also in all the others. For this reason, it is essential to discover the extent to which belonging to a minority ethnic group and confession are important and characteristic in the life of members of the communities studied. What place do ethnic and religious identity have in the structure of their complex identity? The existence of minority ethnic and religious signs is not a self-willed process with a clear-cut result. They are only transferred down the generations in justified cases – when their bearers see their meaning and perceive them as values."

With this gradual clarification of individual elements which form a common denominator, as is identity, the author tries to answer the question as to who are the Slovaks living to the south of Slovakia's border. The author tries to help us answer the question of why these people still feel that they are Slovaks, of how they are tlike us and how are they different. How can we counter them when they try to persuade us in moments of inspiration that down there in the Low Land they are more Slovak than those living in Slovakia? In addition, at the same time, by examining these phenomena, these Slovaks from the Low Land provide us with the opportunity for us Slovaks, too, to ask ourselves the question as to what our Slovakness consists of. And what makes us real Slovaks and them only variations of Slovaks? What is more, a fixed Slovak national ethnicity or one that develops naturally. Then we catch ourselves out by realising that we cannot answer accurately the question as to what the natural development of Slovaks in Slovakia consists of. Can we talk about natural development when we lived for so long here under the Tatras without a national state? After all, until 1918, we lived in the same state as those Slovaks from the Low Land.

In his synthesis, Ladislav Lenovský confirms that by conducting research into the Slovaks from the Low Land, his understanding of such phenomena as are the nation, Slovaks, Slovakness, national history, culture, social context etc. becomes more complicated, that each new discovery made in his analysis of the Slovaks of the Low Land becomes a more complicated explanation of what he thought he knew in relation to the phenomena which took place or are still taking place in Slovakia.

The concept of identity is linked to the most existential questions which we ask ourselves as part of our basic ontological questionings: how we ask ourselves, at festive times, on a Sunday, in the tranquility of a quiet afternoon: who am I? What am I doing in this world? What is my life about? And we ask ourselves the same question in a practical context, that is a social, political, official one: when the same question – who are you? - is asked by a police officer, a judge, an official carrying out a census or a notary come to sign our last will and testament.

Several important features are characteristic of Lenovský's academic research method: the first is that he looks at the phenomenon of Low Land Slovaks through the eyes of someone "from outside". Unlike the authors who made a significant contribution to knowledge about these Slovak communities and who came from this very environment, or lived here for a long time, so much so that they merged with these people and this environment (Ľudovít Haan, Andrej Mráz, Ján Sirácky, Ján Botík atď.), Lenovský comes "from outside", from Slovakia and is not burdened by the stereotypes of looking at individual communities or individual phenomena which determine the life of Low Land Slovaks; he is not part of any of the local camps, clans, does not need to take into account any territorial claims, he is not a Vojvodina Slovak and does not have to be careful to give enough space in his research to those from Nadlac; he is not from Békéscsaba and does not need to apologise for giving more space to Békéscsaba than to Tótkomlós, Pazov or Petrovac etc. – the only thing that he must be careful about, is for his research to be sufficiently representative and objective in order to be able to describe correctly what he has discovered and - *sine ira et studio* – to be able to interpret it and evaluate it correctly.

Lenovský came to the Low Land as a young man with an innocent mind and heart and began to get to know the world of the Slovak Low Land. He was not a completely blank slate, he had inside him great support on which he could rely at any time on this first journey across an unknown sea: that support was the academic method and theoretical knowledge which he had adopted during his university studies. He was like Jean-Francois Champollion, who at a certain point discovered the mystery of hieroglyphs and now wanders around the inscribed chambers of Egyptians temples and reads with unprecedented excitement the stories of which no-one had ever dreamed. With this elementary academic baggage, Lenovský also arrived in the Low Land and began to discover the two-hundred-year-old stories of the local Slovaks, to whom almost no-one listens and in whom almost no-one is interested anymore – in particular when you are inside the story, when you are a local. Two-hundred-year-old stories which every Low Land inhabitant had heard many times over and over again, even in different versions, and to which they have probably also contributed with their own particular twist in this bizarre mix of myths, legends, anecdotes and babble. This can only interest someone pure, someone from outside, a Slovak from Slovakia whom we, Low Land Slovaks, want to surprise with our preserved Slovakness, to overwhelm and beguile – even if it makes us bristle when this Slovak from Slovakia admits honestly and movingly: "God, how nicely you speak Slovak!"

Ladislav Lenovský must still remember today when and where he heard for the first time the words *handrovka* (home-made carpet, the word derived from *handra* – rug), *gecel* (skirt), *riťká* or *repové rezance* (pasta made from potatoes,

but *riťka* also means "ass") which they "*močia* v dare" (wet/covered in semoline, but *močiť* also means "urinate"), when and where he witnessed a škriepka (quarrel) where they make the best sausages, when and where he tasted for the first time the Low Land *dulovica* (alcoholic drink made from *dula* – quince) or from *moruša* – mulberry, (in the Low Land Slovak dialect mulberry is called *jahoda*, which in standard Slovak means strawberry) and *jahodovo pálenô* (malberry spirit) – about which he later discovered that it is not made from strawberries, but from mulberries, and he must have shaken his head in surprise when he discovered in the dictionary of the Slovak language that even in Slovakia in some places mulberries are called strawberries and that even Martin Kukučin used it with that meaning; thus it is not some kind of Low Land mistake. And he must remember even today when he probably fell off his chair when during his onomastic research he discovered that one part of the village of Pivnice has been called for as long as anyone remembers *Pičkovec* (this word derives from *pička* – vagina; it used here as a toponymic expression – probably the name of a marginal part of the village)[1] Why? No-one knows any more. Or more precisely: they know – all of them – and each has a load of evidence to prove theirs is the only correct interpretation.

Lenovský carried out his research, beginning "from scratch", so every piece of information was a new discovery for him. And this is what makes Lenovský different from the other researchers I mentioned: the approach of the latter was that they knew the whole picture, and at a certain point they decided to raise their knowledge up to the level of academic discourse. Lenovský works in the opposite direction: he describes at the level of academic discourse individual phenomena and tries to understand and explain the whole. When describing his methodological approaches, the author states:

> The criteria for choosing research locations were: 1. the lack of attention paid them by researchers to date and a minimum of existing materials, and, on the other hand, 2. the location's historical representativeness and many existing works about them, 3. conditions for field research, 4. coverage of the whole space.

The research took place between 2005 and 2016 in truly little known and talked about locations, such as:

> Hungary- the Transdanubian village of Jásd (Jášť) in the area of the Bakony mountains, Pilisszentlászló in Pilis, Vanyarc (Veňarec) in Novohrad (Vanyarc), Sári (Šára) near Budapest, now part of the town of Dabas (Dabas – Sári), Dunaegyháza (Eďház) on

[1] Meaning of jokes follows from double-meaning of the local terms.

the Danube and the town of Békescsaba (Békešská Čaba); Serbia (autonomous area of Vojvodina) – the Bačka villages of Pivnice (Pivnica) and Silbaš, Boljevci (Boľovce) near Belgrade – even though in administrative and government terms it does not belong to the Vojvodina – and Vojlovica in Banat, now part of the town of Pančevo (Vojlovica – Pančevo); Romania – the town of Nadlac (Nadlak) in the Arad county, the village of Butin (Butín) in the Romanian part of the Banat, and the two Bihor county villages of Borumlaca (Borumlak) and Varzari (Varzaľ) in Transylvania. Croatia is represented by the village of Soljani (Soľany) in the Slavonian part of Syrmia.

The second significant feature of Lenovský's academic research is his research into phenomena which we could label as unique, variant, accidental, specific etc. "The aim of the research was: 1) to obtain, record, process and present material on as yet little or unstudied Slovak communities and thus extend existing knowledge and 2) to verify existing historical stereotypes on the representativeness of the location and to compare them with the current situation and future prospects of the Slovak minorities present" This, too, is linked to a certain extent to the fact that the author does not approach the object of study from the perspective of his *a priori* knowledge and grasp of the subject; his striking shift towards an analysis of highly variable phenomena (which includes the choice of the above-mentioned locations), not only completes the picture of Low Land Slovaks, but also opens up new perspectives on perceiving the overlapping of individual phenomena, when the phenomenon of Low Land Slovaks can also be considered as a space where common internal characteristics occur. Here, too, comes a decisive, break-through moment in Lenovský's method, when he studies not only what makes these communities stand out, what makes them different and specific in a majority environment with a different ethnic group, but also what is similar, or identical with the context of the majority:

Ethnic and religious aspects within the research into (not only) European ethnic minorities are already traditionally dealt with more than others in ethnological, socio-cultural, anthropological and culturological research. In addition, other aspects of the way of life of minorities are usually studied and interpreted as ethnic (or ethnic-religious). In the case of the research on Slovaks in Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia, this applies twofold. These people (sometimes even too often and in a simplified manner) are automatically stigmatised and presented primarily as Slovaks, or of Slovak origin, for their image is historically formed by this different ethnic and religious identity. Interest in them is motivated by this very type of difference from the surrounding environment, which might paint an interesting picture of them, albeit only a partial one.

For part of the complex picture also includes what is the same, what does not distinguish them in any way from the others. Such a reduced methodological starting-point may lead to a generalisation, which also offers some type of pre-fabricated image of minorities.

> It creates the impression of a network of ethnically (and partially religiously) homogenous Slovak communities/locations distributed to the south of Slovakia's border.

And it is because of the clearly defined distinction between the invariable and the variable that Lenovský succeeds in precisely structuring the situation relating to the issue of ethnic identity among individual Law Land communities:

> Whereas in Romania and Serbia ethnic identification and self-identification still appear to be more direct and clearer, in Hungary and in Croatia we need to think in a completely different manner in these contexts. Several Slovak communities in Romania and Serbia still retain the nature of ethnic enclaves with a relatively clear ethnical self-awareness and identification. Those who are of Slovak origin and whose mother tongue is Slovak, identify themselves as Slovaks here to a much greater extent than is the case in Hungary and Croatia.

The important historian from among the ranks of Vojvodina Slovaks Prof. Samuel Čelovský pointed out to me once a piece of data worthy of note: at some time in the 1930s, just before the Second World War, the then president of *Matica slovenska* in Yugoslavia, Dr. Ján Bulík reported at a congress of Czechoslovak minorities abroad in Prague that Yugoslav Slovaks were living in ethnically unmixed marriages – the total number of such mixed marriages was: two! Eighty years later, a friend of the family, let us call her Táňa, from the Slovak-Serb village of Kulpin (Kulpín) in the Serbian Vojvodina told us of her experience during a population census: when asked to what ethnic group she professed to belong, she answered "Serb". The clerk, who was a local man and knew the family situations of all the inhabitants of Kulpín, smiled while writing this down and added: "Of course, your father was a Serb." Asked about her religious appurtenance, she replied: Evangelical of the Augsburg confession. The clerk noted in surprised: "I've never heard of a Serb being an Evangelical." Asked about her mother tongue, Táňa replied: Slovak. The clerk thought a little and said: "Yes, your mother is Slovak." Táňa replied: "Well, not exactly, because only my grandfather Samuel Vida was Slovak, but my grandmother was Vorličeková." "Czech?" asked the clerk. "Partially, because only my great-grandfather was Czech, and his wife Nencika was half-German, after her father – and her mother was Hungarian, so she only spoke Hungarian."

Today, Táňa teaches Slovak in a primary school in Kulpin, where there were two Slovak classes in each year thirty years ago. This school year, five children enrolled in the Slovak class in the first year.

In the space between Bulík's report on the situation of the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia, the ethnic-religious identity of Frau Vorličeková's grand-daughter and

the decline of Slovak schooling in Kulpin, Ladislav Lenovský looks for fragments of reports which might explain the situation and reason for these matters.

Ladislav Lenovský is certainly aware of the fact that there is one reason to be happy and one reason to feel bitter: the reason to be happy is the fact that he managed to bring his research to a successful conclusion and publish a academic testimony of it – a synthesis – which is the most cherished desire and imperative of every scholar and every piece of research. For this, we owe him our thanks and recognition, for this we also owe thanks and recognition to the Ivan Krasko Culture and Science Society from Nadlac, Pavol Hlásnik and Ivan Miroslav Ambruš, also for bringing this work to a successful conclusion.

The bitter feeling will certainly come from the realisation that after him, no-one will ever carry out any comparative research on a similar scale, because there will probably be no-one on whom to carry out the research: the object of his interest is becoming assimilated in the meantime – in the context of a globalising world, as well as through new phenomena such as intensive departures, or the return of Low Land Slovaks to Slovakia etc. Further features will only be the offspring of Slovakia if they have or not an awareness of their Slovak roots. Lenovský's synthesis was created at the last moment, when the Slovak enclaves south of Slovakia's borders are spoken of as green shoots.

Unless...

The only possible consolation for this – essentially – natural and ruthless development and the fate of every national enclave abroad is if we help ourselves by using the categories of post-structuralist philosophy and if, following in the footsteps of Deleuze and Baudrillaud we begin talking about simulacrums. In the opinion of these two philosophers, the term of simulacrum is seen as an "emptied picture, an ordinary form without content, an icon, an imitation." At first glance, the Slovak communities south of Slovakia's borders might be such a form without content: they have already lost their Slovak essence, only a formal labelling of origin has remained.

But the situation begins to be interesting in a postmodern way, if we delve deeper into Baudrillard's text, when the simulacrum takes on the dimensions of a "virtual copy of a non-existent original which is more realistic than reality." In the postmodern era, warns Baudrillard, the difference between the original and the copy disappears; only the simulacrum exists. The over-production of symbols has caused them to be pulled away from the object of representation, and by becoming a cycle, it has caused the end of reality as such. If Baudrillard is right, the old dilemma about whether the more real, truer, that is more original Slovaks are those

Slovaks in the Low Land or those in Slovakia, begins to take on peculiar, even absurd dimensions, from a contemporary viewpoint. If the difference between the original and the copy disappears, if reality per se disappears, as Baudrillard says, I am afraid that those of us living in Slovakia will be drawing the short straw in this discussion: contemporary philosophy will not say we are right, however much we protest, for example, by saying "Slovakia is here" and "This is our home!". I can imagine at some point in time a "Vojvodina Slovak" arguing to my grandson (living in Slovakia) that he's an original Slovak, unlike my grandson and all those who live in Slovakia, using the thesis of the French philosopher quoted as his argument, speaking in the new Slovak Vojvodina dialect: "*Pa bre, koji si ti Slovak? I Bodrijar kaže da sam ja pravi Slovak a ne ti, jebo te ja!*"

Michal Babiak

REFERENCES

Bednárik, R. (1966). *Slováci v Juhoslávii* [Slovaks in Yugoslavia]. Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied.

Bielik, F., Siracky, J., & Baláž, C. (1984). *Zahraniční Slováci a národné kultúrne dedičstvo* [Slovaks Abroad and National Cultural Heritage]. Martin: Matica slovenská.

Botík, J. (2011). *Dolnozemskí Slováci* [Low Land Slovaks]. Nadlac (Romania): Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko.

Botík, J. (2016). *Slováci vo Vojvodine* [Slovaks in Vojvodina]. Nový Sad (Serbia): Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Slovaks.

Botiková, M. (1995). *Slováci v zahraničí* [Slovaks Abroad]. In *Slovensko* [Slovakia] (pp. 332–371). Bratislava: Perfekt.

Čelovský, S. (2011). *Z kultúrnych dejín Slovákov vo Vojvodine* [On the Cultural History of Slovaks in Vojvodina]. Bački Petrovac (Serbia): Local section of *Matica slovenská* Bački Petrovac.

Harpáň, M. (2000). *Zápas o identitu*. [Struggle for Identity] Nadlac (Romania): Vydavateľstvo Ivan Krasko.

Miklovic, J. (2008). *Stará Pazova 1769–1794*. Stará Pazova (Serbia): Centar za kulturu: Kanadem.

Mráz, A. (2004). *Rozhovory o juhoslovanských Slovákoch*. [Discussions about Yugoslav Slovaks] In Andrej Mráz, *Rozhovory o vojvodinských Slovákoch 1* [Discussions on Vojvodina Slovaks I] (pp. 135–211). Bački Petrovac (Serbia): Slovenské vydavateľské centrum.

Ormis, J. V. (2013). *Kultúrne snahy Slovákov v Juhoslávii*. [Cultural Efforts of Slovaks in Yugoslavia] In: Ján V. Ormis: *Literárno-historická publicistika* (pp. 339–397). Bački Petrovac (Serbia): Slovenské vydavateľské centrum.

Sirácky, J. (1985). *Dlhé hľadanie domova* [The Long Search for Home]. Martin: Matica slovenská.

Sirácky, J. (1966). *Sťahovanie Slovákov na Dolnú zem v 18. a 19. storočí* [Slovak Emigration to the Low Land in the 18th and 19th Centuries]. Bratislava: Matica slovenská.

Sirácky, J. et al. (1980). *Slováci vo svete 1 [Slovaks Abroad 1]*. Martin: Matica slovenská.

Vereš, A. (1930). *Slovenská evanjelická kresťanská cirkev a.v. v Kráľovstve juhoslovanskom v slove a obrazoch* [The Slovak Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Words and Pictures]. [Bački] Petrovac: self-published.

Vojnićová Feldyová, S. (Ed.) (2017). *Slovenská evanjelická augsburského vyznania cirkev v Srbsku v slove a obrazoch* [The Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia in Words and Pictures]. Nový Sad (Srbsko): Slovenská evanjelická a.v. cirkev v Srbsku.

Ústav pre kultúru vojvodinských Slovákov. Retrieved September 5, 2019, from http://www.slovackizavod.org.rs/