

REVIEWS

ZACHAR PODOLINSKÁ, Tatiana – POPELKOVÁ, Katarína. *STORY OF COHESION: On the History of an Academic Institution*. Bratislava: VEDA, 2023. 432 pages.

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The book *Story of Cohesion* traces the history of the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology (ÚESA) at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV) from its beginnings in 1946 to the present day. The book was published on the occasion of the 77th anniversary of the founding of the Institute. According to the preface, the book is “*contribution to the anthropology of academic institutions in Central Europe from the latter half of the 20th century until nowadays. On the background of longue durée processes and profound political, ideological, and economic transformations, the book displays the micro-temporalities in the life of the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology within the Slovak Academy of Sciences.*”

We must agree with the author’s assertion that the book is not simply a list of the Institute’s staff, publications, and projects. It is a scientific publication with a carefully developed concept that requires long-term preparation. The authors used methods typical of their discipline – anthropological perspective, historical ethnography, and memory studies – to document the history of their institute. The book is based on archival sources and secondary literature, but its main innovation is the extensive use of personal testimonies of former and current employees of the Institute. In this respect, ÚESA has a great advantage. Its academic focus naturally emphasizes the importance of such sources. This means that the Institute’s staff have long been recording their own accounts of what goes on in the workplace.

The use of these sources makes this book particularly compelling and sets it apart from similar publications in a positive way. It is not just a dry institutional history, but also conveys the opinions, attitudes, feelings and emotions of the Institute’s staff. The authors are right in saying that they have captured “*the nature of the Institute as a living organism during the socialist, post-socialist, and post-transitional periods.*”

It should also be emphasized that the book provides an overview of the history of ethnology as a professional scientific discipline in Slovakia in the second half of the 20th century. Although ÚESA and its predecessors have always been relatively small research units within the Academy, they have always played a key role in shaping the discipline of ethnological research in Slovakia. The institute’s academic development, research agendas, and publishing activities have significantly influenced the discipline nationwide.

Like other social sciences and humanities, before 1989 ethnology was one of the ideologically controlled disciplines, and its development during the communist period (and after) was closely tied to political changes. The book describes how the Institute and its staff had to respond to frequent radical political changes, reorganizations within

the SAV, changing forms of academic evaluation, and chronic problems with research funding. Changes in academic approaches also played a crucial role. The central argument of the book, reflected in its title, is that the story of cohesion and mutual support among generations of Institute staff is the core thesis of the Institute's history.

The book is divided into four main chapters representing four generations of ÚESA researchers. The first is the "founding generation," active in the 1950s and 1960s. It was followed by the "builder generation" during the normalization years of the 1970s and 1980s. The "transformational generation" worked to rebuild the Institute in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. Today, the "innovator generation" leads ÚESA. The four parts address the key challenges of each generation and analyze the complex interactions among its members.

Each of the main chapters is further subdivided into smaller sections dealing with the Institute's institutional and personnel development, major research directions, international scientific collaborations, major internal and external challenges that have influenced its functioning, and informal relationships among staff. One of the strengths of the book is that the Institute's development is not described in a vacuum. Instead, the authors consistently link its history to changes in Slovakia's political landscape during the second half of the 20th century. External factors are used as a basis for describing the Institute's development and explaining the strategies used by its staff to achieve its goals.

Criticism can be levelled at the significant imbalance in the length of the chapters. While the first generation receives only ten pages and the second 35, the period after 1989 takes up more than 300 pages. This is, of course, a logical consequence of the availability of sources – the closer to the present, the more sources there are. A similar situation applies to personal testimonies, which play a key role in the book.

A second criticism cannot be attributed to objective reasons. It concerns the fact that one of the authors is the long-time director of ÚESA. The section on the Institute's development over the past decade is sometimes clearly written from Tatiana Zachar Podolinská's perspective. While her leadership of the Institute has undoubtedly been successful, this one-sidedness detracts from the book's impartiality, especially when it includes laudatory quotes from her subordinates (p. 260). This is especially noticeable because earlier chapters do not show such tendencies.

The authors openly admit that their book is a *laudatio* for ÚESA on the occasion of its anniversary. While celebratory elements are present, they are by no means dominant. It is not an uncritical publication. On the contrary, it is an original and high-quality scholarly work. It is perhaps the best written history of a specific academic institution in Slovakia to date, especially the chapters dealing with the period after 1989. Despite the aforementioned criticisms, the book's greatest strength is its extensive use of personal testimonies. Most of them were collected specifically for this work. For one of the most internationalized and globally networked institutes in the social sciences and humanities, it is fitting that this book is published in English.

The professional and original design of the book matches its content and the image of the Institute. It is unfortunate, however, that it does not include photographs, which would have been useful for documenting the work and life at ÚESA and would have enriched the text.

In conclusion, *Story of Cohesion* is a scholarly, rigorous, original work that innovatively describes the development of ÚESA and its predecessors. It is a unique contribution to the history of academic institutions in Slovakia. The book will be of interest to anyone interested in the history of science. Its originality, analytical depth, modern approach, and appropriate design may inspire other similar Slovak institutions to begin documenting their histories.

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PERSIAN, Jayne. *FASCISTS IN EXILE. Post-War Displaced Persons in Australia*. London: Routledge, 2024, 192 pages.

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“Every nation has its ‘history wars’, contentious debates about the past, what happened and why it is still important. The past, after all, is intrinsic to the idea of nationhood.”¹ This is how Glenda Sluga started her study in the book *The Historian’s Conscience. Australian Historians on the Ethics of History* from 2004, and its thought-provoking idea clearly continues to resonate within historical community, providing a stimulus for researchers, particularly in the selection of their topics.

In “Fascist in exile“, historian Jayne Persian brings attention to the intricate dynamics of post-war history, migration, and the impact of fascist emigres on Australia and Europe. In the first chapter, the author describes the general development of post-war regulations and the political and legal consequences for Nazi collaborators and other prisoners of war in the countries of Central Eastern Europe. In this chapter, she also illustrates how Western countries dealt with the issue of former Nazi collaborators trying to escape Soviet influence in the context of the Cold War.

The author then describes the decisions of the Australian government regarding the reception of displaced persons, including the system of Australian migration policy and its bureaucratic apparatus. This chapter also includes information within the international context, such as United Nations resolutions. The author demonstrates the steps taken by the Australian government using specific examples of displaced persons and the criteria for their acceptance. She describes the efforts of the Australian government representatives to reinstate the immigration regime act of 1901, which aimed to prevent the integration of racial diversity. The problematic past was perceived only in terms of leaning towards communist ideology and connections to the Soviet Union.

In the following chapter, the focus shifts to describing the emerging resistance of part of the Australian population in the 1950s and 1960s against the actions of the Australian

1 SLUGA, Glenda. Whose History. In MACINTYRE, Stuart, ed. *The Historian’s Conscience. Australian Historians on the Ethics of History*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004, s. 127.