

Ort, Jan. *Facets of a Harmony: The Roma and Their Locatedness in Eastern Slovakia*. Translated by Philip Jones. Prague: Carolinum Press, 2022. 230 pages. Paperback, \$20.00.

Czechia and Slovakia are two countries where cultural anthropology departments have been at the forefront of advancing cultural anthropology (*etnológia* as it is called in Slovak) because of the diversity of subcultures found in each, from the Moravians to the Rusyn. They have also been two nations whose anthropology departments focus on the Roma due to their proximity and access to Roma settlements. They have many advantages in researching the Roma: Czechs and Slovaks have been in contact with the Roma for generations, and many anthropologists are born polyglots. Yet, the Roma have also been notoriously hard to study as their language is not Slavic and is only recently codified. Yet one up-and-coming anthropologist has overcome many of the hardships to research the Roma in Eastern Slovakia, and we will probably hear his name much more often: Jan Ort.

Ort demonstrates a real command of both linguistics and cultural anthropology. As of the book's publication, he is still a doctoral candidate at Charles University. Nevertheless, his work adroitly maps out the social capital (or lack thereof) of different classes of Roma among themselves, within an anonymous village, and in Eastern Slovakia in general. He commandingly explains and demonstrates the complexities of the social politics, economics, and prejudices that Roma face through interviews with Slovaks, Rusyns (who are a Slavic subculture in Slovakia), and the Roma themselves—quite obviously using Czech, Slovak, and Romani in his interviews with the citizens of “Jolany,” a village that seems to this reviewer to be around Svidník, Slovakia.

Here, it is important to note one characteristic of cultural anthropology in Czechia and Slovakia: The General Data Protection Regulation, which is the guiding law of the EU

surrounding personal data, deems that people have a right to anonymity. Because many of the villages where the Roma are intermingled with the Slovak population are very small, the cultural anthropologist often resorts to renaming villages in their academic works to protect the identities of the target research population. The villages are so small, in fact, that just using pseudonyms for the subjects does not go far enough: if someone is quoted as saying something that could be considered disparaging, the phrasing of the quip may be enough for others in that village or just outside of that village to know the “culprit.” Also, the Roma population deserves its autonomy and privacy and changing the name of the village from whatever it actually is to “Jolany” protects that population from unwelcome intrusion. Therefore, should the reader wonder why Ort goes to such lengths to protect the target research population, they should know that this derives from his utmost ethical practices in cultural anthropology as well as his adherence to the laws of the European Union. He still mentions his ambivalence towards this practice, as though it protects his research subjects individually and as a whole, the practice of naming the village “Jolany” could also shield him from future criticism should someone else also research the same population and have different results (p.22). His concerns hearken back to the famed discourse on Margaret Mead’s findings being criticized by Derek Freeman.

Ort uses his own field research for evidence of this ethnography interpreted through the lens of Frantz Fanon’s writings, especially *Black Skin, White Masks* (p.30). He demonstrates that even though Jolany prides itself on being a village where Slovaks, Rusyns, and Roma all coexist “without prejudice,” the fact remains that the prejudice against the Roma still exists in Jolany and constitutes the social hierarchies there—even among the Roma themselves. His interviews and observations lead to some troubling facts: the prejudice against the Roma is still rampant among the Slovaks in Jolany and that the prejudices have also integrated into Roma society

there. Even though the Roma, as Ort tells us, may see the actions of the *Gadži* (white people who are not Roma—Slovaks and Rusyns) as inherently unethical compared to the morals of the Roma, there is still a perceived class structure among the Jolany Roma dictated by their proximity to the *Gadži*. Also, there is a perception of class according to which Roma have traveled, say to Czechia to work, and those who have not. Even still, there is a difference among the Jolany Roma and “other” Roma from elsewhere. This perception, Ort demonstrates, exists among the *Gadži* as well. The Jolany Roma, according to the white denizens of that village, are somehow different from the “other” Roma found elsewhere. He demonstrates that in spite of this, when Roma from elsewhere arrive, they are at once an “Other” and yet still part of the “imagined community” (pp. 208-9). He also explains the linguistic prejudices of Slovakia by reminding the reader of the phrase “Slovak in Slovakia (na Slovensku, po Slovensky)” and describes how it at once shows the colonial power of the national language and yet is also usurped by local Romani to solidify their Slovak Roma identity (p. 129). Yet, it is the opinion of this author that here is the only weakness of the book: Ort explains how this phrase was used in Slovak schools but misses his chance to also link this idea to the Slovak fascist song “Rež a rúbaj do krve.”¹ One would expect an admirer of Fanon to attack fascism and colonialism at every opportunity.

Overall, the book is an amazing ethnography of Roma in one Eastern Slovak village and competently demonstrates how ingrained prejudices influence the behaviors of subaltern communities. It is an excellent, thorough case study of how locality, language, customs, and “imagined community” coalesce into a somewhat false narrative of how one village prides itself on being “different” from others while staying just too much the same as anywhere else in Slovakia. This work is perfect for graduate students of cultural anthropology as well as graduate

history students; it is also the first work of what I hope will be many more from this author to make him a powerhouse in the field of cultural anthropology.

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¹ The lyrics to this song are “Reč a chlieb si chránime, nikomu sa nedáme, Na Slovensku po slovensky smelo hlásame,” or “the language and bread we protect, we will succumb to no one, Slovak in Slovakia we say proudly!” This was a song of the Hlinkova Garda, a paramilitary, fascist group from 1938-1944.