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**Katerina Vidner Ferkov**  
katerina.ferkov@ung.si  
University of Nova Gorica  
<http://www.ung.si>

## Ethnological Research in Slovakia in Relation to Medical Anthropology

Tatiana Bužeková

The discipline of cultural or social anthropology was not institutionalized in Slovakia until 2002, when the Department of Social Anthropology was established at the Comenius University in Bratislava. The counterpart of anthropology has been ethnology, initially oriented to traditional/folk culture. Later, since the end of the 1960s, the research area has been broadened: ethnologists started to explore urban communities, ethnic groups, politics, religious movements and various contemporary social phenomena. Thus far, therefore, medical anthropology has not existed in Slovakia as a specific anthropological sub-discipline aimed at exploring bio-cultural adaptation and health issues in relation to cultural context. Ethnographic research in general was not related to anthropological theories, but corresponded to the particular development of ethnology in socialistic countries. Yet, in some areas, it has been related to the topics of health care and sickness, and therefore could be regarded useful for medical anthropologists. This paper will briefly present the relevant topics of ethnological research and make an allusion to some themes of recent research in other disciplines of the social sciences that might motivate anthropologists and ethnologists exploring medical issues.

The list of the main research topics of ethnology in Slovakia (Horváthová 1995: 23 - 43) includes general research questions, such as employment, food, hygienic practices, cosmetics, and social institutions, that might be important for medical anthropology. But these should be interpreted in relation to corresponding theories, and this has not been done so far. Nevertheless some topics in the list are related to medicine. First of all, this concerns the folk knowledge and oral traditions explored by ethnologists as well as folklorists. Ethnographical monographs dedicated to particular villages or regions usually contained chapters on folk beliefs and practices including folk medicine (see, for instance, Horváthová 1974; Jakubíková 1972); the same could be said about encyclopaedic publications comprising many entries related to folk medicine (Veľký, Vladár 1977–1982). Ethnologists have explored, for example, folk beliefs related to various kinds of sickness or different parts of the human body, healing herbs, childbirth practices, magical healing, and the interpretation of illness in supernatural terms, such as witchcraft or

the evil eye. Magical beliefs and practices were often in the focus of ethnologists' attention. This line of research has been continued by some recent publications on regional traditional healing practices (for instance, Marec 2011) and an encyclopaedia of traditional culture, recently published on the internet, that includes such entries as healers, healing/magic practices, healing herbs, and various kinds of sickness (Kiliánová 2011). The prevalence of research on folk/traditional medicine in the sphere of health / sickness has been determined by the initial orientation of ethnology on traditional culture. However, since the 1990s, magical practices related to illness have become an object of research in cognitive anthropology aimed at exploring the cognitive mechanisms involved in folk beliefs (for instance, Jerotijević 2011). This research is not necessarily concerned with traditional culture and might examine cultural models of health and sickness in the context of esoteric movements and alternative/spiritual medicine (Bužeková 2011).

Recent ethnological research in general has tended to be oriented more on contemporary society than traditional culture. Ethnologists have studied the topics of the human body and ageing (Herzánová 2007) or sport activities (Botíková 2005), which might be relevant for medical anthropology. Yet such vital questions as public health care or health education did not attract their attention. But then again these domains have become an important issue in related disciplines, such as in particular sociology and pedagogy (see, for instance, Matulník, Imrichovičová, Brukkerová 1999; Hegyi, Takáčová, Brukkerová 2004). Sociologists and pedagogues exploring the topics of public health care and health education have often used ethnographic research methods; their works might have inspired ethnologists and a new generation of anthropologists, but so far have not had any response. Their results might be helpful for future ethnological and anthropological research that would explore in detail the social conditions of public health care, cultural models of health and illness and mechanisms of their transmission, as well as processes of children's learning and adaptation to their environment.

It could be said that the discipline of medical anthropology in Slovakia does not exist. Yet some ethnological works, as well as results obtained in related social disciplines might motivate future research in this area. Publications on folk medicine describe representations of health and sickness in a broader cultural context and therefore might be useful for investigating cultural modes of healing. On the other hand, sociological and pedagogical works can provide ethnologists with initial data on public health care and health education.

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**Tatiana Bužeková**

dmtania@gmail.com

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Faculty of Arts

Comenius University in Bratislava

<http://www.fphil.uniba.sk>