

Abstract

This thesis discusses a perception of death among Czech expats living in Serbian Banat. History of Czech migration to Banat started in 19th century after the war with Ottoman Empire, when the land was given to settlers from all territories of Habsburg monarchy. Nowadays Banat territory is divided between the countries of Serbia and Romania. Czechs differ from Serbs mostly in their language and catholic faith. Thesis is based on data collected during two expeditions of the Institute of Ethnology CU FA to the municipalities of Bela Crkva, Češko Selo and Kruščica. During the first expedition in 2021 the photos of Czech graves were taken on local catholic cemeteries. During the second expedition in 2022 interviews with the expats were recorded on the topic of funerals, dying and faith. The main research questions were: How Czech expats perceive death and dying? What are the differences between funerals in the past and present? What is the role of the dead in the lives of the living? For data analysis the thesis uses P. Ariès' theory of tamed death, A. Gell's theory of objects' secondary agency and the theory of deathscapes. Tamed death is a death without a taboo, death that is familiar and the actors can prepare for it. The opposite is wild death. Expats speak very openly about the topic. Their image of death is determined by their religious beliefs, but some of the traditions are currently being abandoned and death starts "to get wild." This process is slowed down by the custom of commissioning one's own gravestone during their life. Secondary agency theory assumes, that a primary actor puts their intents into an inanimate object to influence the behaviours of others. The dead body can have agency given by the dead person themselves prior to them passing away or agency given by the bereaved. The expats' funeral rituals have standardized forms, thus the dead as an individual does not have a much individual agency. The deceased stays at home, while their family and friends hold a wake by their body overnight, then the body is buried as soon as possible. This changed in Kruščica after the building of a new chapel, where the body is moved to, and the wake is held there. The dead have more agency as an abstract community, who needs the bereaved to ease their existence by adhering to the rituals. This projects on the role of the dead in the lives of the living. Deathscapes are places associated with the dead and dying, typically cemeteries, which in the expats' case they carry ethnic significance due to the Czech graves being written exclusively in Latin alphabet opposed to Serbian graves in Cyrillic. Mourning persons clothes can also become a deathscape.