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## Unintended Revelations in History Textbooks: The Precarious Authenticity and Historical Continuity of the Slovak Nation<sup>1</sup>

- This article shows how to expose misconceptions of ethnocentric education.
- It applies insights of current scholarship on nationalism.
- Slovakia's history textbooks are examined as a case study.
- Findings undermine the concept of the Slovak nation as authentic and historically continuous.
- The article also underlines implications for research and practice within Slovakia and beyond.

**Purpose:** This article proposes an analytical framework that helps to identify and challenge misconceptions of ethnocentrism found in pre-tertiary teaching resources for history and the social sciences in numerous countries.

**Design:** Drawing on nationalism studies, the analytical framework employs ideas known under the umbrella terms of primordialism, constructivism and ethno-symbolism. In applying it, the conceptualisation of the Slovak nation, as presented in the history textbooks currently used in lower secondary schools in Slovakia, is examined as a case study.

**Findings:** A conceptually inconsistent picture emerges from the findings, displaying prevailing patterns of primordialism and a degree of ethno-symbolism. Nevertheless, the article concludes that history textbooks lend, on a number of occasions, unintended support to constructivism. Hence, both this inconsistency in theoretical approach, and frequent use of problematic assumptions based on primordialism and ethno-symbolism show that the attempts of textbooks' authors to demonstrate the authenticity and historical continuity of the Slovak nation remain precarious.

**Research implications:** The analytical framework used in this article is well-suited for multi-country examinations of national narratives in curricula and textbooks of history and the social sciences.

**Practical implications:** Teaching materials and pedagogic approaches drawing on constructivism could enhance critical engagement with ethnocentrism in Slovakia and beyond.

### Keywords:

History education, national identity, textbooks, Slovakia

### 1 Introduction

This article proposes an analytical framework that helps to identify and challenge misconceptions of ethnocentrism that continue to impact, in particular, the design of pre-tertiary teaching resources for history and the social sciences in numerous countries (e.g. Cajani & Ross, 2007; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013). It is set against a twofold background: the worldwide recurrence of conflict potential of nationalism and the substantial discrepancy between the academic views on national identity and the national narratives used in pre-tertiary education.

The conflict potential of nationalism—as exposed, for example, during the twentieth century by the First and Second World Wars, the decolonisation conflicts in Africa and Asia, and the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, or, more recently, by the Ukrainian crisis and the anti-immigrant sentiments found across Europe and beyond—continues to prompt academic enquiry (Goode, 2014; Legrain, 2009; Özkirimli, 2010; Troconis, 2015).

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This general claim also applies to the analysis of national narratives in curricula and textbooks of history and the social sciences designed for use in pre-tertiary education (e.g. Schüddekopf, 1967; Stobart, 1999; Pingel, 2010; UNESCO, 1949). Despite the controversies about their role which have been raised by academics and educational practitioners, they remain integral components of formal schooling. Curricula underlie the teaching process, and textbooks are seen as their “dominant translations” as well as “national instruments perpetuating cultures and ideologies” (Repoussi & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2010, p. 156). Therefore, it is not surprising that they are considered by many analysts as appropriate objects for academic enquiry.

The research methods employed in the examination of national narratives vary and range from descriptive accounts to more specific, analytical approaches. Kohn's (1944) contentious civic versus ethnic classification of nationalism, which associates western Europe with socio-political maturity in contrast to the central and eastern parts of the continent, has been used alongside other theoretical perspectives such as the world culture theory, which highlights the convergence of educational practices across the globe. Working from single case studies and international comparisons, scholars have acknowledged a distinct shift from uncritical glorification to a more sober evaluation of national histories or the portrayal of other nations. At the same time, they also argue



that the national narratives presented in the curricula and textbooks of history and the social sciences used in pre-tertiary education demonstrate an essentialist bias (e.g. Berghahn & Schissler, 1987; Cajani & Ross, 2007; Findor, 2011; Hranova, 2011; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013; Potapova, 2015; Ridley, 2011). In contrast, in academia a substantial number of scholars reject the notion of nations as essentially unique and antique forms of collective identities (Brubaker, 2009; Özkirimli, 2010).

Motivated by the conflict potential of nationalism and the striking discrepancy between current scholarship and the teaching resources for history and the social sciences used at pre-tertiary level, I would like to contribute to the discussion on how to further the presentation of national identity at this stage of education. In so doing, I will draw attention to the conceptualisation of the nature of nations, which, in my view, lies at the heart of nationalism and its conflict potential. As such, the conceptualisation of the nature of nations should, I believe, remain at the centre of such enquiries. Therefore, by employing ideas that are conveniently summarised in academia under the umbrella terms of primordialism, constructivism and ethno-symbolism, I will develop an analytical framework which can be used to enhance a critical review of the ethnocentric model of education. I feel that this could advance the contribution education can make to the alleviation of the detrimental repercussions of nationalism. Hence, in applying this framework, I will conduct a qualitative examination of history textbooks used in Slovakia at the lower secondary level (with students aged 11-15) and published in the period of 2009-2012. My objective is to critically engage with the following question: Is the Slovak nation conceived of as given and authentic (primordialism), socially constructed and relatively modern (constructivism), or historically continuous (ethno-symbolism) form of collective belonging?

The article proceeds as follows: The second section discusses the research design that underpins my empirical examination and begins by introducing the analytical framework which will guide it. Although the selected paradigms are well known among students of nationalism, for the sake of the clarity of the argument presented herein I will highlight their central ideas. I will also outline the rationale behind the adopted research design, the textbook selection and the method which will be applied to the textbook analysis. In the third part, I will present the findings derived from my examination of textbooks. The fourth and final section of this article is reserved for concluding remarks and a brief discussion of the key implications of this research.

## 2 Research design

### 2.1 Analytical framework

Initially a subject of historiography (in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century), the critical and interdisciplinary scholarship of nationalism has grown exponentially, particularly since the 1980s (Özkirimli, 2010). Despite the continuous controversies,

paradigmatic diversity and “terminological chaos” (Connor, 1994 [1978], p. 91) that have shaped this discussion, the tripartite division of primordialism, constructivism and ethno-symbolism has frequently been used to describe inter-related academic positions within the field (Bačová, 1999; Brubaker, 2009). More importantly for this article, their respective propositions substantially address the central issue which, I believe, remains the question of the nature of nations.

#### 2.1.1 Primordialism

Derived from the Latin term *primordium* (original), which has its roots in *primus* (first) and *ordior* (to begin) (Oxford Dictionaries online), primordialism, frequently also called essentialism, is not considered a dominant approach within the contemporary scholarship (Bačová, 1999; Brubaker, 2009). Rather, it captures longstanding assumptions recorded in the antique accounts of the Greek historians Herodotus (circa 484–425 BC) and Polybius (circa 203–121 BC), and also much later in the writings of Enlightenment thinkers such as the German humanist Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). According to this concept, nations are timeless and authentic subcategories of humanity, initially formed under the influence of a given climate or geographical location. Herder further conceived of nations as extended families linked by ties of common kinship origins and, in particular, native language. Language was for him the most critical aspect of nations, a reflection of collective character and a vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of shared traditions and culture (Huxley and Haddon, 1935; Kohn, 1944).

Herder’s emphasis on vernacular languages and folk traditions as the most valuable repositories of national authenticity proved to be inspirational for early national activists across Europe. In particular, his idealised description of the Slavs, whom he considered to be one nation, as an oppressed but extremely generous and peaceful people with a promising future, was well received by national movements in central and eastern Europe (Drews, 1990; Kohn, 1944). Moreover, Herder’s view of nations appears to be consistent with the perceptions held by the wider public, and is also routinely reproduced in political discourse and in the media (Billing, 1995; Özkirimli, 2010).

#### 2.1.2 Constructivism

Constructivism, frequently referred to as modernism or instrumentalism, is seen by many as the major paradigm in current nationalism studies (Bačová, 1999; Brubaker, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Clearly opposing primordialism, scholars sympathetic to constructivism reject the idea of the essentialist nature of nations and their antiquity. Instead, they consider nations to be novel forms of collective identities. Constructivists see in the industrialisation-triggered socio-economic, political and cultural transformations of the hereditary structure of agrarian societies the preconditions for the formation of nationalism as a political ideology of popular and territorial sovereignty, and



subsequently of nations (Gellner, 1983; Kohn, 1944). Although a matter of dispute, the French Revolution (1789), which significantly shaped the development of national movements across Europe, is frequently viewed as the reference point in this context (Kohn, 1944; Kumar, 2006).

Constructivists further associate the historical evolution of nationalism and nations with the development of modern states, and also emphasise the central role of intellectual and political elites, alongside that of education. While acknowledging the multiple sources of pre-modern collective identities (social structure, religion, dynasties or regions), they interpret nations as relatively modern and socially constructed phenomena (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Kohn, 1944; Özkirimli, 2010). They also argue that the discriminatory institutions of pre-modern societies (slavery, serfdom, the caste system) prevented the development of a mass consciousness of belonging and solidarity. Therefore, constructivists question the existence of nations as fully established forms of collective identities and doubt their socio-political significance prior to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Connor, 1990; Weber, 1976).

### 2.1.3 Ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolism, described by some as perennialism (e.g. Kumar, 2006), is an umbrella term which refers to a further influential approach in contemporary academic discussions on nationalism. It is opposed to, yet partially overlaps with, the constructivist and primordialist perspectives. Ethno-symbolists also accept the influence of industrialisation, bureaucratic states and elites or education in the process of nations' formation. However, they reject the constructivist claim that there was a

major rupture between the collective identities of the pre-modern and modern periods.

While their view on the antiquity of nations cannot be clearly distinguished from that of primordialism, ethno-symbolists remain critical of primordialist assumptions of the given and essentialist character of nations. Instead they underline the continuity of the historically developed "myth-symbol complex" (Armstrong, 1982, p. 131), or the socio-cultural characteristics of pre-modern communities (e.g. myths, symbols, customs, settlements and collective names). As they argue, these can be traced through the centuries and have been instrumental in the process of nation formation. A related assertion of ethno-symbolism is the emphasis on the long-term (*longue durée*) character of nations; accordingly, nations established their roots before the modern era and have developed from ethnic groups (Armstrong, 1982; Özkirimli, 2010; Smith, 2010).

### 2.1.4 Operationalisation

This paper is not based on an assumption that the textbooks would adopt a rigorous conceptual framework. I am also aware that the operationalisation of the analytical framework might seem problematic because of the overlaps between constructivism and ethno-symbolism, and also on account of the crossover between the latter and primordialism. Nevertheless, by focusing on the preconditions of nations' formation, their antiquity and the further aspects which define them, I seek to draw attention to the key aspects of the conceptualisation of the nature of nations. Therefore, the analytical framework, as succinctly summarised in table 1, will guide my empirical examination.

Table 1: Analytical Framework

PRIMORDIALISM	CONSTRUCTIVISM	ETHNO-SYMBOLISM
<p><b>Preconditions of nations' formation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ birth into a given socio-cultural community</li> <li>➤ kinship connection</li> <li>➤ geographical location</li> <li>➤ climate</li> </ul> <p><b>Antiquity of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ timeless</li> </ul> <p><b>Further aspects of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ language</li> <li>➤ collective character</li> <li>➤ shared traditions, culture, history, territory</li> </ul>	<p><b>Preconditions of nations' formation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ industrialisation</li> <li>➤ building of modern states</li> <li>➤ impact of elites</li> <li>➤ education</li> <li>➤ transformation of the hereditary social structure of pre-modern societies</li> </ul> <p><b>Antiquity of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ modern (after 1789)</li> </ul> <p><b>Further aspects of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ novel forms of collective identities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Preconditions of nations' formation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ long-term historical process</li> <li>➤ industrialisation</li> <li>➤ building of modern states</li> <li>➤ impact of elites</li> <li>➤ instrumentalisation of myth-symbol complex</li> <li>➤ education</li> <li>➤ transformation of ethnic groups</li> </ul> <p><b>Antiquity of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ pre-modern (before 1789)</li> </ul> <p><b>Further aspects of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ethnic foundation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nature of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ given, essentialist, authentic</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nature of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ socially constructed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nature of nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ historically continuous</li> </ul>

### 2.2 Data sources and research methods

I adopted a case study approach focusing on a single country, one educational level and a single school subject

to ensure a meaningful engagement with the defined research question.



### 2.2.1 Slovakia as a case study: A concise historical context

Slovakia is an instructive research subject. As with a number of other countries in the region of central and eastern Europe, it has been shaped by multifarious historical developments.

The origins of Slovakia's national past are, in various historiographical accounts, linked to the arrival of Slavs in the Carpathian Basin, an event dated back to the fifth century, and their first political formations in central Europe, known as Samo's realm (circa 620-658) and Great Moravia (circa 833-906/7).<sup>3</sup> During the tenth century, the territory of contemporary Slovakia was gradually incorporated into the evolving Kingdom of Hungary, which came under the control of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1526. In the period 1918-1938, present-day Slovakia formed together with Carpatho-Ruthenia (contemporary Ukraine), the eastern part of the democratic interwar Czechoslovakia. In the aftermath of the Munich Agreement (September 1938), Slovakia became a satellite of Nazi Germany in March 1939. The geopolitical interests of the allies in the Second World War (the UK, USA and USSR) supported the efforts of exiled Czechoslovak politicians and the domestic opposition, and this led to the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia in April 1945.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, political agreements reached by the allies facilitated the installation of a Soviet sphere of influence in central and eastern Europe. This in turn aided the formation of undemocratic communist regimes (February 1948 in Czechoslovakia) which lasted until 1989 in the region. Shortly after the collapse of communism, the "Velvet Divorce" of Czechoslovakia occurred in 1993 (Čaplovič, Čičaj, Kováč, Lipták, & Lukačka, 2000).

Slovakia was (re-) established as a democratic nation-state; however, national minorities constitute up to 12 % of its citizens (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2012). The quality of the relationship between the national majority and the Romas and Magyars is, in particular, affected by political populism and general stereotyping (Mesežnikov & Gayarfašová, 2008). Consequently, as in other parts of Europe and the wider world, nationalism remains a salient issue in Slovakia. Therefore, it is paramount that attention is paid to how this topic is handled in education.

### 2.2.2 Selection of history textbooks and their analysis

A compelling reason underlying the focus of this paper on lower secondary education is the potential reach and impact of history teaching on students' views within this particular age bracket. Lower secondary education in Slovakia can be completed within elementary school (grades 5-9, ages 11-15) or the eight-year gymnasias (grades 1-4, ages 12-15).<sup>5</sup> The compulsory curriculum, however, does not diversify until the upper secondary level (ages 15-19). Therefore, all students are likely to use the same set of textbooks until the completion of their lower secondary education at the age of 15, regardless of the type of school that they attend.

Curriculum development and textbook production in Slovakia are centrally organised and overseen by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (hereafter ME). As a result, textbook authors must comply with the officially approved curriculum. According to the current curriculum, the primary objective of history education is the preservation of the continuity of historical memory. This is, in turn, described as a historical experience that is to be transmitted to students in chronological order and from the local, regional, national, European and also global perspectives (SPU, 2011, 2014). In theory, schools in Slovakia are able to select textbooks of their choosing (ME, 2011), but in practice multiple and complete sets of history textbooks, covering all grades, were not available at the time this article was completed (winter 2015/2016). In addition to this, following the latest educational reform of 2008, volumes published prior to this date, are no longer in use within lower secondary schools (ME, 2015a; ME, 2015b). Therefore, it seems very likely that most schools are using the single complete set of textbooks that were published in Slovakia in the period 2009-2012. Consequently, I selected books published in this time frame for my analysis.<sup>6</sup>

In analysing them, I applied the method of abduction. According to Blaikie (2004), abduction is best outlined as a logical process which helps a researcher to describe social phenomena and align their meanings to pre-existing academic concepts. In this way, abduction facilitates a critical review of the "mundane and taken for granted" aspects of social practice (Blaikie, 2004, p. 1). I started the analysis of the selected textbooks with piecemeal and multiple re-readings of every single chapter. Guided throughout this process by the sub-categories of the theoretical framework (the preconditions of nations' formation, the antiquity of nations, further aspects of nations), I was then able to identify and code the relevant units of the analysis. These comprised single and multiple sentences as well as paragraphs which I identified across all the textbook volumes. Subsequently, I could classify and critically evaluate the prevailing patterns of the conceptualisation of the nature of the Slovak nation in the selected history textbooks.

I begin the discussion of my findings with some preliminary remarks related to the stylistic and lexical means adopted by the textbook authors to develop national narratives. I then move on to a critical examination of the preconditions of the formation of the Slovak nation, its antiquity and the further aspects which define it. As all of these aspects are tightly intertwined, I am unable to adopt a clear-cut, thematic presentation of the findings. Therefore, I will proceed along a chronological path (by grade) when discussing them. To make the sources of the quotations understandable, I have used an English translation of the Slovak expression "*dejepis*" (history education/textbook) accompanied by a number as a reference to the relevant school grade; for example, "History 6/1, 2009" indicates that the referenced textbook is used in the sixth grade of elementary

school and in the first grade of the eight-year gymnasias (age 12).

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Preliminary remarks

In Slovakia, systematic provision of instruction in history in lower secondary education begins in grade five (age 11). The relevant textbook introduces students to historiography and its objectives, concepts and instruments. The central topics of nationalism studies (nation, nationalism, ethnic group) and the aspects of the nature of nations (as summarised in Table 1) are not elaborated on explicitly at this stage. Nevertheless, the stylistic attributes of the text's narration provide some insights into the interpretative patterns examined here.

A primordialist tendency might be associated with the vocabulary and writing style applied by the textbook authors. In spite of the prevalence of the generic terms "people" (*ľudia*), "inhabitants" (*obyvatelia*), "population" (*obyvateľstvo*) and "humanity" (*ľudstvo*), they frequently resort to the word "nations" (*národy*) and utilise it in discussions of historiography and the history of mankind. In the self-evident conventional application of primordialism, which Michael Billig (1995) calls the "banal nationalism", nations are portrayed unobtrusively as essentially distinctive and antique forms of collective identities: "Antiquity - a period of big empires of ancient nations (Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans) until the fall of the Roman Empire (4000 BC-476 AD)" (History 5, 2009, p. 14).

This self-evident application of the primordialist narrative, which is critically discussed here later, permeates all volumes of history textbooks. It is fittingly exposed, for instance, by a number of inconsistently applied definitions of the central concepts of scholarship on nationalism. Contrary to ethno-symbolism, "nation" and "ethnic group" are treated interchangeably as synonyms and are characterised along Herderian lines and accorded nearly identical features. The first illustration is given in the textbook for sixth-grade students (age 12), which addresses the historical periods of prehistory (circa 3 million-3500 BC), ancient history (circa 3500 BC-circa 500 AD) and the Early Middle Ages (fifth-tenth centuries). It defines an ethnic group (*etnikum*) as "a group of people who are bound through a common historical origin, a type of race [sic], a language and cultural traditions" (History 6/1, 2011, p. 40). Different wording is applied in the textbook for the seventh grade (age 13) which covers the period from the Early Middle Ages (fifth-tenth centuries) up to the era of the Enlightenment (circa 1780): "ethnic group -- a national community, nation, nationality" (History 7/2, 2011, p. 21). Equally, the textbook for grade eight (age 14), which discusses the historical period from the French Revolution in 1789 through to the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, defines ethnic group as a community encompassing "members of a nationality or a nation" (History 8/3, 2011, p. 39). Nation is then outlined in the same text as a "community of people with a common history, language,

culture, lifestyle and a common territory". Nationality (*národnosť*) is explained as a term referring to membership of a nation or a national minority within a state (History 8/3, 2011, p. 39).

The authentic nature of the Slovak nation is further reinforced by the language of intergroup comparison. In an inoffensive but routine manner, textbook authors differentiate between "us" and "them" and "our history" and "our traditions" and "their history" and "their traditions". Hence, they effectively endow traditions with an essentialist quality and convey the given distinctiveness of nations: "The most widely known festive days from our villages remain until today the celebrations of the grain and wine harvests. [...] Each nation also commemorates diverse events which significantly influenced its fate and which it therefore does not wish to forget" [...] (History 5, 2009, pp. 17-18).

In addition to their employment of stylistic and lexical means, the textbooks indicate the conceptualisation of the nature of the Slovak nation through their discussion of the preconditions of the nations' formation and antiquity, as well as the further aspects which define them.

#### 3.2 The preconditions of the formation of the Slovak nation, its antiquity and further aspects

##### 3.2.1 History 6/1 and History 7/2

The first explicit evidence related to the preconditions of nations' formation is introduced in the volume for sixth-grade students. The textbook illustrates this with reference to the arrival of the Indo-European population in Europe in the Bronze Age (circa 2000-800 BC): "At the dusk of the Bronze era, Indo-European ancestors of Germans, Celts, Slavs, and also Romanic nations, from which contemporary nations developed, gradually arrived in Europe" (History 6/1, 2011, p. 14). This sentence portrays nations as the ultimate outcomes of lengthy historical processes that lead to the transformation of their earlier forms. Hence, in this instance, this statement can be associated with ethno-symbolism.

The subsequent textbook for the seventh grade features a more elaborate account of the development of nations. Unlike the previous example, the relevant description conveys an impression of primordialism. Contrary to the attention paid by constructivists to the complex process of modernisation and the ethno-symbolist understanding of the instrumental role the historically continuous myth-symbol complex plays in the process of nations' formation, the text highlights essentialist qualities bound up with primordialism. This is immediately apparent in the opening chapter, "The life of our ancestors". In an ethno-symbolist fashion, the textbook authors outline the crystallisation of nations as a long-term historical process. At the same time, in true primordialist style, they strongly underline the exclusivity and incomparable character of nations:

"The formation of each nation is a complex, unique and non-recurring process. The beginnings of some big nations

are relatively clear and recorded in historical sources. The genesis of smaller ethnic groups is not as straightforward and intelligible. This statement also applies to Slovaks. The oldest denomination of our nation (*ethnonym*) was Sloveni which is very close to a general description for Slavs. What is more, this antique name changed in the course of the fourteenth century from Sloven to Slovak in the masculine form. In the female form (*Slovenka*) and in the adjective form (*slovenský*), the original shape remained (History 7/2, 2011, p. 8).

To reinforce their argument, the authors accentuate, in an ethno-symbolist fashion, the historical continuity of names. From a constructivist perspective, however, this is problematic since the existence of collective names cannot be straightforwardly equated with the persistence of their meanings. In particular, life during the early Middle Ages was characterised by constant transformations, which also impacted on the demographic composition of Medieval communities. Therefore, instead of being evidence of national authenticity or historical continuity, constructivists see collective names as “vessels that could hold different contents at different times” and “held the potential to convince people of continuity, even if radical discontinuity was the lived reality” (Geary, 2002, p. 118).

Still, the textbook authors keep on promoting the pure lineage of the Slovak nation. Through references to a particular Slavic tribe, the Sloveni, they highlight the common kinship origins of the Slovak nation. Consequently, their attempts to establish national authenticity as a self-evident fact in keeping with the tenets of primordialism become evident. Such efforts are also apparent from the notable emphasis they put on the difference between the language of the Sloveni people and the languages of the wider Slavic population within Europe: “The cultural and liturgical language used within Great Moravia will be described [in the textbook] as [the] Slavic liturgical language or Slavic liturgy because this was not the language of Sloveni but it was based on a dialect of the southern Macedonian Slavs” (History 7/2, 2011, p. 8).

The overt emphasis on the language of Sloveni markedly differs from the constructivist and ethno-symbolist views on the cultural and political significance of vernaculars for Medieval peoples. Accordingly, spoken languages had a negligible impact on collective awareness and the delineation of political boundaries before the end of the eighteenth century (Armstrong, 1982; Kohn, 1944). Instead, in the Christian Europe of the Middle Ages, linguistic multiplicity was considered “the result of the sinfulness of man, and God’s punishment for the building of the Tower of Babel” (Kohn, 1944, p. 7).

Nevertheless, textbook authors continue to depict the Sloveni tribe as distinct from the other Slavic peoples. While their first political organisation, Samo’s realm, is described as a tribal union of Slavs, the formation of the Nitra Principality (contemporary Slovakia) in the second half of the eighth century is associated exclusively with the Sloveni people. Moreover, the writing style used in

the textbook for the seventh grade shows Romantic influences from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Herder’s idealised concepts of the peacefulness and victimisation of the Slavs are instantly recognisable. Therefore, “our ancestors” occasionally appear in a more positive light than the “outsiders”. These patterns can be observed in the initial lines of the first chapter of the textbook for the seventh grade, “The life of our ancestors”. It begins with a description of the relationship between Avars and Slavs:

“At the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, the tribe of Sloveni settled in the territory of Slovakia. However, the peaceful life of the new settlers was violated by nomadic and combative Avars. [...] Our ancestors maintained their own lifestyle even after their arrival in the Carpathian basin (History 7/2, 2011, p. 8).

In the above account, the formation of the Slovak nation can be partially associated with ethno-symbolism. It is linked to the Sloveni tribe and explained as the ultimate outcome of a long-term historical process. At the same time, however, the statement emphasises the authentic and antique aspects of “our” predecessors. By highlighting the specific territory and the peaceful character of the Sloveni people, as well as their unique and antique traditions, textbook authors accentuate the distinctiveness of the Slovak nation. Hence, they do not interpret the customs of the Slovak ancestors according to the instrumentalist sense of ethno-symbolism. Rather, by presenting them as inherent qualities, textbook authors clearly follow primordialist logic. Moreover, to demonstrate the authentic characteristics of the Slovak nation, they trace their roots back to an indeterminate, remote past before the arrival of the Sloveni tribe in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the fifth century.

The essentialist understanding of national traditions stands in strong contrast to the constructivist emphasis on their socially constructed character and functions. As has been shown by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), it is not necessarily the occurrence of historical events but rather “repetitions”, “formalization and ritualization” and “modifications” of “suitable” portions of history that create a sense of national distinctiveness and continuity between the past and present.

On other occasions, however, the text contradicts previous statements on the authenticity and historical continuity between the customs of the pre-modern community of Sloveni people and the contemporary Slovak nation: “In the period of Great Moravia new elements occurred gradually in the lifestyle of our ancestors. First of all, the ruling stratum (dynasty, members of military retinue) began to imitate Franks in their dress, lifestyle and military equipment” (History 7/2, 2011, p. 19).

In spite of the mitigating statement limiting the transformation of unique ancestral traditions to the elite, this reference appears to validate constructivism. In doing so, it demonstrates the discontinuity and modifications which are intrinsic to historical developments and



phenomena (e.g. Geary, 2002). Consequently, by undermining both the timeless authenticity of national characteristics and the historical continuity of the myth-symbol complex, the text here exposes the weaknesses of primordialist and ethno-symbolist assumptions.

On the other hand, the establishment and dissolution of the realm of Great Moravia are presented in less crude terms. Simultaneously, however, the textbook stresses the political and cultural significance of these events and the direct line between Great Moravia and contemporary Slovakia and the Slovaks. The Herderian idealisation of the peaceful Slavs as being uninterested in military conquest and expansion is also challenged in the same text. At the same time, the textbook takes an almost celebratory approach towards one of its central figures, Svätopluk (ca. 840-894), by underlining his military and political capabilities:

“Around the year of 833, the Moravian count Mojmir I, expelled Pribina and overran the principality of Nitra. Through the fusion of the principalities of Moravia and Nitra, Great Moravia was founded. [...] Svätopluk was an extremely skilled ruler. Within a short space of time, he consolidated the land internally and started to conquer surrounding Slavic countries. [...] Within less than a quarter of [a] century, Svätopluk transformed Great Moravia into a strong and large realm which even the kings of the East Franks had to respect. [...] (History 7/2, 2011, pp. 11-13).

In spite of the disintegration of Great Moravia, however, textbook authors continue to apply the primordialist narrative (national authenticity), inter-twined with ethno-symbolist patterns (the historical continuity of the myth-symbol complex), in order to establish the essentialism and antiquity of the Slovak nation. In furthering this objective, they highlight archaeological evidence and use it to demonstrate the territorial rootedness and national authenticity of the Slovak people:

“The period of Great Moravia constitutes a very significant stage of our oldest history. [...] Although Great Moravia disintegrated eventually, the local ethnic community did not vanish. Neither did its culture and Christianity which already had strong roots. As archaeological explorations prove, a lasting rupture in the settlement development did not occur. Thanks to a living historical tradition, Sloveni people remained conscious of a common origin, lifestyle, folk culture and language (History 7/2, 2011, pp. 18-20).

The references to the Sloveni tribe as an ethnic community once again allow for a connection with ethno-symbolism. On the other hand, elements of Sloveni culture and Christianity are not presented as being instrumental in the process of the formation of the Slovak nation. Rather, in applying the logic of primordialism, textbook authors portray them as steadfast and unique sources of Slovak essentialism. The text fails to convincingly explain, however, how a shared consciousness was kept intact across geographically distant locations and over a centuries-long period by people

whose freedom of movement had been curbed by serfdom since the later Middle Ages (fourteenth-fifteenth centuries). Despite variations in form and differing degrees of severity, serfdom lasted in the Hungarian Kingdom until 1848 (Čaplovič et al., 2000).

Moreover, as has been convincingly argued by constructivists in particular, social structures based on hereditary inequalities, coupled with linguistic and cultural barriers between the privileged and under-privileged, precluded the development of mass solidarity and a sense of belonging. This was compounded by the limited means of and audiences for mass communication in pre-modern times. Not until the advent of the print industry (fifteenth century) and the piecemeal expansion of public education through the course of industrialisation was the use and standardisation of the vernaculars (1843 in the Slovak case) enhanced. In turn, these developments saw a gradual rise in literacy levels and the expansion of new modes of communication and socialisation to fairly isolated rural communities (Anderson, 1983; Connor, 1990; Gellner, 1983; Weber, 1976).

Nevertheless, despite the strong emphasis on uninterrupted and continuous settlement by a culturally distinctive and self-aware group of Sloveni within the boundaries of contemporary Slovakia, the text contradicts itself once more:

“At the end of April 1241, the contemporary territory of Slovakia was invaded by an additional squad of Tatars which approached through Moravia and started to ravage densely populated southwest Slovakia. [...] Tatars left a devastated land [behind them]. The following winter, famine struck which claimed, allegedly, more victims than the looting Tatars. [...] The repercussions of the Tatar invasion were disastrous for the Hungarian Kingdom. In the central areas of the land, nearly half of the population perished. Villages and churches were burned down and whole areas were abandoned. Only those who had hidden in forests or good fortified places escaped. [...] The devastated land had to be resettled. The king and aristocrats invited guests to their estates. In particular German settlers arrived here and settled in developing cities, in the mining area of Middle Slovakia and on the Spiš (History 7/2, 2011, p. 32).

The discontinuity of the settlement of the Slovak ancestors in parts of current Slovakia once again undermines the validity of primordialism and ethno-symbolism. It challenges the primordialist conceptualisation of the antique, territorial roots of the Slovak nation and the ethno-symbolist assumption of the historical continuity of the ethnic foundation of nations within a given geographical location.

Closely related to the theme of the preconditions of nations' formation is the issue of their antiquity. The question remains fairly inconclusive in relation to the primordialist and ethno-symbolist classifications, because the differences between the two perspectives cannot be readily determined. However, as indicated by the foregoing analysis, nations are presented in the textbooks unobtrusively as antique and essentially distinctive

forms of collective belonging. Equally, the origins of the Slovak nation pre-date the French Revolution and its existence as a geographically and culturally unified group of people with collective awareness is presented in the textbooks as a self-evident fact: “Slovaks lived in diverse states. Our contemporary territory was a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, Austria-Hungary and Czechoslovakia” (History 5, 2009, p. 34). Hence, this interpretation stands in particularly strong contrast to constructivism, the most endorsed perspective within the scholarship on nationalism (Brubaker, 2009; Özkirimli, 2010).

Moreover, as an administrative or political unit, Slovakia did not exist under that name until the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 (Kováč, 2011). Nevertheless, the textbook authors use the terms “Slovakia” and “Slovaks” in narratives pertaining to much earlier historical periods. Consequently, they reinforce the primordialist notion of a fully formed Slovak nation in the pre-modern era. While the first thematic section in the textbook for grade seven, “The ancestors of Slovaks in the Carpathian Basin”, refers to “Sloveni”, the second, “Slovaks in [the] Hungarian Kingdom”, adopts the terms “Slovaks” and “Slovakia” for discussions of the tenth century: “[The] Hungarian Kingdom was founded as a Christian state of multiple nations. Slovaks and Slovakia were an integral part of this state until 1918” (History 7/2, 2011, p. 22).

### 3.2.2 History 8/3 and History 9/4

The discussion on European national movements, addressed within the eighth grade, further illuminates the research question examined here. The relevant textbook is divided into four central thematic areas. The first thematic section is summarised under the heading “On the route towards modern nations” and begins with a European contextualisation of national movements. Despite the vocabulary being reminiscent of the academic approach of constructivism (modern nations), the prevailing writing style displays primordialist inclinations. Contrary to constructivism, the textbook authors treat nationalism as latent in a form of consciousness that preceded the modern era. Moreover, unlike constructivism or ethno-symbolism, they do not link the preconditions of nations’ formation to industrialisation and the transformation of the hereditary structure of agrarian societies or ethnic groups. On the contrary, the peoples of central, south and southeast Europe and the Balkans are described both implicitly and explicitly as socially and politically disadvantaged, while also being territorially and culturally bonded communities that share a collective consciousness.

The historical phenomenon of nationalism is introduced three times in the textbook. In its first appearance, it is contextualised using the French Revolution of 1789 and other European revolutionary developments (1830-1848/9). Subsequently, the textbook presents national movements in a positive light as progressive, socio-political undertakings aiming to

transform discriminatory social structures rooted in hereditary privilege:

“Several European nations strove for the adoption of a new constitution, [and] the introduction of a republican political order, recognition and unification. Such manifestations were described by the term of nationalism. National tendencies grew stronger particularly in Italy, Germany, Poland and in the Balkans (History 8/3, 2011, p. 20).

The second explanation of nationalism is a brief definition of the term. Although discussed in a slightly critical manner, the essentialist nature of nations remains unquestioned: “Nationalism—a stream of political and cultural thought which exalts [a] nation, its interests, history and uniqueness” (History 8/3, 2011, p. 23). Hence, the textbook continues to portray nations as given and authentic collective bodies in the self-evident manner of primordialism. This logic also applies to the presentation of the Slovak national movement.

The relevant thematic area of the textbook is summarised under the heading “The Modern Slovak Nation”. It is within this broad section, subdivided into six separate chapters, that nationalism is described explicitly for the third time. On this occasion, however, one paragraph introduces nationalism from a rather constructivist perspective as an unprecedented set of beliefs, which in fact challenges the primordialist conceptualisation of nations:

“From the end of the eighteenth century, a lively discussion about nations had been conducted within Europe. This was previously a fairly unknown theme because in society until the eighteenth century belonging to an estate or a religion was decisive. During this time, however, scholars argued that there are special bonds between people which link them in a rather extraordinary manner. This bond is membership of a nation. National consciousness—the conviction that a person is a natural member of a nation into which (s)he is born or speaks its language—began to rise in the world. Scholars pondered questions such as what is a nation, who builds it and what are the aspects which might describe a nation. They maintained that the nation is like the family, linked through emotional ties and common language. They considered folk culture (folklore), national traditions, customs, and particularly language to be the most important features of a nation (History 8/3, 2011, p. 37).

The text does not mention ethnic groups as the precursors of nations. Therefore, a number of elements from the above quotation might be associated, in this instance, with constructivism and its view on the formation of nationalism and nations: the role of intellectual elites, the social structure and religion are presented as the main sources of the collective identities of pre-modern societies, while culture and the vernacular are characterised as the novel foundations of collective awareness. Despite this fairly constructivist approach, the subsequent paragraphs and chapters do not elab-

borate further on this brief discussion. Instead, the description of the Slovak national movement continues to reflect a mixed narrative combining primordialism and ethno-symbolism. The term “ethnic group” is applied inconsistently as a forerunner to “nation” and is also used as its synonym:

“The Habsburg Monarchy was a multinational state where each ethnic group was at a different stage of national development. The politically dominant nations, Germans and Magyars, which were using their native tongues as the language[s] of instruction in schools [and] in published literature or newspapers, and founded cultural institutions, had more favourable conditions for national development. Slovaks, Czechs, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovenians [and] Romanians were in a more complicated situation (History 8/3, 2011, p. 37).

In the pages that follow, the textbook once again, unintentionally yet unmistakably, demonstrates the socially constructed character of the Slovak nation. This becomes obvious in the context of the discussion on the codification of the Slovak literary language (1843): “The big disadvantage of Slovaks was that they did not have a common literary language. They had spoken various dialects and were also divided through liturgical language.<sup>7</sup> [...] Therefore, a pressing issue was the creation of a unified literary language that would unite Slovaks” (History 8/3, 2011, p. 38).

The above passage undermines two fundamental aspects of the primordialist conceptualisation of nations. Namely, it acknowledges the absence of a shared native language and cultural (confessional) unity among the members of the Slovak nation. Yet, despite these logical contradictions, the textbook describes the Slovak national movement as a just and progressive enterprise focused on the emancipation of a socially and politically disadvantaged yet culturally homogenous and self-aware community.

The textbook for grade eight also introduces students to the topic of Magyarisation. In so doing, it debates the attempts of Magyar-speaking politicians to transform the Hungarian Kingdom into a mono-national state with one official language (Magyar). In this context, the text highlights the voluntary Magyarisation of certain circles of the non-Magyar population of the Kingdom, which became apparent around the first half of the nineteenth century. As the textbook authors suggest, some city residents and other wealthy inhabitants started to adapt their lifestyles or Magyarised their names in order to gain personal advantages. Consequently, the text again challenges the validity of both primordialism and ethno-symbolism. It does this by exposing the transformation of the presumed authentic features of the Slovak nation and its historically continuous myth-symbol complex.

Slovak national history remains a central focus in the third thematic area of the textbook. This covers the historical period following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 and is dominated by the topic of Magyarisation.<sup>8</sup> Although portrayed in an unemotional,

factual style, the perspective adopted is that of Slovak nationalism. Hence, the textbook authors again utilise the Herderian narrative of Slavic victimisation; Magyarisation is portrayed as an oppressive influence on non-Magyar nations, and on the Slovak nation in particular. The politics of Magyarisation are also used to explain the background to the gradual intensification of political and cultural contacts between the Slovak and Czech political activists of the late nineteenth century.

The last central theme in the textbook for the eighth grade, ‘The First World War’, is also shaped by the primordialist perspective. It presents nations within the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War as socially and politically disadvantaged but culturally homogenous groups. In addition, traces of Herder’s idealised portrayal of the Slavs re-emerge in one of the final chapters of the textbook (“Slovak soldiers at the frontlines”). The chapter begins by emphasising the peaceful character of the Slovak nation, which is then contrasted with the enthusiasm for war within Europe: “Although the majority of Slovaks remained unaffected by the European fanaticism and tended to view the approaching war with anxiety, directly after its outbreak some Slovak papers encouraged the loyalty of Slovaks towards [the] Habsburgs and allegiance to the monarchy” (History 8/3, 2011, p. 80).

The textbook for the eighth grade closes with the establishment of Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1918, an event which is evaluated positively. The subsequent volume for grade nine covers the historical period of the early twentieth century and concludes with the entry of Slovakia to the EU in 2004 and the adoption of the Euro in 2009. Although the textbook for grade eight had already addressed the topic of the First World War, the final volume returns to this theme and addresses the creation of Czechoslovakia once more.

A brief argument supporting the constructivist perspective on the nature of nations also emerges within one sentence in the chapter “Slovakia in the search for its path”. It highlights the limited national consciousness of the population of contemporary Slovakia in the period immediately following the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Moreover, the same paragraph also implicitly emphasises the role of modern states in the process of nation formation: “Before the year of 1918 only a section of Slovaks acknowledged Slovak identity. In the favourable conditions [of the newly established Czechoslovakia] Slovaks could complete their crystallisation as one of the multiple modern European nations” (History 9/4, 2012, p. 42).

The impact of this statement is, however, quickly softened by allusions to the illiberal socio-political conditions within the Monarchy of Austria-Hungary before 1918, described in the textbook for the previous grade. The moderate national consciousness is thus not presented as a reflection of the historical reality; instead, it is depicted as a deliberate strategy adopted by the Slovak population out of existential, socio-economic

necessity or opportunism stimulated by the nationalising policies within the Hungarian part of the Monarchy. Yet, this brief reference is evocative of constructivism.

As Walker Connor (1990) showed, the majority of European migrants arriving in the USA at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries were peasants. In line with his argument, they seemed unconscious of having a specific national identity as defined by the intellectuals or immigration administration. Instead of a cultural awareness, they tended to display a sense of geographical belonging (regional or local) by referring to a particular district or a village as their place of origin. For instance, migrants arriving from present-day Slovakia mentioned the regions of Zemplín or Šariš (contemporary east of Slovakia).

Regardless of the recurring presentation of nations in the self-evident manner of primordialism, the textbook associates the historical period of 1918-1938 primarily with the building of democracy and the importance of active citizenship:

“The democratic system had great significance for Slovaks because for the first time in history a Slovak person became a citizen who had electoral rights. Suffrage was also granted to women which in contemporary Europe was not the norm. [...] For a Slovak citizen it was critical that through active participation (s)he could contribute to the formation of modern Slovakia and search for a path for the country which (s)he considered optimal (History 9/4, 2012, p. 42).

The account of interwar Czechoslovakia is consistently positive. At the same time, the textbook critically discusses the challenges evident within the newly created republic. This is visible from the descriptions of the economic problems caused by the diverging levels of industrialisation between its western and eastern parts and also from the elaboration of the national question. The political discord between Czechs and Slovaks, and also the complexity of the issue of national minorities, particularly in relation to Germans and Magyars, are acknowledged. Nevertheless, textbook authors identify external influences (Germany and Hungary) as the primary forces behind the national frictions within interwar Czechoslovakia:

“Czechoslovakia was a multinational state. [...] The majority of the Slovak population and members of other nationalities lived in harmony. Although they had different opinions on the resolution of numerous issues, they shared common economic, civic and social interests and sorrows. [...] Coexistence was complicated particularly through external influences, mostly when Germany and Hungary strove to use German and Magyar minorities as the instruments of their politics. The national issue in Central Europe and consequently also in Slovakia was very sensitive. It had never been resolved to the satisfaction of all nationalities (History 9/4, 2012, p. 50).

The narrative in the final volume retains a primordialist flavour and presents nations as authentic and self-

evident. Nevertheless, the writing style used within the history textbook for the ninth grade continues to be prudent and factual. This might also be illustrated by the discussion of the establishment of the Slovak Republic in January 1993.

The political organisation of the mutual relationship between Czechs and Slovaks in the period 1945-1989 is described in the textbook as a sensitive issue which was not optimally resolved. However, the eventual dissolution of the common state is not presented as a result of both nations' desire for self-determination. Pointing towards the lengthy political discussion after 1989, the textbook authors interpret it dispassionately as a consequence of a political decision taken by the winners of the last general election in Czechoslovakia in 1992. They do not provide an extended evaluation of this event; instead, students are encouraged to formulate their own views through the exercise questions found at the end of the relevant chapter, “On the route to democracy and independence”:

“Explain why many citizens favoured the preservation of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and [why] many advocated the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic.

Ask your parents or grandparents how they perceived the atmosphere of the discussions and negotiations about the future constitutional organisation of Slovakia (History 9/4, 2012, p. 123).

#### 4 Conclusions and implications

In this paper, I have proposed an analytical framework that draws on the insights of current scholarship on nationalism and enables a critical review of ethnocentrism, which continues to shape the teaching of history and the social sciences across many countries. Guided by this analytical framework, I have identified patterns and confronted the misconceptions of national narrative found in the most recent history textbooks used within Slovakia's lower secondary education system.

Overall, the interpretation of the nature of the Slovak nation is best described as conceptually inconsistent. The prevalent impression, however, remains primordialist. Compelling evidence has already been provided in this context in the form of examples of the stylistic and lexical choices made by the textbook authors. In the unobtrusive practice of “banal nationalism”, they use self-evident statements alongside inoffensive comparisons and present to students a world filled with unique nations since time immemorial. Consequently, they reinforce the primordialist understanding of nations as essentially given and authentic forms of collective identity. These conceptual indicators appear within all of the examined volumes. Correlating to the discussion of the historical period of nationalism and the Slovak national history, their presence increases in the textbooks for grades eight and nine.

The essentialist understanding of primordialism is most visible in the volumes for the sixth, seventh and eighth

grades. This is apparent from the emphasis the textbook authors place on the uniqueness of the historical evolution of the Slovak nation, the antiquity of Slovak traditions (which are said to have originated in an indeterminate past) and further elements that also reflect the Herderian understanding of nations. Hence, language, commonly shared territory, history, culture and national character (peaceful and oppressed) are used by the textbooks authors to establish the authenticity and historical continuity of the Slovak nation.

A further notable finding from the textbooks analysis is the absence of clear differentiation between ethnic groups and nations. Nevertheless, ethno-symbolist tendencies can be associated with the historical process of the formation of the Slovak nation (*longue durée*) and with the identification of its particular basis, the Sloveni tribe. These conceptual patterns appeared in the textbooks for the sixth and seventh grades. Once established, subsequent volumes (grades eight and nine) do not deliberately return to the question of the preconditions of nations' formation and their antiquity.

Yet, despite the prevalent employment of primordialist logic and a degree of ethno-symbolism, the historical evidence presented in the textbooks for the seventh, eighth and ninth grades lends, on a number of occasions, support to constructivism. References to the transformation of the ancestral traditions of Slovaks, as influenced by encounters with Germanic tribes in the Early Middle Ages and the Magyarisation of the nineteenth century, undermine the validity of primordialist and ethno-symbolist arguments. These are also challenged by the substantial population decline and discontinuity of settlements within contemporary Slovakia which followed the invasion of the Tatars and the famine of the thirteenth century. The account of the subsequent resettlement of German-speaking migrants within its boundaries once again exposes the shortcomings of primordialist and ethno-symbolist contentions. This might also be said to be about the linguistic and confessional divisions (Protestant and Catholic) of the population in the nineteenth century, and their limited awareness of Slovak identity in the early years of interwar Czechoslovakia.

The most obvious constructivist patterns were found in the textbook for grade eight. However, the impact of the account of nations as novel forms of collective identity remains marginal since it is immediately diluted by the subsequent narrative, which once more evokes a primordialist understanding. Yet, this description again reinforces the constructivist view. Namely, it indicates the "constant shifting of allegiances and appropriations" (Geary, 2002, p. 118) found throughout history and also within the geographical area of contemporary Slovakia. Consequently, alongside the aforementioned historical facts, it brings to light the unintended revelations of the textbooks considered here: the precarious authenticity and historical continuity of the Slovak nation.

Undeniably, it is a formidable task to present the topic of the formation of national identity to pre-university

students in an accessible form. Nevertheless, the foregoing analysis has shown that the construction of national narrative in history textbooks remains dominated by primordialism and a degree of ethno-symbolism, although the plausibility of both paradigms has been frequently and, in my view, convincingly critiqued in the contemporary research literature (e.g. Connor, 1990, 1994 [1978], 2004; Özkirimli, 2010; Šulíková, 2014). Although there is more use of constructivist ideas in the higher grades, this remains tentative and inconsistent. Therefore, further research might uncover the reasons for this conceptual inconsistency in the textbooks but it is also possible that the choices have been partly unconscious. There may also be an additional aspect to this that is related to the recent historical evolution of the country. As such, future discussions could also address the issue of to what extent the post-1989 developments, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia's entry into the European Union, and the academic discussions within historiography and other social sciences have impacted on the construction of the national narrative found in history textbooks.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the contributing factors, I would suggest that now is the time to change the way national narratives are conceptualised in curricula and textbooks, both for academic and wider educational reasons.

As this article has demonstrated, current lower secondary education provides an inconsistent interpretation of such concepts as nation and nationalism in relation to Slovakia, and the textbooks accentuate primordial and ethno-symbolist ideas to an extent that cannot be justified empirically or theoretically. This in itself would be a sufficient impetus for re-visiting the curriculum by incorporating constructivist insights into such themes as the preconditions of nations' formation, their antiquity and further aspects which are attributed to them. However, in my view, there are also other urgent reasons for doing so. As noted earlier, there is, at present, considerable evidence of the conflict potential of nationalism, both in Europe and elsewhere. In these circumstances it is also the responsibility of educationalists to consider such issues in curriculum design and transmission.

Therefore, the analytical framework used in this article is also well-suited for application in multi-country examinations of national narratives in curricula and textbooks of history and the social sciences designed for use in pre-tertiary education. I would also suggest that teaching materials and pedagogic approaches drawing on constructivism could enhance critical engagement with the misconceptions surrounding ethnocentrism. The unintended revelations found through the analysis of these history textbooks have provided compelling evidence to support this suggestion. The analytical framework developed in this article could therefore be helpful in contributing to the role that education can play in reducing the conflict potential of nationalism elsewhere in Europe and beyond.



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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> I would argue that the concept of modernism accentuates the pre-conditions for the formation of nationalism and nations and the issue of their antiquity. Instrumentalism highlights the functionalist aspects of nationalism. Therefore, I chose to use the term constructivism as it emphasises more adequately the focus of this article, which is the nature of nations.

<sup>3</sup> Samo is described in historiographical accounts as a Frankish merchant under whose leadership Slavic tribes successfully revolted against the supremacy of the neighbouring Avars (Čaplovič et al., 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Pre-war Czechoslovakia was restored with the exception of Carpatho-Ruthenia, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union (Kováč, 1998).

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<sup>5</sup> An optional transfer to the eight-year gymnasias is possible after the completion of grade five of elementary school once entry tests have been passed.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Education Law (EL, 2008), schools for national minorities are obliged to use translated versions of the officially approved textbooks. Hence, and also due to my own linguistic limitations, I draw only on textbooks published in the Slovak language for this article.

<sup>7</sup> For Catholics, the liturgical language had traditionally been Latin. For Protestants, this was the so-called 'old Czech' (*bibličtina*) used in the first Czech translation of the Bible. (Čaplovič et al., 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Following the defeat of Austria in the war with Prussia (1866), the Austro-Hungarian Compromise established two administratively autonomous parts of the Monarchy (the Kingdoms of Austria and Hungary) under one king and with common ministries of finance, defence and foreign affairs (Čaplovič et al., 2000).

<sup>9</sup> This paper draws on a wider research project, which also examined the possible rationale behind the absence of a systematic application of the insights of current scholarship on nationalism in the teaching of history, geography and civics at the pre-tertiary level of education in Slovakia. Empirical data, which I collected through discussions with academics and teachers (who both participate in the development of curricula and textbooks), points towards the significance of the limited impact of nationalism studies on wider historical and interdisciplinary debates, as well as teacher training in Slovakia. A meaningful elaboration on these particular findings, however, is beyond the scope of the current study.

