FOREWORD

Humans are social beings and such aspects as living, interacting and working together are inevitable, thus, natural laws of social conduct including respect for others, their beliefs and their qualities are vital things to be taken into account. Different means have been used for self-identification and for identifying others, which has led to an emergence of a complex classification scheme looked upon in the framework of social, gender, religious, ethnic, national and other aspects. Among significant distinguishing (and also – unifying) factors there is religion, language and culture which differ from each other but at the same time are interrelated and influence the life of an individual and the humankind in general in very diverse ways. Understanding these factors and the ways they are employed by different individuals, communities and countries help us better explain the similarities and differences we find today among people and nations.

Religion serves for uniting people, regions and nations, as well as for their distinction from each other culturally. Religions are identified by two key features with the first one mainly being humans' need for faith, i.e. to believe in what is conceivable but intangible. The other key feature is that religions seek to influence and affect the manner, in which the believer lives and interrelates with other people in the society. This feature of religion needs to be adaptable in order to deal with the continuously changing patterns of life. Like religion, language is also considered one of the defining characteristics of an individual and nation. The significance of language lies in the manner how it has contributed to the powerful mind-set of developing nationalism. As people increasingly embraced their nation-states with emotional commitment and loyalty, national pride came to be expressed in terms of national distinction. This development, in turn, was linked to linguistic uniqueness and solidarity. As for culture, humans' living and working together lead to the formulation of common sets of beliefs which again are used to unify and distinguish them from others. Some cultures struggle to preserve these beliefs, while others work to change them to deal with the rapid advance-

ments of their societies. Some cultures are oppressive against or supportive towards others or some particular members of the society, which results in conflicting situations or societies.

Research papers included in this collection present the studies which by employing comparative methodology address various aspects of religion, language, social studies and culture important for individuals and societies in general. The findings by the authors of the papers help specifying various forms and functions of these aspects and their impact on people's lives.

The influence of religion on the everyday social life of people is investigated by Anton Piyarathne in his paper "Secularising Buddhism: An Ethnography of Roadside Buddhist Shrine Worshiping in the City of Colombo". The author focuses on the effects of constructing and worshipping Buddhist roadside shrines in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Based on ethnographic data, the shrines are multi-functional by nature. The author uses the term "secularising" to depict the fact that in today's world, especially in urban contexts, the spiritual has often been replaced by profane and "people tend to have more focus on secular benefits than sacred needs" (Piyarathne). Secularization of Buddhism as such is exemplified by obtaining the blessings of the Buddhist pantheon and cosmology, minimizing vulnerabilities and getting the maximum benefit from the liberal economic trends and globalisation patterns.

The effects of bilingualism and living in a conflicting diglossic situation is examined by Jonathan Durandin. In his article "Franco-Latvian Children and the Latvian Diglossic Situation", the influence of the diglossic situation on the children speaking several languages and their opinions have been analysed based on the interviews of four children attending school in Riga, the capital of Latvia. According to the study, the children place themselves in two distinct linguistic environments and value their French-Latvian or French-Russian bilingualism. A detailed analysis of the psychological and social functions of the children's first languages reveals their reasons for using several languages, among which there is a possibility to stand out from the Latvian-speaking context or other people in Latvia, avoidance of suffering or fostering any social tensions brought by specific situations.

In a survey carried out in the territory of Latvian – Russian borderland in the framework of a postdoctoral project "Transformations of Festive Culture in the Borderland: The Case of Latgale and Pskov Regions" supported by the European Union European Regional Development Fund, Oksana Kovzele analyses the festive culture and its exposure to commercialization in Latgale and Pskov region.

The survey, which included 906 people, revealed that nowadays almost all groups of festivities are exposed to commercialization processes. According to the data provided in the research, adopted, state, traditional, and religious festivities are the most affected ones. The intensity of commercialization processes differs significantly in both statistical regions: on the one hand, the residents of Latvia's region are a great deal more accustomed to commercialisation and have adapted to the role of festive consumers, on the other hand, expressions of counter-reaction aimed at decommercialization are emerging emphasizing the need of preservation authentic cultural values in a modern consumer society. In the neighbouring region of Russia, which is the minor object of the research, the problem identified in the study is in the initial stage of discussion, thus the participants of the survey often refrain from commenting on this topic.

The paper "Sòókò Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Continuity and Change in the Royal History of Ilé-Ifè" by Ayowole S. Elugbaju and Lanre Hassan, acquaints the readers with the Sòókò institution, its origin and place within the Ilé-Ifè socio-cultural structure and investiture ceremonies within the context of continuity recorded by the institution. The study reveals that while the institution is as old as the ancient town and has existed over several centuries, it has, however, undergone transformations that are affecting its investiture ceremony and relevance in the traditional political institution of the town. The paper concludes that while the institution has been impacted by changes imposed by modern world tendencies, it continues to remain a relevant body in the sustenance and continuation of the monarchy and its culture.

Finally, Nubia Nieto analyses the origins and current state of violence against women in Mexico and Brazil, the countries with critical level of impunity and machismo influenced by their political, social, economic and cultural structure. According to the author, machismo continues to stay a stable phenomenon in the culture of these two countries and contributes to developing high level of tolerance towards violence against women. The study contributes to deeper understanding of gender inequality and social exclusion, as well as recognizes women's rights for the empowerment of women individually and collectively.

All the papers touch upon the impact of the cultural transformation process or emphasize the importance of and need for cultural change.

Editors of the collection:
Ilze Kačāne
Aveen Mohammed Hasan