ABSTRACT

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IN SEARCH OF A USEABLE PAST: POLITICS OF HISTORY IN THE POST-COMMUNIST CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA FROM A COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The dissertation examines the puzzle of the divergent post-communist discourses and rituals of collective memory in the Czech republic and Slovakia – in particular, the difference in (1) the two countries' attitudes toward de-communization, (2) their interpretations of their common Czechoslovak past, and (3) the overall content and style of official memory discourses employed in the two countries after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Taking a comparative historical perspective, the dissertation traces the transformation of the Czech and Slovak historical narratives over time and finds the roots of the divergent Czech and Slovak post-communist paths in the legacies of the Czechoslovak communist and interwar regimes. On a conceptual level, the dissertation presents a culturalist critique of the dominant institutionalist literature on democratization and an argument on how we might think of post-communist transitions outside of the strictly institutional framework. It conceptualizes democratization as a dynamic and a highly contentious process of meaning creation in which various actors struggle to legitimize themselves and their visions of the present and the future by making references to the past and highlights the special role of political myths in this process. Rather than a straightforward adoption of some ready-made institutions and processes, in other words, democratization is presented as an activity of

sensemaking – of searching for useable pasts and new legitimizing mythologies. The Czech and Slovak post-communist search for useable pasts represents neither an unprecedented "return of history" nor some cynical sinister power play of elites acting on some well-constituted interests but rather a new phase of an ongoing, dynamic project of identity and meaning-creation – of sense-making through time.

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Introduction

With the collapse of communism in 1989, pasts, presents and futures in East Central Europe became subject to an extraordinary metamorphosis. Virtually overnight, Honeckers, Husáks and Kádárs of the Eastern bloc stepped down – some voluntarily, some less so; the despised Soviet tanks stationed for decades throughout the region as a form of "brotherly help" against the "enemies of socialism" finally left; thousands of gigantic statues of Marx, Lenin and other once-hallowed saints of the communist era were removed from central squares and town centers; and the entire region was soon thrown into a remarkable street and plaza re-christening frenzy. The despised, yet intimately familiar, world of symbols, truths and identities, which for more than four decades culturally defined East Central Europe, became suddenly obsolete. And its inhabitants were unexpectedly confronted with a new and urgent need to re-think their worlds, envision new futures and re-build their relationship with the past. In a manner quite unthinkable just a few months earlier, East Central Europeans suddenly found themselves desperately rummaging through their national histories, dusting off some of their previously silenced pasts, looking for historical analogies, inventing new traditions,[1] dreaming up new "fantasies of salvation",[2] in some places, even reburying the dead and leading some commentators to hastily proclaim an unprecedented "return of history".

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[1] Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger, Eds. (1983). The Invented Tradition. Past and Present Publications. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[2] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

Revolutions of 1989, in other words, ushered in a phase of transition and uncertainty, throwing the former communist region, in fact the entire world system, into what professor Ken Jowitt memorably termed a "new world disorder" [3] – a peculiar state of uncertainty and flux in which most of the acquired meanings and central points of reference dissolved, boundaries and established identities with which people used to define themselves and others became uncertain and assumed pasts and futures were put at stake. Along with the Wall, in short, crumbled not only the ECE political and economic systems but the entire moral, cultural, and psychological architecture of Eastern Europe.[4] Gone was people's sense of orientation, of knowing what was the right way to go, to act, to think. The old regime's official ideals and heroes became valueless for the new system. And paradoxically, as Czech sociologist and a former dissident Jirina Siklova perceptively points out, laughable became also the previous regime's enemies and unofficial heroes as the fate of many Eastern European dissidents illustrates. The system of social stratification was thoroughly transformed. In addition, in several countries, Czechoslovakia included, national identity underwent a thorough metamorphosis. In a word, people's entire meaningful worlds were abruptly altered. Commenting on the immediate post-1989 experience in Czechoslovakia, Šiklová wrote:

> We are experiencing cultural shock like migrants, refugees, and
> emigrants experience. The shock originates in the fact that one has been
> uprooted and is suddenly living in a totally new environment in which he
> must quickly adapt. In the case of migrants and emigrants it is well
> understood that such a rapid change may also be a cause of neurosis, and
> the social workers assigned to work with refugees are aware of this fact.

[3] Jowitt, K. (1992). The New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.

[4] Dawisha, K. (2005). "Communism as a Lived System of Ideas in Contemporary Russia." East European Politics and Societies **19**(3): 463-493.

It is difficult to provide aid for migrants and refugees; to ensure therapy

and quick adaptation for an entire nation is impossible. Moreover, we

have not changed our place of residence, we have not moved anywhere;

only the society around us has changed completely.[5]

Strangely enough, however, despite the enormous magnitude of the symbolic

transformation that has taken place in the former communist world over the past two decades,

the symbolic dimension of the post-communist change remains an understudied subject.

Despite all the monuments that have been replaced, streets that have been renamed, the dead

bodies which have been reburied, despite all the large and small quarrels, debates, and

skirmishes over which historical figures should be placed on national currencies, which

events and personas should be emphasized in history education, or which days should be

instituted as national holidays, we still know relatively little about the enormous symbolic

transformation that has taken place in the former socialist societies. Beyond the widely

popular, politically convenient, yet nonetheless conceptually weak assertion that history was

"unfrozen" and "returned" to East Central Europe once the constraints of the bipolar

ideological conflict were lifted, the role of the past in the democratization project remains

obscure.

To a large extent, the lack of research focusing on the symbolic aspect of democratic

transitions is due to the way democracy and transitions to democracy have been routinely

conceptualized in much of the sociological and political scientific literature. More often than

not, democratic transformations are understood to entail an aggregate body of rules and

norms which, upon their successful adoption, will miraculously transform undemocratic

systems into flourishing Western-type models of democracy. Viewed in such rationalistic,

positivist fashion, democracy represents no more than a set of abstract, institutional rules

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[5] Šiklová, J. (1993). "Backlash." <u>Social Research</u> **60**(4): 737.

(such as a competitive party structure, free and fair elections, institutionalized rule of law, market capitalism, etc.) and democratization a fairly straightforward, technical process of getting there.[6]

Inquiries into the role of the past in the democratization project, in other words, are strangely missing from the dominant picture of democratization. In the rare cases when the role of the past is entertained by transitional analysts, it is usually framed in terms of rather vague blocks of pre-communist and communist "legacies" which are then treated in a deterministic fashion to post facto explain divergent post-communist trajectories of former communist countries. Those countries with the "right" kinds of historical experiences are assumed to have better chances at achieving their democratic consolidation and those which lack such positive experiences are in trouble. The role of the past, in other words, is reduced to one of democracy's many prerequisites.[7] As Harold Wydra correctly points out, however, such a view overlooks the possibility that past cultural meanings could play a positive, integrative, role in the construction of new meanings and symbols and in the legitimization of the new political order.[8]

The Story

Starting with the basic premise that any meaningful study of democratization needs to consider the less palpable, symbolic processes hidden underneath the more visible

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[6] For instance, the majority of scholarly journals and transitional analyses in the early 1990s focussed on questions of constitutional and political engineering with the major debates during this period including the pros and cons of various electoral systems, the risks and benefits of presidentialism vs. parliamentarism, the character of judicial review, the perils of different approaches to economic reform, privatization, etc. See for instance some of the early issues of the Journal of Democracy and East European Constitutional Review – the two major journals founded in order to provide the Western and home-based reformers with theoretical and practical know-how on how to build a functional and stable liberal democracy in the region.

[7] See for example Przeworski, A. (1991). Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[8] Wydra, H. (2007). Communism and the Emergence of Democracy. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

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institutional changes, which accompany transitions to democracy, this dissertation zeroes in on the discourses of memory in the post-communist Czech and Slovak republics. Taking a historical perspective, I analyze the key myths, collective memories and official histories that constitute the Czech and Slovak symbolic universe and trace their transformation over time, starting from the 19th century national awakeners, the interwar Czechoslovak republic, World War II, the immediate post-war period and the Czechoslovak communist era. In other words, I study how memory has been instrumentalized for legitimacy and meaning formation by subsequent generations of Czechs and Slovaks over time and how the most recent, post-communist "return of the past", to use a popular metaphor, compares to previous phases of national memory construction.

To address these questions, I take as my empirical focus discourses and rituals of collective memory in the Czech republic and Slovakia, in particular the debates about and the actual commemoration of Czech and Slovak national holidays. I also enrich my analysis with examples of other instruments of "banal nationalism"[9], such as statues and memorials, banknotes, history textbooks, etc. I believe analysis of public debates over national holidays and various other tools of state propaganda mentioned above offers an especially fruitful way of looking at political transitions. This is so because all new regimes, especially those emerging from a lengthy authoritarian experience, are faced with a need to confront their past. They must decide which continuities to emphasize, which pasts to disassociate themselves from, how to deal with those directly responsible for the crimes of the former regime as well as those (often the majority of the population) who helped perpetuate the repressive system in more passive ways. As Paloma Aquilar and Carsten Humlebæk point out, by creating new holidays, collectivities give new contours to their past, they punctuate time in new ways, brand specific historical events as "national" and thus worthy of

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[9] Billig, M. (1995). <u>Banal Nationalism</u>. London, Sage.

celebration and respect while consigning some other events to oblivion.[10] Politics of the past
(as captured in debates about national holidays, statues and memorials, history textbooks,
etc.) thus promises to provide a fruitful way of capturing the symbolic, meaning-making
dimension of democratic transformations.

The Czech and the Slovak comparison in particular offers an especially interesting
demonstration of these processes due to the puzzle it presents.   Given the fact that Czechs
and Slovaks lived together in a common state and were citizens of the same regimes for
nearly seven decades,[11] the difference between their post-communist discourses and rituals of
collective memory is rather striking. While the Czechs became one of the first post-
communist societies to pursue serious de-communization efforts via lustration and public
access to communist Secret police files, the Slovaks never really implemented lustration
policies, were much slower in publicizing the secret files and, unlike the Czechs, have been
much more accepting of their communist past (as well as continued presence of former
communist functionaries in public life). In addition, while the Czechs maintained continuity
with interwar Czechoslovakia and its legitimizing mythology even after the Czechoslovak
split, the Slovak post-communist elites rejected the Czechoslovak past and began a 19th
century-like nationalist project of constructing a brand new Slovak identity.

The Czech- Slovak comparison is also interesting from the politics of the past
perspective for another reason. In the Czech and Slovak case, we are dealing with especially
tangled, complex and divisive pasts (even in comparison with some of their other post-
communist neighbors). Czechoslovakia is one of a few countries in the post-communist
region which had a well functioning and relatively prosperous democracy during the interwar
years. At the same time, however, it is also the only country in the region where communists

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[10] Aguilar, P. and C. Humlebæk (2002). "Collective Memory and National Identity in the Spanish
Democracy. The Legacies of Francoism and the Civil War." History&Memory**14**(1): 121-164.

[11] Excluding the 1939-1945 period when Bohemia was annexed to Hitler's Nazi Germany and
Slovakia became a Nazi puppet state.

won in free elections in 1946, in the absence of Soviet tanks on the Czechoslovak territory. Throughout its existence, the Czechoslovak communist regime represented one of the most ideologically rigid communist regimes of the bureaucratic-authoritarian style, to use Herbert Kitschelt's classification,[12] employing one of the most radical and thorough practices of organized forgetting. It is thus interesting to investigate how much (if any) memory was preserved despite more than four decades of communist manipulation of the past – and whether any of it might still be useable in the new system.

The Czech and Slovak World War II past is equally complicated – not least due to the gross deformations and lies the communist regime constructed about it. Memories of the war, including dark legacies of Slovakia's collaboration with Hitler's Germany and its role in deportations of Slovak Jews were never freely discussed during the communist rule. Similarly, memories of Czech and Slovak anti-fascist resistance during the war as well as the entire interwar period of the first Czechoslovak republic were either silenced or hugely distorted by the communist propaganda. As Tony Judt fittingly noted, there was not one but indeed a whole archipelago of extremely difficult memories to be processed in the Czech and Slovak republics after the collapse of communism.[13]

Adding to the already complex and multiple tasks of the Czech and Slovak post-communist transformation was Czechoslovakia's dissolution on January 1 1993 which further heightened the need for redefinition and self-reflection, especially in Slovakia where it led to a major revision of Slovak identity.

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[12] Kitschelt, H., Z. Manfeldova, et al. (1994). Post-Communist Party Systems. Cambridge, Cambridge UP.

[13] Judt, T. (2002). "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe." Memory & Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past. J.-W. Muller. Cambridge, Cambridge UP: 157-183.

Positioning the Argument

To talk about democratization as sense- or meaning-creation necessarily calls for a cultural approach. By this, I do not necessarily mean an approach focused on norms, values and attitudes toward politics as was characteristic of some of the earlier functionalist studies of political culture, most notably those by Almond and Verba.[14] Neither do I imply a Geertzian, ethnographic, look at customs and traditions.[15] Rather, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, I conceptualize political culture as a "practice" – an ongoing work of symbolic representation, in which various actors maintain or subvert the words and categories through which reality is perceived and expressed. They do so in order to impose and legitimize their vision of the world, its present meaning and their desired vision of its future direction.[16] Political culture, the way I employ the term, thus is neither a social structure nor a normative system; it is better thought of as the constitutive symbolic aspect of all social processes.

The starting point of such culturalist argument is the realization that human knowledge is necessarily limited and particular; that in order to make sense of the world, we, humans, select and simplify. We make "cosmos out of chaos", to use Mircea Eliade's fitting expression, by placing isolated events and experiences into collective narratives or myths.[17] It is through such narratives that similarity and difference are defined, boundaries are erected, rules are established. Myths tidy up the immense complexity and contradiction of history by packaging it into a fairly simple explanation or story and encoding it in such a way as to

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[14] Almond, G. A. and S. Verba (1963). The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, Almond, G. A. and S. Verba, Eds. (1980). The Civic Culture Revisited. Newbury Park, Sage.

[15] Geertz, C. (1973). The Interpretation of Cultures. New York, Basic Books.

[16] Bourdieu, P. (1984). Distinction. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and Symbolic Power. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, Bourdieu, P. (1997). Pascalian Meditations. Stanford, Stanford University Press..

[17] Eliade, M. (1959). The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. New York, Harcourt.

make it difficult to decode and question. Myths function as agreed criteria by which the collectivity conducts its affairs.[18] As Vladimir Tismaneanu explains, elusiveness is in fact one of the key characteristics of political myths. It is precisely because of their elusiveness (and thus ability to defy rational analysis) that political myths acquire their power. The fundamental function of political myths is not to describe reality but to imagine it in line with certain political interests.[19] According to another scholar of political culture, Mary Douglas, myths help create "shadowy place[s] where nothing can be seen and no questions asked."[20]

All the foregoing leads to the key argument culturalists make: It is precisely through political myths – and not some strictly rational calculation – that individuals experience the world, make sense of it, and form their preferences. In other words, for culturalists, politics is both strategic and constitutive.[21] It involves much more than a purely instrumental pursuit of interest; it is also about individuals and groups making sense of their world and communicating it to themselves and others, in emotional as well as cognitive terms. To put it yet another way, politics is also (at least partially) about sense- or world-making.

All this has important research implications – both for the study of democratization and political transformations and for the study of politics in general. First of all, cultural approach thus conceived calls for a different set of research questions from the ones traditionally raised by political scientists. Instead of assuming that political actors are guided by some stable and well defined interests and identities and consequently focusing on explaining how their political acts succeed or fail to obtain those ends, scholars of political culture problematize these presumably given categories and raise questions about their

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[18] Schöpflin, G. Central Europe: Defining a Thought Style, London: UCL-SSEES.

[19] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

[20] Douglas, Mary. 1986: 69.

[21] Olick, J. K., Daniel Levy (1997). "Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics." American Sociological Review 62(December 1997): 921-936.

construction, reconstruction and maintenance over time.[22] In terms of understanding post-communist democratization, this means abandoning the widespread assumption that post-communist elites act on some clearly defined interests or conceptions of democracy and entertaining the possibility that figuring out, interpreting and articulating what democracy means (or ought to mean) may be what actually lies at the heart of post-communist democratization and consolidation.

Another useful insight offered by cultural approaches to politics is their emphasis on public discourse and narrative construction. In recognizing politics as a work of sense-making or meaning-creation, culturalists draw attention to the special role that narratives, especially those explicitly focused on the past, play in legitimation and meaning creation. In addition, aware that narrative construction does not take place in a vacuum but is instead infused with social power, they also point to the articulators of those frameworks and the multiple and intricate power relations which permeate narrative construction. For the study of democratization, this means looking not only at the mentions and silences in narrative accounts put forward by the new post-com elites in their search for legitimacy and meaning but also examining the articulators themselves – including their ideological backgrounds and political agendas. It means asking questions such as: Which myths are being put forward? By whom? Why? What are the silences in the newly emerging narrative accounts and what do they mean?

Closely related to this is another crucial point emphasized by scholars of political culture and that is the emphasis on the dynamic character of narratives, identities, and political cultures in general. [23] In contrast to earlier, what might be called "simple", identity

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[22] Verdery, K. (1999). The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change. New York, Columbia UP.

[23] See for instance Schwartz, B. (1991). "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington." American Sociological Review **56**(April): 221-36, Olick, J. and J. Robbins (1998). "Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." Annual Review of Sociology **24**: 105-140, Mitsztal, B. A. (2003). Theories of Social

construction approaches (such as Hobsbawm and Ranger's Invention of Tradition, and even Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities), more recent scholarship refuses to view political cultures as some static systems or once and for all inventions and insists instead that they constitute dynamic processes with histories of their own. Nations are not simply invented or imagined; they are continuously constructed and reconstructed. This brings into focus questions about their transmission, maintenance and transformation over time and highlights especially the role that critical historical junctions and upheavals – such as revolutions – play in the construction/reconstruction and negotiation of national or collective narratives.[24]

In sum, cultural approach offers a number of useful insights which enable us to move beyond the dominant, procedural, view of democratization, focused mainly on democratization's palpable institutional elements, towards a much richer, symbolic, understanding of democratic transitions as essentially processes of sensemaking which occur within cultural systems.

The Tools: Myth, Memory, History, Mythscape

To analyze the evolving Czech and Slovak discourses of memory, I employ the concept of *mythscape,* recently proposed by Duncan S. A. Bell.[25] Defined as "the discursive realm in which myths of the nation are forged, transmitted and negotiated constantly",[26] the concept of mythscape avoids some of the characteristic weaknesses of collective memory literature. In particular, it circumvents the often criticized tendency to overinflate the concept

Remembering. Philadelphia, Open University Press, Olick, J., Ed. (2003). <u>States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection.</u> Durham, Duke University Press.

[24] Wydra, H. (2003). <u>Political Transformations and Islands of History</u>. ECPR Joint Sessions, Panel 16: Politics and Memory, Edinburgh.

[25] Bell, D. S. A. (2007). "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity." <u>British Journal of Sociology</u> **54**(1): 63-81.

[26] Ibid. 66.

of memory and use it to represent a whole host of different social practices, cognitive processes and representational strategies, even to the extent that institutions, buildings, statues, archives, museums etc are now said to remember. Anthony D. Smith is a prime example when he speaks of myths and memories of the nation, using the terms interchangeably.[27]

The opposite strategy has been to emphasize differences among various kinds of memory. To Maurice Halbwachs' classic definition of collective memory as a socially framed property of individual minds,[28] recent scholars have added concepts such as "individual" or "autobiographical" memory (signifying an individual psychological phenomenon or, simply, the human faculty of preserving traces of things directly experienced), "post-memory" (i.e., transmitted memory that involves generational distance),[29] "historical memory" (remembered past to which we no longer have "organic" connection, constructed by professional historians using rules of historical inquiry),[30] "official memory"(i.e., those representations of history which are taught in schools, enshrined in national celebrations, passed down in print, etc), "cultural memory" (memory imbued with cultural meaning),[31] "organic memory" (remembered past to which we have organic relation and is an important part of our lives), etc. As several authors have pointed out, however, the zeal for conceptual clarity has led to such degree of overspecification of the concept of memory that it is in danger of becoming essentially useless as a cognitive tool.[32]

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[27] See Smith, A. D. (1999). <u>Myths and Memories of the Nation</u>. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

[28] Halbwachs, M. (1992). <u>On Collective Memory</u>. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

[29] See Hirsch, M. (2008). "The Generation of Postmemory." <u>Poetics Today</u> **29**(1).

[30] Hutton, P. H. (1993). <u>History as an Art of Memory</u>. Hanover/London, University Press of New England.

[31] Sturken, M. (1997). <u>Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, teh AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering</u>. Bekeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press.

[32] For a useful discussion of these two fallacies see Olick, J. and J. Robbins (1998). "Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." <u>Annual Review of Sociology</u> **24**: 105-140.

In contrast, the benefit of Bell's concept of mythscape is that it comprises various kinds of representational strategies, including myth, official and individual memory, and professional history, without conflating them all together. It thus allows us to move beyond the conceptual disputes over what memory or history means or should mean and accept that there are different ways in which identities can be represented, contested and transmitted and thus focus on the processes through which this is done. In doing so, it also allows us to study how organic memory may at times serve to subvert, and at other times to reinforce – or give credibility to – official forms of memory. Bell's concept of mythscape can subsume memories but, as he points out, the two are not synonymous. Memory, in line with Maurice Halbwachs' definition, as a socially framed property of individual minds,[33] can function in opposition to nationalist myth.[34] Memory is simply too awkward and too complex to fit into the simplifying schemas of myth.[35] Nor is mythscape synonymous with history as a professional discipline concerned with a systematic study of the past. Professional history may play a decisive role in forging the governing mythology but it is not its primary function. Like memory, it is too intricate and complex to fit easily into nationalist mythology.[36]

Making the Question Concrete

Going back to my previous discussion of culture as a discursive field within which politics takes place, Bell's concept of mythscape can be seen as a subset of that field.

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[33] Halbwachs, M. (1992). On Collective Memory. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

[34] As discussed, in simple terms, national myths represent narratives that selectively portray the story of a nation's past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology. See Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

[35] In turn, collective memory can be loosely defined as the result of individuals interacting socially in order to articulate their memories.

[36] Bell, D. S. A. (2007). "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity." British Journal of Sociology **54**(1): 77.

Applying the above terminology to my present study, the dissertation essentially maps the transformation of the Czech and Slovak national mythscape (its official histories but also dissident counter-narratives, individual and collective memories) over time by examining Czech and Slovak public debates – in particular parliamentary discussions and media coverage of debates about national holidays, memorials, statues, history textbooks etc.

I specifically make effort to avoid a common tendency in many studies of post-communism to treat the year 1989 as some kind of a "year zero" when all things started and instead situate my discussion of the post-communist symbolic transformation within a larger historical framework of evolving official representations of the Czech and Slovak national past, starting with the inception of the First Czechoslovak republic, and continuing through the WWII period, the communist era, the Velvet revolution of 1989, up to the present. The approach I employ here is thus doubly comparative – it involves both comparisons across time and between the two cases and emphasizes the dynamic, constantly negotiated character of national mythscapes.

The Goals

In telling the story of the evolving transformation of the Czech and Slovak national mythscape, the goals of this dissertation are both descriptive and conceptual. On the descriptive level, the dissertation presents the Czech and Slovak post-communist discourses of collective identity from a historical perspective, comparing the post-communist symbolic battles over the meaning of national history and identity with similar battles that Czechs and Slovaks waged in the past – during the 19th century national awakening era, in interwar Czechoslovakia, during World War II and under communism and shows that this most recent, post-communist, transformation may be unique in terms of the actors and issues involved but certainly not in terms of the processes that constitute it.

On a more conceptual level, the dissertation presents an argument on how we might think of post-communist transitions outside of the strictly institutional framework which tends to dominate studies of post-communism. Its aim is to illustrate how, by studying the role of past cultural meanings in post-communist politics, we might enrich our understanding of post-communist transformations and move beyond the highly popular, politically convenient, nonetheless conceptually inadequate "return of the past" paradigm of post-communist nationalism and actually investigate what pasts exactly are "returning," how, and why.

What is to Come: Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation is organized in the following way. Chapter Two begins to map the multiple and convoluted 20th century transformations of the symbolic mythscapes of Czechs and Slovaks by offering a brief overview of the Czech and Slovak history. Instead of a comprehensive overview, I focus on select "islands of history" (to use Harold Wydra's term), in other words bits and pieces of history which were later picked up by various nationalist elites and became building blocks for their political projects. For purposes of simplification, I group these "islands of history" into four categories, based on the use to which they were put by later observers: (1) Myths of the Origin, (2) Myths of the Golden Age, (3) Myths of the Heroic Age, (4) Myths of the Fall (and unjust persecution) and (5) Myths of Rebirth and Renewal.

Chapter Three lays out the main constitutive elements of the Czechoslovak national narrative as it was constructed by Czechoslovakia's founders in the 1920s and early 1930s. Specifically, I take note of the deep religious and national tensions which arose in connection to state-promotion of what many considered to be a grossly one-sided (pro-Czech, pro-Protestant) form of identity, unrepresentative of the multiethnic and multireligious character

of the interwar Czechoslovak society. The chapter concludes with discussion of the Czech

and Slovak experiences during the Second World War and the decisive impact of those

experiences on the re-definition of the Czech and Slovak identity in the immediate postwar

period.

Chapter Four discusses the three main phases of the Czechoslovak communist regime

– the years of the Stalinist terror (late 1940s-early 1950s), delayed de-Stalinization (1960s-

1968), and Normalization (1969-1989) – and the communist practices of organized forgetting

that accompanied each. Contrary to the popular belief that nationalism was an idea alien to

the communist ideology (and thus was supposedly temporarily frozen in East Central Europe,

only to erupt with vengeance after 1989), I show that the Czechoslovak communist regime

actively appropriated, used and periodically cleansed and revised elements of the Czech and

Slovak national past to consolidate and maintain its power. Furthermore, in contradiction to

extreme constructivist theories of national identity which suggest that elites are capable of

inventing national identities practically at will, I argue that the Czechoslovak communist

regime, despite its reputation of being one of the most rigid, repressive, neo-Stalinist regimes

in the region, was unable to achieve its goal of creating a "new socialist man" and inculcating

in him a new version of the past. Instead, I concur with Shari Cohen that decades of

communist massaging and erasing of history produced a highly cynical, historically

disoriented and distrustful population which, after 1989, became highly vulnerable to the

temptations of various new "fantasies of salvation".[37]

The final Chapter 5 maps the post-communist discourses of memory that have

accompanied the Czech and Slovak transitions from communism. Its key argument as well as

the argument of the dissertation as a whole is that, instead of a spontaneous "unfreezing" or

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[37] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP. Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press.

"return" of some previously repressed or tabooed memories, the so-called post-communist "return of the past" represents simply the most recent phase in the long and convoluted process, begun back in the 19th century by the Czech and Slovak national awakeners, of composing and re-composing Czech and Slovak national histories and identities. What sets this post-communist phase of national imagination apart from its predecessors are communism's enduring legacies. After a brief overview of the main causes of the 1993 Czechoslovak breakup and the actors and political cleavages that emerged in the Czech and Slovak republics afterwards, the chapter zeroes in on the Czech and Slovak post-communist discourses of memory and looks for answers to the puzzle of their divergent post-1993 paths.

Chapter 2: Islands of the Czech and Slovak Early History

Having introduced the theoretical literature which provides the vocabulary and framework with which to think of the national identity and its construction in more abstract terms, this chapter begins to map concrete labors of national identity creation which went into the making of the Czech and Slovak nations. As the previous chapter indicated, nations and traditions, while they may be imagined or invented, nonetheless cannot be simply conjured up out of nothing. History does matter in other words, although certainly not in the deterministic fashion that primordialists attribute to it. In order to make sense of the way Czechs and Slovaks imagined and repeatedly re-imagined themselves as nations throughout the 20th century, something needs to be said first about what came before. My account of the multiple and convoluted 20th century transformations of the symbolic mythscapes of these two nations, therefore, starts with a brief overview of the Czech and Slovak past.

Rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of the Czech and Slovak history, I focus here on select "islands of history." These bits and pieces of history have left a deep mark on the Czech and Slovak national psyche and later, after careful selection, were arranged and then disguised as recovered memory. They then became building blocks for subsequent Czech and Slovak national identity entrepreneurs and their political projects. Loosely combining several typological schemes, proposed by leading scholars of nationalism,[38] I group these "islands of history" into four categories, based on the use to which they were put by later observers: (1) Myths of the Origin, (2) Myths of the

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[38] Specifically, Hosking, G. and G. Schöpflin, Eds. (1997). Myths and Nationhood. New York, Routledge, Schopflin, G. (1997). The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myth. Myths and Nationhood. G. Hosking and G. Schopflin. New York, Routledge, Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP, Smith, A. D. (1999). Myths and Memories of the Nation. Oxford, Oxford University Press, MacDonald, D. B. (2002). Balkan Holocaust? Serbian and Croatian victim-centered propaganda and teh war in Yugoslavia. Manchester, Manchester UP.

Golden Age, (3) Myths of the Heroic Age, (4) Myths of the Fall (and unjust persecution) and (5) Myths of Rebirth and Renewal. I use the above categories simply as useful heuristic tools, recognizing that they are neither exhaustive nor exclusive and that, in reality, they greatly overlap.

Foundational Myths: Myths of Origin and Descent

All nations, no matter how recent they may be, claim to possess a long and glorious past, which usually stands in sharp contrast with the less than an ideal present. Anthony Smith discusses myths of origin and descent as narratives describing ancient origins and noble lineage and genealogy of nations, including stories of founding fathers or tribes.[39] In the Czech national imagination, Praotec Čech holds the status of the mythic forefather of the nation. According to the legend, some time in the 6th century A.D., this mythic Czech ancestor, having led his people from the east, looked out from the top of Mount Rip and seeing "a land subject to no one, filled with game and birds, flowing with sweet milk and honey, and with pleasant climate" decided that earthly paradise for his people had at last been found.[40] The Czech history thus began.

In fact, however, apart from the estimated date of the arrival of the first Slavonic tribes to the region some time around the year 530, little is known about the Czech history prior to the 9th century.[41] What is known is that some time at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries, these Slavic settlers, collectively known as Sclavi, formed themselves into two

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[39] Smith, A. D. (1983). Theories of Nationalism. New York, Holmes and Meier.

[40] Cosmas chronicle, cited in Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University: 9.

[41] The immediate pre-Slavic predecessors of Moravians were Germans who left the region deserted after their defeat (by another Germanic tribe) in 470.   Before the Germans, the region was inhabited by Celts. In fact, the name "Bohemia" comes from the Celtic tribe known as the Boii which inhabited the region in Roman Times (approximately from the mid-fourth century B.C.) until the arrival of Germanic tribes moving into Bohemia from the north in the first century B.C. Steinhubl, J. (2005). Odkedy mozeme hovorit o Slovensku a Slovakoch. Myty nase slovenske. E. Krekovic, E. Mannova and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV**:** 24-29. Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

political "tribes" in order to resist external pressures from the Asian nomadic Avars. The two tribes included the Czech tribe (referred to as Beheimi, Boemi), which resided in the Czech basin, and the Moravians (variously referred to as Maravi, Sclavi Margenses, or Marahenses) who occupied Moravia and western Slovakia. While the Bohemians did not form a unified state until later in the 9th century, the Moravians, led by their duke (knize) Mojmir I., established their state in or around the year 830. For a short period of about twelve years, from 883 to 895, Bohemia was annexed to the Moravian state by the Moravian duke Svatopluk.[42]

The Great Moravian Empire (or simply Great Moravia), as the state came to be known, was relatively short lived – it collapsed in the face of the invading Magyars in or around the year 906. Nevertheless, its existence was noteworthy as it coincided with the growth of Christianity throughout the area. At the time, Christian religion served as one of the key instruments of the Frankish expansion into the Danube basin. Aware that establishment of an independent Moravian church was a key prerequisite for maintaining political independence of Moravia, Moravian Duke Rastislav requested missionary assistance from Rome. When his request was denied since the papacy itself was under the Frankish influence at the time, he turned to the Byzantine emperor Michael III. Faced with the threat of the emerging Frankish-Bulgarian alliance, Michael III agreed and, in 863, sent to Great Moravia two experienced diplomats and prominent intellectuals of the time, brothers

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[42] The origins of the name of the 9th century Moravian state are disputed. In the 9th century, in fact, no-one had ever heard about an entity called "Great Moravia", much less a Great Moravian Empire. The name began to be used only decades after the collapse of the Moravian state. The first written mentions of Great Moravia can be found in the writings of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porfyrogennetos (905-959) who noted the existence of two Moravias – one smaller, situated in the Balkans and one larger (megalli). To this day scholars debate whether, by using the adjective "megalli" Constantine really meant "larger" or whether he used it to mean "more distant", i.e., "the Moravia which was more distant from the Byzantine empire". The addition "empire" was added even later. Turcan, V. (2005). Pribina a Svatopluk - slovenski velmozi? Myty nase slovenske. E. Krekovic, E. Mannova and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV: 30-35.

Constantine (later named Cyril) and Methodius.[43] Their main contributions include the

development of a new Slavonic "glagolitic" script based on the Greek alphabet, translation of

portions of the liturgy and scriptural texts into the Slavic language, establishment of a church

seminary, development of civil law and the introduction of Slavic language liturgy.

The Byzantine mission to Great Moravia was abruptly terminated by Rastislav's

successor, Duke Svatopuk in 886, one year after Method's death (Cyril died in 869).[44]

Expelled from Great Moravia, the Byzantines then took their missionary work to Bulgaria.

There they established theological schools and, based on the glagolitic script invented by

Constantine, devised Cyrillic Alphabet which gradually spread throughout most of the Slavic

world to become the standard alphabet in the Orthodox Slavic countries. In terms of the

fruits of Constantine and Methodius' mission work, these crumbled soon after the termination

of the Byzantine mission. Despite its great potential to raise the cultural level of the

Moravian population, the Slavonic script devised by Constantine was introduced too early

and did not spread beyond the close circle of Constantine and Method's friends and co-

workers. Its practical role for the cultural development of the domestic population was

virtually none since the majority of the Moravian population, including its ruling elite,

remained illiterate throughout the 9th century.[45]

Later on, with the commencement of literacy, the former Great Moravian territories

reverted back to the Latin alphabet, the script first used by the Celts who resided in the region

thousands of years earlier. The Slavic liturgy introduced by Constantine and Methodius was

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[43] In other words, there were many pragmatic reasons involved in the decision to invite the Byzantine missionaries into Great Moravia. To ascribe to the Byzantine mission in Great Moravia the role of some kind of a symbolic bridge between the East and the West as some later interpretations have done is therefore at odds with historical facts. Turcan, V. (2005). Cyril a Metod - trvale dedicstvo? Myty nase slovenske. E. Krekovic, E. Mannova and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV: 36-41.

[44] Although the exact reasons which led Svatopluk to end the Byzantine mission in such an abrupt way are not known, they most likely had to do with the protracted conflict between the followers of Method and Method's personal and ideological opponent the Nitran pro-Western oriented bishop Wiching; some even speculate about a possible failed coup by the pro-Byzantine side.

[45] The Moravian ruler Svatopluk himself was an analphabet.

prohibited by Pope Stephen V as early as in 870 so there was not much to build upon in this respect either. In short, by the beginning of the 10th century, with no followers left to pass the fruits of the Byzantine mission work on to new generations, the otherwise remarkable work of Constantine and Methodius and their followers began to gradually fade into oblivion. "It would be rediscovered and would prove to be instrumental for nationalist purposes during the times of the Czech and Slovak national revival in the 19th century as will be discussed later.[46]

The Moravian state did not outlive the end of the Byzantine mission for very long. Svatopluk's death in 904 and the arrival of new nomads from the east considerably weakened the kingdom and after a decisive defeat by the Magyars in or around 903, the Moravian empire fell apart and its territory and population became divided along the border of the newly emerging Hungarian state. Moravians living to east of the Morava River were absorbed by the Hungarian state and, surrounded by their new non-Slavic neighbors, gradually developed a distinct identity. From the beginning of the 13th century, they began to be referred to as "Slavs", Sclavi, Slavus, Slavi, Toth, Winde, Wenden, occasionally Slovyenyn and Slowyenyny and from the beginning of the 15th century also Slowak.[47] The rest of the original Moravian ethnic group, i.e., the population living to the west of the Morava River, became fully integrated with the Bohemian population and gradually lost its Moravian identity. By the beginning of the 10th century, the Great Moravian Empire and its population ceased to exist and the center of activity moved to Bohemia which gradually became the political center of the Western Slavs.

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[46]Turcan, V. (2005). Cyril a Metod - trvale dedicstvo? <u>Myty nase slovenske</u>. E. Krekovic, E. Mannova and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV: 36-41.

[47] Steinhubl, J. Ibid.Odkedy mozeme hovorit o Slovensku a Slovakoch: 24-29.

Picture 1: Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius

Myths of the Golden Age

As the name suggests, Myths of the Golden Age refer to moments of national greatness, prosperity and glory. They tell stories of harmony and plenty, of times usually long gone, when the nation stood tall and shone with confidence and power. By far the most comprehensive analysis of myths of the Golden Age and their functions comes from Anthony D. Smith. For him and other primordialists, the Golden Age constitutes the key component

of nationalism and national identity. The Golden Age comprises the essence of the nation.[48]

Myths of the Golden Age are usually closely tied up with myths of defeat and national

humiliation, forming a seamless narrative of a rise–fall–renaissance. Their main function is

to boost confidence and inspire loyalty and national pride in their audiences by providing

proof of the nation's capabilities.

The Přemyslid Beginnings and the Czech Golden Age under Charles IV

In the Czech national imagination, the Premyslid beginnings and the rule of Charles

IV are generally considered to be the brightest, most glorious times in the Czech history.

After all, it was under Prince Bořivoj I., Bohemia's first historically documented lord and

member of the medieval Czech Přemyslid Dynasty, allied with the Great Moravian ruler

Svatopluk, that consolidation of the Czech state took place.[49] It was also at this time that

Prague was established as the state's central castle – position which it holds till today. The

consolidation of the Přemyslid kingdom was finalized after 935 by Boleslav I who abolished

all other Bohemian dukedoms, introduced a strict land organization based on the newly built

castles and essentially laid the basis for Bohemia's regional organization as we know it today.

Through a series of territorial expansions, Boleslav extended the Přemyslid control through

Moravia and parts of today's Slovakia to Cracow and farther east, though most of these

territorial acquisitions were lost as early as around 990 to the emerging Polish state. Moravia

was permanently attached to Bohemia at the beginning of the 11th century. Since then, with

the exception of the addition of "Chebsko" in the 13th century and the loss of Kladsko and

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[48] Smith, A. D. (1983). <u>Theories of Nationalism</u>. New York, Holmes and Meier.

[49] According to the legend, Premysl was a plowman whom Libuse, a prophetess descended from Father Cech chose for husband. From that point, Premysl left his plow and oxen and ruled the Czechs from Libuse's castle at Vysehrad.

Silesia in the 18th century, no significant changes to the Czech borders have taken place, which, considering the history of most other European states, is a rather rare occurrence.[50]

The Přemyslid dynasty remained on the Bohemian throne for over four centuries. During this time, the kingdom gradually crystallized into an administratively sovereign state within the Holy Roman Empire, Bohemian kings were recognized by the Emperor, they were numbered among the seven electors of the empire and had the right to appoint their own bishops. It was also under the Přemyslids that the first large scale colonization of Bohemian towns by German craftsmen and merchants took place, unintentionally sowing the first seeds of what would become a deep seated Czech-German animosity.[51]

Contributions of Borivoj, Boleslav and other early Premyslids for the consolidation and development of the Czech medieval state notwithstanding, no Bohemian ruler holds a mystique as powerful among the Czechs as does Vaclav, the patron saint of the Czech land whose statue in the Prague square has been traditionally a place where Czechs gathered in times of national trauma as well as national jubilation. Known for his deep religious devotion and high education, Václav has become a symbol of virtue and religiosity to many Czechs (especially Catholics). Adding to Vaclav's saintly aura was certainly also the fact that he was murdered at a young age on his way to church in Stara Boleslav by his younger brother and successor to the Czech throne, Boleslav I.[52] Later historians have interpreted the rivalry between Vaclav and Boleslav which ended Václav's life in different ways. Nationalist Czech historians have explained it as a reaction to Václav's supposedly pro-German policies, specifically his submission to Henry I the Fowler after the German surprise attack on Prague in 921 which resulted in resuming the payment of a traditional tribute which was first imposed in 806. The German side, on the other hand, (especially during World War II

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[50]Treštík, D. a. (1999). Mysliti Dejiny. Praha, Paseka: 141-2.

[51] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

[52] Although the exact year of Václav's death remains disputed (some sources date it to 929 while others use the year 935), Vaclav was fairly young, under thirty, when he was murdered

(WWII)) has interpreted Václav's policies as a realistic acquiescence to a stronger

Germany.[53] The question of Bohemia's relations to the German state would re-appear again

and again in Czech history as discussed in the following chapters.

Picture 2: Statue of St. Vaclav by Josef Vaclav Myslbek in Prague's St. Vaclav Square

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[53] Agnew, H. (2004). <u>The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown</u>. Standford, Stanford University: 13.

Another name which holds a stable place in the pantheon of Czech national heroes and is tightly associated with the myth of the Czech Golden age is that of Charles IV, the firstborn son of Eliška Přemyslovna (Václav III's sister) and John Luxembourg, under whose rule Bohemia reached the pinnacle of its territorial, economic and cultural power and prosperity.[54] Deliberate in cultivating his Czech heritage, Charles IV, who from 1355 to his death in 1378, held the double title of the Bohemian king and the Holy Roman Emperor. To his credit, he greatly extended the borders of the Bohemian state,[55] strengthened the kingdom's constitutional position within the Holy Roman empire, jumpstarted the Bohemia's economic growth and greatly contributed to the development of arts and culture, earning a nickname Pater Patriae (Father of the Country, or Otec vlasti) from his compatriots while being derided as "stepfather of the empire" and "pope's king" by his opponents.[56] He took Prague for his imperial capital and made it into one of the main commercial and cultural centers of medieval Europe. In addition to fully rebuilding the devastated Prague castle which, by that time, had not been a royal seat for two centuries, Charles IV founded Prague's New Town. He built the largest town square in Europe (Charles Square), a new 520-meter-long stone bridge over Vltava (Charles Bridge), a Benedictine cloister (Emmaus Abbey), in addition to other projects. In fact, much of the architectural beauty Prague is known for dates

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[54] Charles IV took up the office of Margrave of Moravia from his father at the age of seventeen in 1333. Thirteen years later, he became the Bohemian king, and nine years after that he gained the title of the Holy Roman Emperor.

[55] In addition to Bohemia proper, Moravia, and Luxemburg, Bohemia's borders expended under Charles IV to include the Silesian principalities, Upper and Lower Lusatia and upper Palatinate. For a time (1373-1415), borders of the kingdom extended all the way to Brandenburg and Berlin fell under Bohemian rule. Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 34. Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University Press: 36.

[56] Pope Clement VI was a former tutor and advisor of young Charles while at the French court. (Charles was sent to the French court at the age of seven to receive education. He spent ten years there). Part of the reason for the revival of the Luxembourgs' connections to France and the papacy were the deteriorating relations with the Wittelsbach emperor Ludwig of Bavaria. (The Papacy had been involved in a power struggle with Ludwig for some time already). Few years later, after the election of Clement VI these factors would help bring Charles to the imperial throne Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University Press: 31-32.

back to Charles' era.[57]. Charles IV was a devout Christian and an ardent promoter of the Cult

of St. Vaclav after whom he was named at his baptism. He received the name of the Renewer

of the Empire Charlemagne at his confirmation To his saintly predecessor Vaclav, Charles

built a extraordinarily ornate chapel in St Vitus Cathedral in Prague. Highly educated

himself, Charles IV was a great patron of arts and education which he believed to be the key

to Bohemia's sovereignty and prosperity. He founded and supported a number of Czech

cultural and educational institutions, including the oldest university in central Europe, which

now bears his name.[58]

Great Moravia – The First Slovak State?

Due to Slovakia's more than ten century long incorporation into the Hungarian state,

the repertoire of Slovak moments of glory is much thinner than it is in the Czech case. As

has been already mentioned, after the demise of the Great Moravian Empire, the Moravian

population living to the east of the Morava River was subsumed by the newly emerging

Hungarian state and remained its integral part for the following ten centuries. This is not to

say there were no moments of greatness during those ten centuries. As part of the Hungarian

state, Slovaks participated in the Hungarian successes. Particularly prosperous, for instance,

were the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries which, due to the absence of major wars,

invasions, epidemics or famines, are generally considered Hungary's Golden Age. The

territory of Slovakia, with its rich resources of gold and silver ore, shared in this

development. Its major towns – Bratislava, Trnava, Košice, Prešov, and Bardejov as well as

a number of independent royal mining towns – Banská Štiavnica, Banská Bystrica and

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[57] Sayer, D. (1998). <u>The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History</u>. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 34-35.

[58] Charles IV's desire, in his own words, was so that "faithful subjects of our kingdom, who ceaselessly hunger for the fruits of knowledge, should not be forced to beg for foreign help … [and] seek out alien nations or plead for the satisfaction of their longings in unknown lands." Quoted in Ibid.

Kremnica – experienced a rapid development during that time. Especially positive was also the time of the rule of Maria Teresia, when Bratislava became the royal seat and Slovakia the economic and cultural center of Hungary. For a time (until it was relocated to Buda), the University of Trnava, with its largely Slovak faculty, became the center of scientific life in Hungary. Reformed along the lines of the University of Vienna, it housed a medical faculty, faculty of law, as well as natural sciences. In addition, several mining academies were established in Slovakia in the second half of the eighteenth century, drawing on the area's rich mining tradition.[59] Nevertheless, since Slovaks were always in a subordinate position, lacking a state and a nobility of their own, they could not claim any of these moments exclusively as their own. For instance, the time of Maria Teresia's enlightened rule, though undoubtedly positive in many respects, was also marked by heavy centralization (and Germanization) of the public life, generating strong dissatisfaction among the Slovak intelligentsia.

As a result, the 19th century Slovak awakeners, when searching for traditions around which Slovak identity could be invented, looked to the distant ninth century Great Moravia as the first state and the golden era of Slovaks. A prime example is Pavel Jozef Safarik's work Slovanske Starozitnosti (1837) which provided the blueprint with which subsequent generations of Slovaks learned to think was their history. Not only did Safarik situate the Golden Age of Slovaks in the Great Moravian period, he also claimed an essential continuity between the Moravian population of the 9th century and the 19th century Slovak awakeners. In doing so, he stretched the age of Slovaks by several hundred years, to the times when Slovaks as a distinct ethnic group did not even yet exist. Unlike the Bohemian tribes which were also briefly incorporated into the Moravian state as has been discussed, the Moravian

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[59] They included the Mining Academy in Banská Štiavnica and the Berg Akademie which became a model for technical colleges throughout Europe. Among their renowned faculty were the chemist Anthony Rupprecht who was among the first to develop the European method of amalgamation and the Italian physicist Alessandro Volta. Toma, P. and D. a. Kovác (2001). Slovakia: From Samo to Dzurinda. Stanford, Hoover Institution Press: 20.

population occupying the territory of today's Slovakia (called Nitransians) was not yet ethnically differentiated as historical documents from the 9th century show. This population developed a distinct identity only after the demise of Great Moravia when their territory became part of the newly emerging Hungarian state, not before, despite Safarik's claims. It was only due to their new exposure to an ethnic group significantly different from themselves – the Magyars – that the former Moravians or Nitrasians began to ethnically differentiate and gradually identify themselves as Slavs and later Slovaks. Even then, it would still take a very long time before the sense of Slovak identity would take root in the Slovak society. In fact, even as late as at the beginning of the 20th century, many Slovak respondents when asked about their identity were unsure, typically responding that they were bilingual, Slovak and Hungarian speakers. What it meant to be Slovak, in other words, was far from clear even ten centuries after the collapse of Great Moravia. Nevertheless, as scholars of myths remind us, historical accuracy is one of the least important factors when it comes to the emotional appeal of myths. And so, despite its historical inaccuracy, the 19th century myth of Great Moravia as the first Slovak state has been reused over and over again since Safarik's times by subsequent Slovak nationalists, as will be seen in upcoming chapters.

Myths of the Heroic Age

Myths of heroism, or myths of military valour as Schopflin terms them, are tied to instances in a nation's history when the collectivity, either represented by the people or the elite, rebels against what they perceive to be an intolerable tyranny and in that rebellion finds a true expression of its own essence. These myths are often tied to revolutionary situations

and uprisings and typically have a powerful homogenizing effect on their audiences, in addition to serving to justify acts of violence.[60]

The Hussite Era

In the Czech national imagination, the Hussite era represents the brightest moment of national heroism when the Czechs stood up "against all", as the famous 19th century Czech novelist Alois Jirasek put it, and armed with nothing but their fervent faith, religious hymns and simple weapons adapted from farm implements, defended the truth of the Gospel, successfully repulsed multiple foreign crusades. They eventually forced the hated King Žikmund (Charles IV's brother and successor) to abandon his kingdom.[61] In reality, the economic, political and cultural fallout of the Hussite period was clearly a negative one; the Hussite religious wars essentially undid most of the accomplishments Charles IV achieved forty years earlier. Nevertheless, over time, the collective memory of the Hussite revolt proved to be equally, if not more galvanizing and inspiring, as the early Přemyslid beginnings or the golden era of Charles IV.

The name most readily associated with the Czech reformation is that of the Czech priest, lecturer and rector of Prague University, articulator of many tenets which a century later would become the basis of Martin Luther's Protestant reformation, Master Jan Hus. A

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[60] Hosking, G. and G. Schöpflin, Eds. (1997). Myths and Nationhood. New York, Routledge:32.

[61] Contrary to Romantic idealizations of Jirasek and others, however, it turns out that the 15th century Hussites were far less united than what the various successive interpretations have suggested. In fact, it seems that when the Hussites were not fighting off Žikmund and his army or seizing Church property, they were busy fighting each other. The deepest division existed between the so called Utraquists – moderates willing to negotiate with the papacy who generally reduced their demands to the fulfillment of the Four Articles of Prague (i.e., the minimum program agreed by the Hussites on in May 1420 which consisted of (1) communion under both kinds for all lay people, (2) proper and free preaching of the Bible, (3) demand that priests live according to the Scriptures and (4) be punishable in lay courts for mortal sins) – and Táborites who, being much more radical in their demands, rejected all ecclesiastical authority (save that of the Bible) and called for radical social equality. The conflict between the two groups culminated at the fratricidal battle of Lipany in 1434 where the Utraquists defeated the Táborites, after which the road to reconciliation between the Hussites and the papacy was open. Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 38-40.

fearless supporter of the ideas of the English reformer John Wycliff, Hus was excommunicated by the papal curia in 1411 as a heretic. Defying the papal ban, Hus continued to organize public defense of Wyclif's writings at the university and preach at the Prague Bethlehem Chapel against the sale of papal indulgencies. Consequently, he was summoned to Konstanz where, in a public hearing resembling a show trial, he was charged with heresy and sentenced to death. He was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.[62]

Hus' immolation immediately generated a wave of protests by the Czech nobility (including the highest officials in Bohemia and Moravia), who denounced the Council's actions as both a great injustice and a grave national insult. When, less than a year later, another Czech Master, Jeroným Pražský, was burned at Konstanz, the movement began to gain in numbers as well as radicalism until eventually, on July 30, 1419, in an incident which came to be remembered as the First Prague defenestration, a mob of radicalized Hussites thundered into the Town Hall in Prague's New Town, threw its anti-Hussite town councilors out the window and replaced them with Hussite representatives.[63] Žikmund of Luxembourg, who succeeded Charles' deceased son Václav IV on the Bohemian throne shortly after the Prague events, immediately set out to obtain papal backing for launching a holy crusade against the heretical kingdom.[64] From that point on, the Hussites were at war with the rest of the Western Christendom, including their own king.

Reconciliation between the papacy and the Hussites did not come until 1436 when, after seventeen years of fighting, a settlement known as the Compactata of Basle was finally reached, permitting the Hussite Church the exception of practicing communion in both kinds

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[62] Hus' teachings and activities must be seen in the context of the religious and national tensions at the Prague university at the time. There in 1409 – when Václav IV's Kutna hora decree gave the Czechs the majority in the university decision making body – Hus was elected the rector. Hus' election immediately spurred a wave of protests from the German faculty and students, many of whom left Prague to found universities at Leipzig and Erfurt.

[63] Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University Press: 44.

[64] Charles IV" son Václav IV died of heart attack two weeks after the Prague events.

and allowing the Czech nobility to keep the property seized from the Church. Revolutionary

as it was for the times – Basle Compacts represented the first time that a separate

confessional group within Western Christendom was recognized by the papacy – the

agreement did not last for very long. In 1462, the Compacts were renounced by the Pope, the

Hussite leader Jiří z Poděbrad (who in the meantime had been elected the King of Bohemia)

was excommunicated and another holy crusade against the heretical kingdom was

proclaimed.[65]

Picture 3: Jan Hus monument in Prague's Old Town Square

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[65] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press:
40-41.

The Janosik Myth

In the Slovak case, the absence of its own state and indigenous aristocracy has meant that many of the myths that populate the Slovak national mythscape are of a plebeian character – at least as far as the pre-20th century Slovak history is concerned. Perhaps the most popular in the category of "heroic myths" is the legendary Robin Hood-like figure of the Slovak folklore, Juraj Janosik. According to the legend invented by the 19th century Slovak national awakeners, Janosik was a highwayman who robbed nobles and gave the loot to the poor. Janosik became a symbol of resistance to oppression and this image was reinforced in numerous 19th century poems and stories which later became part of the Slovak and Czech middle and high school literature curriculum. Janosik was also the theme of the first Slovak film (made in 1921). During the anti-fascist Slovak national uprising, one of the partisan groups bore Janosik's name. Similarly, after the war, the communist party appropriated the Janosik myth, producing a score of films about the legendary thief. According to the communist rendition, Janosik became a class warrior, fighter for social justice and direct precursor of the Communist Party.

The actual historical figure Janosik was born in the village Terchova in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg monarchy in 1688. He fought with the Kuruc insurgents at the age of fifteen, was then recruited by the Habsburg Army and served as a prison guard in Bytca. At the age of 23, he deserted the army and created a forest robber group of which he became the leader. He was captured in 1713 and sentenced to death. According to a legend, he was caught in a pub, after slipping on spilled peas, thrown in his way by a treacherous old lady. The manner of his execution was not known to the public until the early 19th century when the Slovak national awakeners made it part of the Janosik legend. He was supposedly

executed by being hung on a hook by his left side and was left dangling on the gallows to die (although some sources claim he was hung by the throat).[66]

Picture 4: Statue of Juraj Janosik in Terchova

Later in the 20th century, new moments from the Slovak past would be added to the category of Slovak "heroic myths". The chief among them would be the Slovak antifascist national uprising in which the Slovak Army and general population rose against the wartime

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[66] See for example Hloskova, H. (2005). Narodny hrdina Juraj Janosik. <u>Myty nase slovenske</u>. E. Krekovic, E. Mannova and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV**:** 94-103.

Slovak fascist regime led by President Tiso. That myth too, however, would remain deeply contested and subject to numerous revisions, as discussed in chapters four and five.

Myths of the Fall and Persecution: Hundreds of Years We Suffered

Perhaps no category of myth appears in East Central Europe with greater frequency and enjoys popularity as great as do myths of unjust suffering, powerlessness and defeat. This peculiar East Central European preoccupation with one's own misery is undoubtedly linked to the convoluted history of the region where shifting frontiers and rulers were a common occurrence. Sense of geographical, political and cultural marginalization with respect to Europe has produced a mixture of self-doubt, self pity and anger which looks for scapegoats and external enemies to explain away its own powerlessness and humiliation.[67] As Schopflin explains, these are myths of powerless and compensation for that powerlessness – both of which stress the importance of status reversal. They make virtue of passivity and fatalism and make suffering nations morally superior to others by the virtue of having suffered. In East Central Europe, myths of suffering are typically tied to myths of redemption which claim that a nation, because of its sorrowful history, will be one day redeemed or may itself redeem the world.[68]

The Battle at Bila Hora and the "Age of Darkness"

On the list of the "dark moments" in the history of the Czech lands, the defeat of the anti-Habsburg Czech rebellion at the Battle of Bílá Hora on November 8, 1620 and the brutal

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[67] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

[68] Schopflin, G. (1997). The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myth. Myths and Nationhood. G. Hosking and G. Schopflin. New York, Routledge: 29.

Habsburg revenge that followed is undoubtedly one of the darkest ones. The roots of the 1620 defeat can be traced back to the unfinished business of the Hussite period. After the death of the Hussite King Jiří of Poděbrady, the country was left effectively lawless.[69] Eventually, in 1526, after five decades of disagreement over who should become the new Bohemian king, the Czech Diet, now confronted with the Turkish thrust into Central Europe, finally decided to offer the Bohemian throne to Ferdinand I of the Habsburg royal family. Very soon, that decision proved fateful. Intent on consolidating his power, Ferdinand quickly moved to limit the Czech sovereignty, made the Habsburg succession hereditary and gradually incorporated the once-autonomous Bohemian kingdom into what was to become the Austrian empire.[70] The Czech resentment of the Habsburg heavy-handed rule, which was combined with strong renewed Catholicism pressures, eventually burst open in May 1618 in the Second Prague Defenestration. One year later, the Czech Diet rejected the Habsburg succession and elected a new king, the protestant elector of the Palatinae, Frederick.

The Habsburg revenge against the rebellious Czech nobles came fast and with an exceptional brutality. On November 8, 1620, the Czech rebellion was decisively crushed at the Bílá Hora (White Mountain) on the western outskirts of Prague by the legitimate Habsburg successor, Ferdinand II. The "Winter King" Frederick immediately fled Prague, taking his army with him.[71] The following May, public execution of twenty-seven Czech

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[69] For about five decades following Jiří z Poděbrad's death in 1471, the country was ruled in abstentia by the Polish Jagellons since no suitable domestic replacement could be agreed upon. This meant that the power was effectively devolved to the Czech nobility.

[70] Ferdinand's strategy of political centralization included bypassing of the Land diets which had served as the traditional forums for domestic, fiscal and foreign policy issues, establishing Vienna-based institutions, curbing the autonomy of Prague and other cities, dissolving the district diets – the traditional discussion arenas of the lower nobility, and eventually having the Czech Diet give up its right to elect the king (although they technically still kept the right to "accept" the king). Habsburg policy of political centralization was accompanied by militant Counter-Reformation, with the most important offices being allocated to Roman Catholics, protestant denominations being persecuted and a Jesuit university, Klementinum, being established in Prague in an effort to counter-balance the Utraquist controlled Prague university. Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 42.

[71] Frederick was given the nickname "Winter King" since he ruled exactly for one year and four days.

aristocrats and burghers took place in Prague's Old Town Square. Their heads were

exhibited on the tower of the Charles Bridge for the next ten years as a memento of the events

of 1620.[72] The property of the Protestant nobility – comprising over three quarters of the land

in the kingdom – was confiscated and transferred for little or no cost to Catholic loyalists,

many of them foreigners. Catholicism was declared the only permitted religion in the

kingdom, communion in both kinds was forbidden, Protestant priests were expelled from the

country and Protestant nobles and burghers were given the choice of either converting back to

Catholicism or leaving their homeland. The Prague University was put under Jesuit

administration in 1620 and, about three decades later, merged with the Klementinum to form

the Karl-Ferdinand University.

Picture 5: Execution of 27 Czech Lords in Prague's Old Town Square in 1621. Source:
commons.wikimedia.org.

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[72] The sculls were eventually taken off and ceremonially buried in the Tyn Cathedral during a brief
occupation of Prague by a Saxon Protestant army in 1631.

The resulting cultural and political devastation of Bohemia was enormous. About one-fifth of Czech and Moravian nobles and close to a quarter of the burgers chose voluntary emigration in order to preserve their faith, including such renowned European intellectuals as J.A. Komenský, the author of The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart, or the renowned historian Pavel Stransky. In addition to physical exodus, strict censure of the Czech written word was put in place, accompanied by the burning of virtually all Czech writings from the years 1414-1620.[73] German language was made equal with Czech in state administration, a status it had never had before. On the other hand, the Czech language, once a language of education and higher administration, retreated from cities and became a sign of a low class status. The class structure was thoroughly altered as a result of the confiscations and emigration of the Protestant nobility. Even though legally Bohemia remained an independent kingdom linked to Vienna only by the person of the monarch, in reality, its sovereignty was effectively lost. The few residual powers the Czech Land Diet still retained after several decades of Habsburg centralization were now either severely curtailed or totally erased.[74] In short, Bohemia's political status as well as its ethnic, linguistic, religious and class structures were changed beyond recognition in the aftermath of Bílá Hora. By the later 18th century, the great majority of Czechs – from nobility down to peasants – were once again Roman Catholic.[75]

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[73] Over the period of thirty years, this amounted to the physical liquidation of over thirty thousand books proclaimed to be heretical or erroneous by the Jesuit censors. Among these was the Bible kralicka, the treasure-house of the Czech language. As Derek Sayer perceptively noted, this was not merely a religious purge, it was a war against much that up until then defined Czech history and Czech identity Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 49.

[74] The Czech Diet was no longer allowed to exercise its right "to assent to" each new king which meant that the Habsburg succession was officially proclaimed hereditary on both the male and female side. The Diet also lost its power to initiate legislation and was only allowed to debate issues put before it by the king. It could no longer control residence in the kingdom, which meant that foreigners were free to buy estates without first acquiring Czech permission. Ibid. 47.

[75] To make the transformation complete, the links to the Czech past were severed and historical memory re-arranged to reflect the new circumstances. One example of this is the Jesuit attempt to displace the figure of Jan Hus in the popular memory by inventing a new national martyr, St. Jan

In the 19th century, during the period of the Czech national awakening, the battle of

Bila Hora was singled out as the defining moment in the Czech history and a key pillar of the

new narrative of Czech identity. That narrative was provided by Frantisek Palacky in his

distinctly Romantic, five-volume History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia

(Dějiny Národu Ceského v Čechách a na Moravě, 1836-1867). Although Palacký's work

covered only Bohemia's medieval history, in particular the golden age of Charles IV and

completely pushed to the sidelines Bohemia's more recent, two and half centuries long,

incorporation into Austria, its simple framework, summarized by Palacky himself as "We

were here before Austria, and we will also be here after it!" offered a convenient way to re-

interpret later events as well. The 1620 anti-Habsburg revolt of Czech nobles thus became

reduced to a Czech national rebellion –its class and religious dimensions omitted from the

story. Similarly, the twenty-seven victims of Ferdinand's revenge in the aftermath of the Bílá

Hora defeat were inscribed into Czech history as national martyrs. And so were Jan Amos

Komenský and the other post-Bílá Hora émigrés who left the country when the Protestant

faith was banned. In short, the entire post-Bílá Hora period was recast as a period of purely

national oppression of the Czechs by the Germans; the wider European currents which had an

impact on the Czech-German relations at that time (such as the Protestant reformation or the

emergence of the modern state) were glossed over, as were the class roots of the conflict. [76]

Nepomucky and creating a commemorative day for him on May 16. As it later turned out,
Nepomucky, who according to a legend was supposed to be thrown from the bridge into Vltava by
Václav IV in 1393 after he refused to reveal the secrets of the confessional, was indeed a Jesuit
fabrication – a composite of two 14th century personages – and was eventually stripped of his
sainthood in 1963. Ibid. 47-52.

[76] The Hussite period held a special place in this narrative and was also re-cast in a new, national, light.
The Hussites ceased to be the medieval soldiers of God which they believed themselves to be, and
instead became the soldiers of the Nation, fearlessly defending the Czech language and embodying all
of the uniquely Slavic values which Herder celebrated in his pan-Slavist writings, including
democracy, pacifism, freedom, justice and equality.

"Thousand Years we Suffered" – Myth of the Millennial Slovak Oppression under the Magyars

While the Czechs refer to the Bila Hora defeat as the beginning of their national "age of darkness", Slovak nationalists place the beginning of their national "millennial oppression" in 906 – the year when Great Moravia was defeated by the Hungarians. A short episode from 1999 provides a good example of how deeply entrenched this myth in the Slovak society is. In 1999 the ultra nationalist Slovak National Party led by Jan Slota, a politician infamous for his xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Hungarian, and anti-Czech rhetoric, requested that the Party of Hungarian Coalition, which at the time was part of the center right governing coalition led by Premier Dzurinda, apologized to the Slovak nation for the "millennial oppression perpetrated on the Slovaks by Magyars" and thus demonstrated its loyalty to the Slovak Republic. Slota's statement was bound to provoke strong reactions from various parts of the Slovak political spectrum – which it did. But what was especially significant about the incident was that it showed the extent of the myth of the millennial oppression in the Slovak society. Politicians, journalists, observers, readers, regardless of which side of the ideological divide they stood, could place and decode the myth of Slovak victimhood without any difficulty or further need for elaboration. The myth of the millennial oppression of Slovaks by Magyars was a cultural code, understood and taken for granted both by its supporters and its opponents.

In fact, however, the myth has a relatively recent pedigree. It was not until the 19th century when Slovak national awakeners, especially Pavel Jozef Safarik, invented and popularized the concept of millennial oppression of Slovaks by Magyars that it entered public consciousness. In his 1837 work *Slovanské Starožitnosti*,[77] Safarik did what Palacky had done for the Czech history – provided the conceptual matrix, with which to associate the

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[77] Safarik, P. J. (1837). Slovanske starozitnosti. Praha.

Slovak past. Similar to Palacký's rendition of the Czech history, Šafárik's account of the

Slovak past was a story of an age-old antagonism and oppression. Only, in this case, the

main actors, the peaceful, democratic and freedom-loving Slovaks, were fending for

themselves not against the Germans but against their belligerent Hungarian neighbors, whose

aggressive arrival into the Danube Region at the beginning of the 10th century ended the

Slovaks' Golden Age in the Great Moravian Empire and marked the beginning of the Slovak

millennial suffering and subjugation. Another similarity which connects Palacky's and

Safarik's narratives is a noticeable historical re-ordering and stretching present in both

narratives. Just as the two and a half centuries of Bohemia's incorporation within the

Austrian empire were pushed aside and presented as simply an aberration or anomalous

disruption of a much longer and a much more glorious historical continuity in Palacky's

narrative of the Czech history, the entire nine hundred plus year-long time of Slovak

incorporation into the Hungarian state were labeled simply a "millennial darkness" in

Šafárik's story.

That Šafárik's interpretation of Slovak history was historically inaccurate is without

question. As discussed, Slovaks as a distinct ethnic group did not yet exist at the time of the

9th century Moravian state; drawing a direct line between the Moravian population and the

19th century Slovak national awakeners was therefore historical nonsense. More importantly,

however, by placing Slovakia's Golden Age in the time of the 9th century Moravian state and

rejecting the entire period of the Slovak incorporation into the Hungarian state as "darkness"

or an aberration, Šafárik projected negative experiences of his own times on Slovakia's entire

post-Great Moravian history and in the process stripped Slovaks of ninety percent of their

history.[78]

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[78] Findor, A. (2005). Tisicrocna poroba? <u>Myty nase slovenske</u>. E. Krekovic, E. Mannová and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, SAV**:** 71-76.

In reality, the policies of heavy Magyarization that Šafárik referred to in his book did not begin until the later half of the 19th century, specifically until the failed 1848 revolt and the subsequent dualization of the Habsburg monarchy in 1867 when Austro-Hungary became divided into two states, each of which pursued an independent minority policy. In the Hungarian half, of which Slovakia was part, the original St. Stephen's conception of a multinational Hungary was abandoned for the nationalist project of building a "single Magyar political nation." With it, all Slovak cultural and higher education institutes were abolished and Hungarian was established as the sole official language of the state.

As harsh and devastating as Hungary's post-1867 minority policy was, however, it ought to be emphasized that it was a specific 19th century phenomenon. No Slovak sources dating back to the 14th, 16th or 18th century ever mention a five hundred-, seven hundred-, or nine hundred-year long oppression of Slovaks by Magyars. The character of the Slovak-Hungarian relations during Slovakia's incorporation in Hungary was simply much more complex than what we find in Šafárik's narrative and only rarely did it reflect purely ethnic criteria. This is not to say that there were no episodes of ethnic conflict or linguistic battles between the two groups. But to use these isolated instances as some proof of a thousand-year-long discrimination of the entire ethnic group as the nineteenth century historiography had done is historically inaccurate. Ethnic criteria simply did not weigh that much in the final decisions of the state, the Church or the landlords at that time. If the Slovak peasant was suffering from the burdens of an unjust feudal system, chances were the Hungarian peasant was suffering just as much. In other words, rather than one's ethnic identification, it was more likely one's social status and religion which determined his or her societal hierarchy at that time.[79]

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[79] Krivy, V. and E. Mannova Ibid.Mytus obete**:** 77-85.

Paradoxically, by trying to endow his compatriots with a long and glorious past, Šafárik effectively erased most of the past that Slovaks had. It is here that we can locate the seeds of the perpetual Slovak frustration with their history and attempts to compensate for this deficiency by inventing glorious pasts in places where they did not exist. Šafárik's "thousand years we suffered under the Magyars" thesis would later undergo numerous modifications. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, for instance, the millennial subjugation of Slovaks under the Hungarian rule would be interpreted as a thousand-year-long separation of "two brotherly branches of the Czechoslovak nation" which "finally and definitely" ended with the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. During the wartime Slovak state, the millennial oppression of Slovaks would be interpreted in a similar way, except for the fact that Great Moravia would become the first state of Slovaks and the date of the "final and definite" end of the Slovak suffering would be represented by March 14, 1939. The Czechoslovak communist historiography would generally follow the interpretation of the First Czechoslovak Republic and depict Great Moravia as the first common state of Czechs and Slovaks but the interpretation of the thousand-year-long oppression would focus on the class roots of the conflict, downplaying its national causes. And the post-communist Czech and Slovak elites would find their own ways to re-work the myth into their own narrative schemes as will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Picture 6: Hungarian jail of the nations. A postcard issued by Ferdis Juriga, Slovak deputy in the Hungarian Diet, commemorating Juriga's two year long imprisonment for anti-Hungarian provocations.

Myths of Rebirth and Renewal – The Czech and the Slovak National Awakening

Scholars of political myth often point to similarities between political and Biblical myths, emphasizing the theological and cyclical nature of both. Political myths, much like Biblical myths, leave their audience with an assumption that contemporary events are but an episode in a much larger story. They allow individuals to understand their nation's role in

history as well as the specific era in which the nation finds itself.[80] According to Henry Tudor, "Mythical time is reversible. What is done is not forever lost. It may in the fullness of time repeat itself. Every myth is a story of death and rebirth, of an end or eschatos with simultaneously a new beginning."[81] Similarly, George Schopflin describes myths of rebirth as stories of reawakening in which a nation that is partially destroyed or suppressed by a fall may reawaken and redeem itself. "Rebirth can create a sense of a clean slate, a new start, in which the awfulness of the past can be forgotten."[82] In political myths, history is composed of falls and redemptions and although there may be a belief that the nation will eventually come out victorious, there is a sense of constant threat from the outside enemies who hinder the nation's progress and thus make it necessary for members of the nation to rally together to preserve their identity.[83]

Up until the 18th century, the primary form of personal identification in both the Bohemian and the Slovak societies was based not on one's ethnicity or language but on one's estate. Although there existed a rather strong awareness of "Czechness" among the Bohemian population, this awareness did not correspond to an ethnic identification but could more appropriately be described as land patriotism – a much broader form of identification which subsumed all those living in Bohemia at the time, regardless of their national, linguistic or religious identification. A similar land-based form of patriotism existed in Moravia. The situation was somewhat different in Slovakia where the dominant awareness of a Hungarian state identity (i.e., the idea that all privileged inhabitants of the Hungarian state formed one Hungarian nation) co-existed with an awareness (although weak) of "Slavness"

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[80] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

[81] Tudor, H. (1972). Political Myth. London, Pall Mall Press.

[82] Schopflin, G. (1997). The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myth. Myths and Nationhood. G. Hosking and G. Schopflin. New York, Routledge.

[83] MacDonald, D. B. (2002). Balkan Holocaust? Serbian and Croatian victim-centered propaganda and the war in Yugoslavia. Manchester, Manchester UP.

among the country's Slovak population. The 19th century national awakening movement set out to change all that and replace the existing land-based, historic, affinities with new, linguistically-based ones.

The idea of linguistic ties was adopted from Germany and drew, specifically, on Herder's writings on nations. Instead of unifying independent dukedoms into empires as Herder had in mind, however, the Czech and Slovak national "awakeners", as the 19th century Czech and Slovak nationalist elites came to be referred to, sought the opposite goal – division of an existing empire, i.e. the Austro Hungary, into autonomous national units.[84] And even though they liked to refer to themselves as mere "awakeners" and defined their goals in cultural rather than overtly political terms, their activities were, in fact, revolutionary.

With the help of dictionaries, history, language books and other publications as well as institutes and learned societies focused on the promotion of Czech and Slovak literature, the awakeners succeeded in gradually redefining the Czech and Slovak identity and historical experience. This after centuries in which it had been inextricably tied to the history of the Holy Roman Empire and the kingdom of Hungary. They replaced them with a new, linguistically-based, set of associations. Re-imagined as a Slavic nation, Bohemia ceased to be the most eastern outlier of the despised German civilization and, instead, became – at least in the minds of its creators – the most western outlier of the newly constructed Slavic world (the fact that the Czechs had never been Orthodox and had never written in Cyrillic notwithstanding). Similarly, Slovakia ceased to be an isolated Slavic island in the Hungarian dominated multinational state and became part of an imagined, linguistically-based Slav, later Czechoslav and still later Czechoslovak community. This was far from a mere "revival" of an existing national identity. The identities constructed by the Czech and Slovak awakeners were new creations, miles away from the original land-based patriotism which had bound

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[84] Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 23-24.

together the inhabitants of these countries over the preceding centuries and made it possible

for each member of the society – whether they spoke Czech, German, Jiddish, Polish, Slovak,

Hungarian or other languages – to call them their home. With identity redefined in strictly

linguistic terms, all non-Czech and non-Slovak speakers were effectively relegated to the

position of "outsiders".

It should be noted that the question of what the exact contours of the new linguistic

community ought to be was deeply contested both among the Czech and the Slovak

awakeners at the time. In Bohemia, a narrower conception of Czech identity championed by

Josef Havlíček Borovský, sought to draw the borders of the imagined Czech community

rather narrowly – including only the Slavic inhabitants of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and

Slovakia.[85] This competed with a much broader, "pan-Slavist" program – advocated, for

instance, by Josef Jungmann, Josef Dobrovský, Ján Kollár, Pavel Jozef Šafárik, among others

which saw the Czech identity as part of a much larger Slavic identity, which in addition to

Moravians and Slovaks, included Poles, Russians and Illyrians. To representatives of the

broader conception, the Czech language, just like Polish or Russian languages, was but one

dialect of a single Slavic language.[86] To proponents of the narrower conception of Czech

identity, the Poles, Czechs, and Russians constituted independent nations. Despite their

linguistic affinities, they no more constituted a single "Slavic nation" than Germans, Danes,

Swedes, Dutch, Norwegians and English comprised a single "Germanic nation" or Spaniards,

French, Portuguese and Romanians formed a single "Romance Nation".[87] In Slovakia, the

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[85] Havlicek's opposition to the Czech pan-Slavist program was a result of his deep suspicion of Russia's imperial ambitions.

[86] A good example of efforts to reground Czech language and identity in a broader Slavic identity is Josef Jungmann's 120,000 entry, 5-volume Czech-German dictionary, published between 1834-39, which included, in addition to Czech terms (either derived from the Czech language as it was spoken at the time or from archaic Czech), a large amount of words borrowed from other Slavic languages. The compilation of the dictionary took its author over thirty years. Many of Jungmann's contemporaries derided Jungmann for producing a Slavonic rather than a Czech dictionary. Sayer, 70-72, 109-110.

[87] Havlicek's reservations about the pan-Slavist program were linked to his suspicion of the Russian imperialist ambition. In terms of the relationship between Czech and Slovak, Havlicek considered the

key division was between Slovak Catholic intelligentsia who advocated the idea of an independent Slovak nation speaking Slovak, and Slovak Protestants who were in favor of a "Czechoslav" identity based on the Czech language.[88]

What was at stake in these seemingly theoretical disputes about linguistic similarity (or otherwise) between Czech, Slovak and other Slavic languages was clearly more than just pure linguistics. As Benedict Anderson reminds us, dictionaries and grammars, in addition to serving their educational purpose, are key instruments through which nations are created and sustained[89]. At stake in these theoretical arguments was a fundamental disagreement over the character of the Czech and Slovak identity and nation that was in the making[90]. And at the heart of the argument was a tacit agreement that non-Slavs, specifically the Germans and the Hungarian, were not to be included. In short, purely linguistic battles, they were not.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century in Bohemia and much later in Slovakia, however, that the Czech and Slovak awakeners' construction ceased to be mere

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two to be dialects of the same "Czechoslav" language. Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 111.

[88] Eventually, in the early 1840s, under increasing magyarization pressures, the two strands of the Slovak national intelligentsia did unite, adopting a new literary Slovak language, distinct from the Czech as well as the "Slovakized Czech" used by Slovak Protestants up until then. The key catalyst which prompted the unification of the Slovak Catholic and Slovak Protestant national movements was an increasing radicalization of the Magyar national movement. Aware that the issue of language was the major sticking point which had divided Slovak Catholics and Slovak Protestants previously, Ludovit Stur, the leader of the young generation of Slovak Protestants moved to codify a new literary Slovak language, differentiating it from the literary Czech as well as the "Slovakized Czech" used by Slovak Protestants up until then, which the Slovak Catholics had been so critical of. In addition to enabling the unification of the two Slovak movements, Stur's 1843 separation of the literary Slovak language also reflected a sense, which had been gradually developing within the Slovak society, of Slovak and Czech distinctiveness. From the late 1830s and 1840s, it became fairly clear that the Czechs and the Slovaks would develop as two independent cultural-ethnic communities, although with a strong awareness of their mutual closeness Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 26.

[89] See Anderson, B. (1991). Imagined Communities. London, Verso.

[90] Havlíček Borovský's aversion to pan-Slavist attempts to incorporate Bohemia more deeply within the Slavic fold had more to do with his suspicion of Russia's imperial ambitions (which in turn were based on his personal experience of having lived in …czarist Russia for a number of years), than with his like or dislike of the Russian language itself. Similarly, the pan-Slavist arguments of Jungmann, Dobrovský, Kollár and Šafárik had pragmatic side to them as well – seeing in the Czech-Slavic cooperation a counterbalance to German influence in Bohemia and Hungarian influence in Slovakia.

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private activities of a handful of poets and intellectuals and gradually came to be embraced by the Czech and Slovak middle classes. The shift was especially noticeable in Bohemia where modernization provided a set of instruments and technologies (cheap newsprint, schools, postal services, political parties, public buildings, etc.) through which the national project could be carried out.[91] It also generated a modern and prosperous civil society which was capable of being nationalized. This was a population which increasingly lived in towns and cities, could read and write, was becoming increasingly affluent, and, perhaps most importantly, had a personal interest in the circulation of the Czech language.[92] As a result, as Derek Sayer writes, by the mid 19th century, the national image constructed by the Czech awakeners became so deeply ingrained in the Czech everyday life – in the language, customs, folk tales, nursery rhymes, dress – that it ceased to be a mere intellectual construct and became an integral part of social reality. And this image was never seriously disrupted since; not even after the failed revolts of 1848 and the subsequent imposition of neo-absolutism.[93]

The situation in Slovakia was considerably different. Unlike in Bohemia where modernization was already in full swing by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hungarian part of the monarchy, where Slovakia belonged, was still deeply enmeshed in feudalism. The majority of the Slovak population was comprised of peasants with only a weekly developed sense of their national distinctiveness. The middle class, which proved to be essential in transforming the ideas of Czech awakeners into a truly mass-based movement in Bohemia, was emerging only very slowly in Slovakia and where it did exist, it tended to easily succumb to Magyar pressures. Similarly, support from the patriotically-minded aristocracy, so instrumental for the success of the Czech national movement, was missing in

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[91] Anderson, B. (1991). Imagined Communities. London, Verso.

[92] Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University: 110-111.

[93] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 89.

Slovakia where the majority of Slovak nobles were either Hungarian or, when Slovak by

origin, were more loyal to the Magyar than to the Slovak cause.[94] Finally, as has been

mentioned, the relatively small group of Slovak intelligentsia which existed and was active at

the time was deeply divided along religious lines.[95]

The gap between the Czech and the Slovak realities and national programs grew still

larger after the 1867 dualization of the Habsburg monarchy. As has been mentioned,

Budapest (under whose administration Slovakia belonged) quickly abandoned the original St.

Stephen's conception of a multinational Hungarian state and began to take drastic measures

to make Hungary into a "single Magyar political nation".[96] Meanwhile, Bohemia which was

administered by a much more nationally lenient Viennese government enjoyed a considerable

degree of social, economic, political and cultural autonomy, including the right to use the

Czech language in administration and education. As a result, by the early 1890s, Bohemia

was able to develop into a fully fledged political nation (minus the state) with all attributes of

a well-developed civil society while in Slovakia, the development of national life was

stagnating under the heavy yoke of Magyar nation.

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[94] Further complicating the task of the Slovak national awakeners was also the multiplicity of
languages which were in wide use on the territory of Slovakia at the time. Besides German, which was
the official language of administration and schooling and Latin, which continued to be the official and
scientific language as well as the language of the Catholic liturgy, Hungarian, Slovak and Czech were
widely spoken – Hungarian by the nobility; Slovak largely by peasants, serfs and some, predominantly
Catholic, intellectuals and classical Czech by Slovak Protestants as well as a large portion of the
Slovak intelligentsia.

[95] These differences translated into different political strategies the Czech and the Slovak awakeners
opted for in 1848. While the Czech program sought to legitimize its demands for federalization of
Austro-Hungary via arguments of state historic right (essentially the argument that the 1526 election of
Ferdinand of Habsburg to the Czech throne was a voluntary act by the Bohemian estates and therefore
Bohemia never lost its independence), the Slovak national elites, in the absence of a historic state,
cloaked their demands in the language of natural rights. Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20.
století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 29.

[96] In the same year, all major Slovak cultural and educational institutions, including the premier Slovak
cultural institution Matica Slovenska, were abolished. The resulting cultural devastation was
enormous. According to a 1919 survey, out of the total number of six thousand schoolteachers working
in Slovakia, only one tenth, i.e., six hundred even spoke Slovak. Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of
Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 173.

The outbreak of the First World War took the developments of Czech and Slovak national movements in a wholly new direction. Previously limited to efforts to secure an equal position within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the aims of the Czech and Slovak national movements began shifting towards national self-determination as the war progressed. With them, the pragmatic benefits of a union between Czechs and Slovaks began to gain in attraction. With Austro-Hungary's capitulation on October 27, 1918, the centuries-long association of Czechs and Slovaks with the House of Habsburgs ended and a new phase in the Czecho-Slovak relations began.

Chapter 3: Constructing the Czechoslovak Nation – Act I: The Interwar Republic

As Mona Ozouf poignantly notes in her book on festivals and the French Revolution, revolutionary events open up time in both directions – forward and backward. They offer the winners the opportunity to legitimize themselves by inventing traditions and propose their own version of the past and of the future.[97] The fall of Austro Hungary and the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was one such transformative event. And even though, as the previous chapter made clear, invention of tradition as a tool of political legitimization had been already used and abused by the Czech and Slovak national awakeners back in the 19th century, the establishment of Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of World War I (WW I)gave the Czech and Slovak intellectual elites a state apparatus of their own to institutionalize their invented traditions and thereby achieve, at least partially, hegemonic control over the content of their national mythscape. This chapter lays out the main constitutive elements of the Czechoslovak national narrative as it was constructed by Czechoslovakia's founders in the 1920s and early 1930s. Specifically, I take note of the deep religious and national tensions which arose in connection to state-promotion of what many considered to be a grossly one-sided (pro-Czech, pro-Protestant) form of identity, unrepresentative of the multiethnic and multireligious character of the interwar Czechoslovak society. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Czech and Slovak experiences during the Second World War (WW II) and the decisive impact of those experiences on the re-definition of the Czech and Slovak identity after the war.

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[97] Ozouf, M. (1988). <u>Festivals and the French revolution</u>. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Establishment of the Interwar Czechoslovak Republic

The establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic on October 28, 1918 could

very well be described as an accident of history – a fortuitous result or coincidence of

activities of a handful of Czech and Slovak politicians, supported by Czech and

Slovak émigré groups in North America, with the aims of the victorious Allies. There

was nothing inevitable about Czechoslovakia's birth. In fact, it took more than three

years of concerted diplomacy, military planning and organization before the

arguments of the Czechoslovak founders – Tomas Garique Masaryk (the intellectual

father of the idea of a joint Czechoslovak state and later its first president) and his two

émigré colleagues, Edvard Benes and a Slovak astronomer living in France, Milan

Rastislav Stefanik – finally began to find willing ears on the side of the Entante

powers. And even then, it was primarily for pragmatic reasons that the up-until-then

hesitant western leaders eventually decided to change their position and support

Czechoslovakia's establishment.

At its core, Masaryk's idea of a joint Czecho-Slovak state, was a pragmatic

one. It stemmed from Masaryk's personal conviction that the emergence of a

German-dominated Mitteleuropa – the inevitable outcome of the war, were the

Central Powers to prevail – was fundamentally irreconcilable with the Czech national

aspirations. Dismantling of the defunct Austro-Hungary and creation of a new

system based on the principle of national self- determination, Masaryk reasoned, was

the only option available if Czechs were to continue to exist as an independent

nation.[98] Czechoslovakia – a state incorporating Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia –

was to be the product of this new system. The incorporation of Slovakia was an

essential part of Masaryk's plan for two reasons. First, without Slovakia, an

independent Czech state – if it ever came into being – would be predestined for the

role of the weakest central European state. Union of the Czech lands with Slovakia,

however, would create a state large enough to withstand the pressures of its powerful

neighbors. Incorporation of Slovakia into the new state would also provide the

Czechs with a direct corridor to Russia – providing another powerful check on

Germany's imperial ambition.

Masaryk's strategy of convincing the Western powers of the pragmatic merits

of the Czechoslovak union had one caveat, however, which as it soon turned out

became the Achilles heel of the new republic. In order to gain the approval of the

Western powers, Czechs and Slovaks had to be presented as two branches of one

homogeneous Czechoslovak nation (otherwise the argument that Austro-Hungary had

to be dismantled based on the principle of national self-determination would fail).

From the Czech perspective, this did not present serious difficulties as the sentiment

prevalent among the Czech political elites at the time, Masaryk included, was that the

difference between Czechs and Slovaks was mainly a matter of different political and

economic conditions in the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Habsburg monarchy

– a gap that could easily be overcome with proper education and modernization of the

Slovak society. Masaryk's statement "Slovak is a Magyarized Czech", though

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[98] This was a novel idea since up until then, the Czech political program (like most other national movements in Austro-Hungary at the time) was focused on achieving a greater degree of autonomy within the monarchy, not on monarchy's liquidation.

insensitive to the intricacies of the Slovak question, was, in fact, a fairly representative reflection of the Czech elite's view of the Slovak society in the late 19th century.[99]

On the Slovak side, Masaryk's idea of the Czechoslovak union met initially with skepticism. In part, this was due to the fact that, unlike the Czechs who generally understood the Czechoslovak project to be essentially a renewal of the historical Bohemian state (with more favorable, expanded, borders), the Slovaks never had a state of their own; their historical experience had always been inextricably linked to Hungary. For Slovak political elites, therefore, the idea of Austro-Hungary's disintegration and creation of Czechoslovakia was something completely new, not to mention the fact that due to heavy political and national repression, conditions for open discussion of various political alternatives simply did not exist in Slovakia at the time. Reservations toward the idea of a Czecho-slovak union, however, were also strong among Slovak émigré circles abroad where political openness to discuss alternatives did exist. Especially in the United States, Slovak émigré organizations had been calling for Slovak autonomy in Hungary for some time already and viewed the Czech-led initiative to create a joint Czechoslovak state with suspicion. Nevertheless, pragmatic considerations spoke loud and clear and neither side could ignore them. After some initial hesitation, therefore, representatives of the Czech and Slovak émigré groups agreed to work together toward the establishment of a common, democratic, Czecho-Slovak federal state, expressing this agreement in

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[99] As for the attitude of Bohemia's general public toward the idea of a Czecho-Slovak union, it was largely ambivalent. Given the very limited connections that existed between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the monarchy at the time, it is fair to assume that the common Czech neither knew nor was too much concerned about the Slovak population living in Hungary.

two crucial agreements – one signed in Cleveland, Ohio on October 22, 1915, another endorsed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on May 30, 1918. [100]

It was not until the summer of 1918, when the inevitability of Austro-Hungary's demise was becoming increasingly clear, however, that the up-until-then hesitant Western powers began to take note of the arguments made by Masaryk and his colleagues. By that time, the allied armies were also beginning to lose strength and so the political weight of the well-organized Czechoslovak legions grew considerably. The decisive point for the establishment of Czechoslovakia then came on October 18, 1918 with President Woodrow Wilson's decline of Austro-Hungary's last attempt to strike a deal by offering its nations a federal arrangement. Nine days later, Austro-Hungary accepted the US note and the following day, on October 28, amidst mass demonstrations and celebrations, the establishment of Czechoslovakia was officially proclaimed by the national committee in Prague. Czechoslovakia was born.

Paradoxically, however, the news of Czechoslovakia's establishment did not reach Slovakia until October 30, two days after Czechoslovak independence had been proclaimed in Prague. Since Czech newspapers had been banned in Slovakia since April and neither the Hungarian nor the German papers informed about the Prague events, Slovak representatives who gathered at a planned meeting in Martin on October 30, were completely unaware of the events that had taken place in Prague. The meeting produced a document entitled Declaration of the Slovak Nation, which expressed the desire of "the Hungarian branch of the Czechoslovak nation" for self-

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[100] Lipták, L. (2000). Slovensko v 20. storočí. Bratislava, Kalligram: 59.

determination. Only later that day, after a messenger finally arrived from Prague with the news of the Prague events, did the remaining delegates (by that time most of the participants had already left for home) make an addition to the existing document, citing Austro-Hungary's acceptance of the demands of the American government as the justification for the Slovak demand for self-determination and desire to be part of a joint Czechoslovak state.

It must have been clear to Czechoslovakia's founders from the very beginning, however, that the road ahead would be a rocky one. First of all, Czechoslovakia, like most other states which had emerged out of the debris of the former Austro-Hungary. faced serious minority problems. Of Czechoslovakia's total population of 13.4 million, only about two-thirds identified themselves as Czechs or Slovaks in 1918, approximately 6.8 million or fifty-one percent were Czech and 1.967 million were Slovaks. The rest of Czechoslovakia's population consisted of ethnic minorities – approximately 3.124 million Germans (32.6 percent of the Bohemian population, i.e., roughly every third person living in Bohemia, or about 23.3 percent of the entire population of CSR), 745,000 Hungarians, 462,000 Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Russians, 181,000 Jews (0.345 if considered by religion rather than declarations of Jewishness as a nationality), 76,000 Poles, in addition to a smaller number of "others".[101] Creating a nation, out of this diverse motley of people who suddenly became citizens of Czechoslovakia was bound to be difficult, not to mention the fact that many of those who became minorities on the date of Czechoslovakia's establishment had in fact been the Czechs' and the Slovak's

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[101] 1921 census data in Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 168.

yesterday's masters and so their incorporation into the new state was reluctant at best.[102]

In addition to Czechoslovakia's minority problem, considerable differences divided the Czechs and the Slovaks themselves. Even though Bohemia and Slovakia had common rulers since the election of Vladislav II Jagellon to the Hungarian throne in 1490, Czechs and Slovaks remained separated by a political and economic border dividing the Hungarian and the Austrian part of the monarchy.[103] As a result, the Czechs were entering their new state with a well developed modern civil society, established political parties, trade unions, voluntary organizations, strong Czech language press, universities, schools, art galleries, theaters, and most importantly, a literate and nationally conscious public – almost half of which lived in cities and towns. By contrast, Slovakia remained largely agricultural and rural. Out of the total Slovak workforce in 1921, sixty-six percent worked in agriculture and forestry (only about fifteen percent worked in industry). For comparison, Bohemia's agricultural employment figures for that same period were below thirty percent. Even in 1930, i.e., twelve years after the founding of Czechoslovakia, there were only eight Slovak

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[102] Multiple protests took place following the proclamation of the establishment of Czechoslovakia. Between October and December 1918, German Bohemian leaders in German-inhabited regions established four "Austrian" provinces, refusing to recognize the Czechoslovak government. Dissatisfaction existed also in Eastern Slovakia, where an "independent" pro-Hungarian Slovak state was proclaimed in Košice on December 11 1918, initiated and supported by the Hungarian government. In the following months, the Hungarian Red Army under the leadership of Bela Kun temporarily occupied the entire Eastern Slovakia and later in June 1919 established a pro-Hungarian Slovak Soviet Republic there. Both instances demanded military intervention by the Czechoslovak army. Similar attempts to undermine Czechoslovakia's new borders were also present in the Tešín, Orava and Spiš regions in the northern part of the republic, where the Polish minority sought to integrate with Poland. See Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 64-73.

[103] The customs border between Hungary and the western part of the monarchy was in place until 1850, preventing the creation of a common Bohemian-Moravian-Slovak market. Ibid: 26.

towns with a population of 20,000 (compared to thirty such towns in Bohemia) and only three Slovak cities had more than 30,000 inhabitants (compared to twenty such cities in the Czech lands at the same date). Moreover, five decades of heavy Magyarization left the Slovak society with a very fragile sense of national identity. Even in 1919 (one year after the establishment of Czechoslovakia), many ordinary Slovaks were still unable to clearly identify their nationality, usually identifying themselves as speakers of both Slovak and Hungarian.[104]

There was also a significant religious rift separating the Czech and the Slovak society. The issue was not of a different religion – both Czech lands and Slovakia were after all confessionally divided; neither of them had "a national religion", although, statistically speaking, Catholicism was the dominant creed in both Bohemia and Slovakia. The key difference lied in the different role that religion played in the two societies. Catholicism, due to its close association with the resented Habsburg rule in Bohemia, could not play a positive role of a national catalyst in the Bohemian society. At the same time, due to the heavy renewed Catholicism campaign between 1620-1781, Protestantism in Bohemia was weak and unable to play that role either. The result was a religious detachment and skepticism among the majority of Czechs.   In Slovakia, by contrast, religion, both Catholic and Protestant, could and did play an active and positive role in the national life, as can be seen in the activities of the 19th century Slovak national awakeners discussed in the previous chapter. The relative decline of the role of the Catholic Church in the Czechoslovak society after 1918 was thus observed with considerable dissatisfaction,

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[104] Sayer, D. (1998). <u>The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History</u>. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 172-174.

particularly among the Slovak Catholic clergy who were highly critical of the "Czech atheist influence" on the Slovak society.[105]

To summarize, Czechs and Slovaks at the time of the establishment of their common state were miles away both in terms of their historical experiences and the type of societies they represented. Despite the rhetoric of centuries-long fraternity between the two nations, there was no common state that Czechs and Slovaks were renewing in 1918. Apart from the linguistic kinship and the only recently invented pan-Slavist ideology, very few historical, political, economic or even cultural linkages existed between the two nations prior to the mid- to-late 19th century. Moreover, the new Czechoslovak state inherited from its Austro-Hungarian predecessor a large number of ethnic minorities, many of whom were resentful of their newly subordinate status. What needed to be reconciled, in other words, were not only physical groups of people but also multiple historical memories and wounds which they carried with them into the new state. Creating a common narrative that would overcome the vast differences between the Czech and Slovak societies and at least to some degree attempt to incorporate the multiple and often contradictory historical experiences and memories of Czechoslovakia's many minorities was, therefore, bound to be very difficult.

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[105] In fact, the Czechoslovak government tried to maintain positive relations with the Catholic Church in Slovakia, preserving the majority of Church laws from the times of Austro-Hungary, refraining from proposals of separation of Church and state as well as proposals seeking equalization of church and civilian marriage, exempting the Church lands and possessions from the land reform, allowing religious education at state schools, etc. Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 76-79.

The new Czechoslovak government used all tools at its disposal to eliminate reminders of the previous rule and instill new markers of identity. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the days and weeks following October 28, both spontaneous and state-sponsored attacks on symbols of the Habsburg rule took place. Hundreds of monuments, statues, signs and symbols of Habsburg dominion were destroyed as Czechs and Slovaks sought to assert dominance over their new public space and cleanse the Czechoslovak towns and cities of traces of what they considered to be an imperial and specifically, German and Hungarian past. The issue of fallen, vandalized, desacralized statues is especially significant here because statues and memorials, as scholars of nationalism remind us, in addition to fulfilling their key function of conserving tradition, also serve to mark territory, delineate borders – in both physical and symbolic sense. Katherine Verdery's insight about links between physical and symbolic desacralization is especially relevant here, pulling down a statue is more than just an act of physical removal of the statue from the landscape, it is also an attempt to deprive the symbol embodied in the statue of its sacredness and timelessness.[106] By actions such as toppling of German and Hungarian statues and symbols, Czechs and Slovaks were not only removing the physical markers of Austro-Hungary's legacy from Czechoslovakia's towns and cities, they were also claiming possession of the commemorative public space that up until then had been closed to them. This was especially noticeable in Slovakia, where removal of Habsburg statues and symbols went hand in hand with physical liberation of the Slovak territory from the occupying Hungarian army.[107]

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[106] Verdery, K. (1999). The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change. New York, Columbia UP: 5.

[107] Especially frequent targets of the revolutionary monument destruction in Slovakia were statues of the 1848 Hungarian revolutionary leaders, esp. Lajos Kossuth and poet Sándor Petőfi, but also Ferenc Rákóczi, the leader of the Hungarian anti-Habsburg uprising in 1703-11, as well as statues and

Perhaps one of the best known examples of the Czechoslovak post-revolutionary destructive euphoria was the toppling of the Marian column in the Old Town Square in Prague by radicalized masses just one week after the declaration of Czechoslovak independence. Erroneously believed to have been erected by Emperor Ferdinand III to commemorate the Habsburg victory at the battle of Bila Hora (White Mountain) under the leadership of Ferdinand's father Ferdinand II, the Marian column was seen by Prague's Czech inhabitants as a mnemonic symbol of German domination – and consequently of Czech national shame. Therefore, it had to go.[108]

memorials erected by the Hungarian government on the occasion of the millennial anniversary of the Hungarian arrival in the Danube basin region in 1906 (??check yr). See Lipták, L. (1999). Rošády na piedestáloch. Storocie dlhšie ako sto rokov: O dejinách a historiografii. L. Lipták. Bratislava, Kalligram**: 311-350. Also see Kodajová, D. (2008). "Starý režim padol, co s jeho symbolmi?" Historická revue **10**: 26-31. Babjak, J. (2008). "Osudy pomníkov po roku 1918." Historická revue **10**: 38-40.

[108] In fact, the monument was erected in 1650 by residents of Prague to mark the Swedish withdrawal from the city at the end of the Thirty Years' War. Over time, however, the origins of the monument became blurred in the public imagination and the monument came to be equated with Habsburg domination. For an excellent account of the toppling of the Marian column in Prague see Paces, C. (2001). "The Fall and Rise of Prague's Marian Column." Radical History Review **Winter 2001**(79): 141-155. Also see Paces, C. and N. M. Wingfield (2005). The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920. Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe. P. M. Judson and M. L. Rozenblit, Berghahn Books**: 107-125, Wingfield, N. M. (2007). Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech. Cambridge, Harvard University Press:145-147.

Picture 7: Marian column in the Old Town Square in Prague built in 1650. Since 1915, it has shared the square with Jan Hus memorial (on the left). Source: Společnost pro obnovu mariánského sloupu v Praze.

Picture 8: Toppling of the Marian Column on November 3 1918. Source: Společnost pro obnovu mariánského sloupu v Praze.

Picture 9: The Old Town Square one day after the destruction of the Marian column. Behind is the statue of Master Jan Hus. Source: Společnost pro obnovu mariánského sloupu v Praze.

Other monuments, statues and symbols in Prague and in cities and towns throughout the country which were considered insufficiently "Czechoslovak" soon followed suit. Key among them were statues of Habsburg monarchs and officials, especially the omnipresent statues of Joseph II which had been adopted by Bohemia's German nationalists at the end of the 19th century as mnemonic sites of the golden era when Germans had predominance in the Monarchy.[109] In Slovakia, an equestrian statue of Maria Theresia, created by a celebrated artist of the age János Fadrusz in 1896, which had stood in one of Bratislava's central squares, symbolizing loyalty of Hungarian estates to their female ruler, was pulled down by

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[109] Wingfield, N. M. (2001). Statues of Emperor Joseph II as Sites of German Identity. <u>Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present</u>. M. Bucur and N. M. Wingfield. West Lafayette, Purdue University Press**:** 178-208. Also see Paces, C. and N. M. Wingfield (2005). The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920. <u>Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe</u>. P. M. Judson and M. L. Rozenblit, Berghahn Books**:** 107-125.

Czechoslovak legionaries and Slovak nationalists in October 1921. Paradoxically, Maria

Theresia was the one Habsburg ruler who contributed the most to the cultural and economic

development of Bratislava. What prompted the outburst of rage against the symbol captured

by the statue was an attempt (unsuccessful) of Hungary's last emperor and Maria Theresa's

great great grandson, Charles IV, to re-gain power in Hungary. Ironically, after the statue

was destroyed, a parchment was discovered in the foundation on which the statue used to

stand. Its words, "Stand for eternity! Stand, until the millennial, beloved homeland stands!"

turned out to be prophetic.[110]

Picture 10: Toppling of Maria Theresa statue in Bratislava in October 1921

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[110] Fragments of the vandalized statue then made their way to Budapest where they were exhibited at the National Museum and throughout the interwar period were exploited by the Hungarian propaganda as a proof of the barbarity of the Czechs. See: Lipták, L. (1999). Rošády na piedestáloch. <u>Storocie dlhšie ako sto rokov: O dejinách a historiografii</u>. L. Lipták. Bratislava, Kalligram**:** 315-323.

Frequently targeted were also symbols of Roman Catholicism which, in the eyes of many Czech nationalists, were inextricably linked with the Old Empire. Hundreds of statues of St. Jan Nepomuk – the "favorite saint" of the Roman Catholic Church whose cult was specifically invented and propagated by the Habsburgs with the intention of erasing the Hussite tradition from the Czech popular memory – as well as many other statues and symbols of Catholicism were removed from public spaces. Although the majority of these acts were spontaneous in nature, they often took place with a tacit approval of the Czechoslovak government which was sometimes unable and sometimes unwilling to prevent them. In fact, in 1923, following an avalanche of statue court cases, removal of statues, inscriptions, and memorials of the Habsburg past from public view was codified into Czechoslovak law and justified as an essential act for the protection of the Republic.[111] As could be expected in a country whose population was overwhelmingly Catholic, such a massive attack on symbols of Catholicism was bound to generate protests from those Czech and Slovak Catholics who viewed them not as political but as religious symbols, not to mention the three million of the country's Germans who saw the removal of Habsburg symbols as a personal attack meant to marginalize and exclude them from the new state.[112]

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[111] Národní shromáždění, R. C. (1923). Zákon 50/1923 Sb. na ochranu republiky [Law for the defense of teh republic]. Sbírka zákonu a narízení statu ceskoslovenského, Rocník 1918–1938 [Code of laws and decrees of the Czechoslovak state]. Praha, Státní tiskárna. For a fascinating discussion of Czech-German clashes over statues in the interwar period see Paces, C. and N. M. Wingfield (2005). The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920. Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe. P. M. Judson and M. L. Rozenblit, Berghahn Books: 107-125.

[112] Interestingly, as Nancy Wingfield notes in her book, it was not only the visual landscape that the Czechoslovak regime thought as worthy and necessary to cleanse of traces of the previous Habsburg rule. The audio space too became nationalized by the new Czechoslovak state. Laws were passed, regulating music to which Czechoslovak citizens would be exposed in public. German patriotic songs like "Die Wacht am Rhein" and "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles," for instance, were forbidden from being played or sung in restaurants and taverns, except in closed, reserved rooms. Failure to comply with the government regulations carried considerable financial sanctions and could even lead to imprisonment. See Wingfield, N. M. (2007). Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech. Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 143-144.

"Dates to be Celebrated with Exuberated Minds"

In place of the removed statues and symbols of the Habsburg, German, Hungarian, and Catholic rule, the new Czechoslovak state invented new cultural traditions to legitimatize the new political and social order. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after the demise of Great Moravia, Czechs and Slovaks had belonged to different states and after 1526 to different parts of the Habsburg Empire. As a result, in the absence of a shared political history, the Czechoslovak nation-builders had to make use of whatever Czecho-Slovak contacts there were throughout the centuries, which they did. And since the Czechs were the dominant force in the new state, the language and imagery of the Czechoslovak nation became distinctly Czech and highly reminiscent of the writings of Palacky and his 19th century contemporaries.

The war, and in particular the exile activities of Czechoslovakia's Founding Fathers, Masaryk, Benes and Stefanik, together with the wartime accomplishments of the Czechoslovak Legions offered an emotionally resounding and politically powerful foundational myth for the new state. Shortly before the first anniversary of the proclamation of Czechoslovak independence, the Czechoslovak parliament made October 28, the date of the official establishment of Czechoslovakia, the most important holiday of the young state. The date was given a special status of a non-working "state holiday" (while the other official holidays recognized by the Czechoslovak state had merely the status of "memorial days" or simply "holidays") and its observation was regulated by special rules, violation of which carried serious sanctions, including imprisonment.[113]

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[113] Národní shromáždení, R. C. (1919). Zákon 555/1919 Sb. ze dne 14.10.1919 jímž se prohlašuje dvacátý osmý říjen za každorocní svátek státní [Law proclaiming October 28 a state holiday]. <u>Sbírka zákonu a narízení statu ceskoslovenského, Rocník 1918–1938 [Code of laws and decrees of the Czechoslovak state]</u>. Praha, Státní tiskárna. See also Národní shromáždení, R. C. Stenoprotokol 83. schuze. Úterý 14. října 1919. <u>Spolecná cesko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna</u>. Available, http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/.

Throughout the interwar period, annual celebrations of October 28 were accompanied by pompous celebrations. The government encouraged all citizens to celebrate the anniversary by displaying publicly their joy and decorating their houses with state flags and flowers.[114] Especially festive was the first anniversary of the republic's founding in 1919, on which president Masaryk delivered a celebratory speech in the National Assembly, outlining his vision of the new state. The speech recalled the Czechoslovak road from the Austro-Hungarian "prison of nations" to independence, paid special tribute to the great men who contributed to the founding of the state and emphasized the democratic, progressive, secular character of the Czechoslovak state, especially its pro-Slavic orientation, while at the same time assuring Czechoslovakia's national minorities of their national and linguistic rights.[115] Similarly lavish were the decennium celebrations in 1928 which lasted several weeks and featured military parades, speeches by government officials, unveiling of statues, educational activities for schoolchildren, museum exhibitions, etc.[116]

Yet, despite the government's encouragements, not everyone celebrated October 28 with an "exuberated mind" as the initiators of the October 28 holiday law had intended. Predictably, the holiday was contested by Czechoslovakia's Germans who continued to reject the Czechoslovak national vision and considered October 28 a day of mourning for the dissolved monarchy rather than a day of joy. Already in 1925, when the new holiday law was being debated in the Czechoslovak parliament and in the Senate, representatives of Czechoslovak ethnic German parties protested against the forceful nature of the law, which stipulated that schools, state offices and state-run public institutions be closed on October 28. The law also gave authority to local police departments to enforce "respectful" observance of

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[114] Wingfield, N. M. (2007). Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech. Cambridge, Harvard University Press: esp. Chapter 6.

[115] Národní shromáždění, R. C. Stenoprotokol 85. schuze. Úterý 28. rijna 1919. Spolecná cesko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna. Available, http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/.

[116] For details of the decennial celebrations, see Wingfield, N. M. (2007). Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech. Cambridge, Harvard University Press:174-183.

the holiday through issuing financial fines and imprisoning the offenders. German deputies objected that respect for a country and its national symbols could not be forced by the police but their complaints found little positive response in the new Czechoslovak government.[117] Throughout the interwar period, annual celebrations of the October 28 anniversary continued to be accompanied by scattered public displays of opposition by ethnic Germans.

Ethnic Germans were not the only ones to use the October 28 anniversary as an opportunity to voice their grievances against the new state, however. The way in which the idea of Czechoslovakism was being implemented in practice was sharply criticized by a growing autonomist movement in Slovakia as well. Gathered around the Slovak People's Party and its leading figure, Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, Slovak autonomists demanded that both October 28 and October 30 (date of the Martin Declaration of 1918) be celebrated as equal birthdays of the new Czechoslovak state since it was only on October 30 that Slovak representatives formally confirmed their desire to join the Czechs in a common state.[118] Much like the German protests, however, the Slovak demands fell on deaf ears of the Czech-dominated government which feared that concessions to Slovaks would only encourage more demands from Czechoslovakia's ethnic Germans which could potentially endanger Czechoslovakia's existence. Czech assurances that Slovaks were free to celebrate October 30 if they so wished but that October 28 would remain the sole official state holiday since that was when Czechoslovakia was internationally recognized did little to ease the tension that began to form between the new state and the Slovak autonomists.

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[117] See speech by Senator Niessner in the Czechoslovak Senate on April 3 1925. Senát, R. C. Stenoprotokol 260. schuze. Pátek 30. dubna 1925. Spolecná cesko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna. Available, http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/.

[118] See for instance the parliamentary speech by Andrej Hlinka delivered on March 21 1925. Národní shromáždění, R. C. Stenoprotokol 336. schuze. Sobota 21. brezna 1925Ibid.. Also see speech by Senator Barinka in the Czechoslovak Senate on April 3 1925. Senát, R. C. Stenoprotokol 260. schuze. Pátek 30. dubna 1925. Spolecná cesko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna. Available, http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/.

In addition to October 28, Masaryk himself, styled as "President Liberator", became an important constitutive element of the new Czechoslovak foundational myth. Only a few months after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, Prague's oldest embankment bearing the name of the Austrian emperor Francis I was renamed Masaryk Embankment (Francis' statue was quietly removed). Soon after, in a manner quite unusual for the times, since public spaces were rarely named after living people (this would change dramatically during the communist era as we shall see in the next chapter), Masaryk's name was added to squares, streets, bridges, libraries and schools. By the late 1930s, statues of the immensely popular and sincerely beloved "President Osvoboditel" ("President-Liberator") or more familiarly "Taticek Masaryk" ("Little Father Masaryk") could be found in most towns and villages throughout the country, typically depicting Masaryk as a scholar or a wartime leader wearing his military uniform.[119] Although the parliamentary proposal to add March 7, the date of Masaryk's birthday, to the list of Czechoslovakia's official memorial days was withdrawn on Masaryk's personal request, many Czechs and Slovaks celebrated their president's birthday spontaneously.[120] Masaryk's cult grew even larger after Masaryk's death in 1937 when, in the atmosphere of a rising Nazi threat, Masaryk's monuments became powerful sites of remembrance and a source of solace for many Czechs and Slovaks.

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[119] The first Masaryk statue was unveiled in Loučka u Litovle in August 1919, followed by two more massive waves of Masaryk monuments – one in 1928, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of republic's establishment and the other in the late 1930s, following Masaryk's abdication in December 1935 and his death two years later. On Masaryk's monuments, see Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka: esp. Chapter 17.

[120] Masaryk was given the honorary title "President-Liberator" on the occasion of his abdication on December 14 1935. On Masaryk as legend-maker, see: Orzoff, A. (2008). The Legend-Maker: Tomas Garrique Masaryk and the First World War. International Historical Conference "Fateful Eights in Czech History: Historical Anniversaries of 2008 and their Significance for the Czech Republic Today", Washington DC: George Washington University.

Picture 11: Statue of T.G. Masaryk by Vincenc Makovský and Jaroslav Fragner built between 1937-1948, situated in front of Faculty of Education of Palacký University at Žižkovo náměstí in Olomouc. Typical of other statues of TGM, the statue depicts the first Czechoslovak president as a philosopher, thinker, a man of moral resolve and integrity. The monument was removed in 1953 and reconstructed between 1990-1993. Since 2003, a copy of the monument stands in T.G. Masaryk Memorial Park on Massachusetts Avenue in Washingtoon DC. Source: wikimedia.org.

In Slovakia, Masaryk's pupil, wartime colleague and organizer of Czechoslovak foreign legions during the war, General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, became the object of a widespread official, as well as popular, mythologization. Interestingly, it was not until his tragic death in an airplane crash on the outskirts of Bratislava on Štefánik's return home from the war on May 4, 1919 and the lavish state-sponsored funeral service he received that Štefánik's name entered the public imagination and became part of the Czechoslovak national pantheon of heroes. Heroic as it was, Stefanik's memory was not unproblematic, however, and soon became the object of symbolic struggles between Slovak autonomists and

representatives of Czechoslovakism, each of whom vied to claim Stefanik's mantle as their own.[121] While the Czechoslovakists celebrated Stefanik's contributions to the establishment of Czechoslovakia, Slovak nationalists emphasized his strong sense of Slovak patriotism which had brought him into conflict with Eduard Benes on a number of occasions.

The culmination of the clash between the two visions of the Stefanik myth came in a form of a public controversy related to a proposal to build a new statue of Štefánik in Bratislava which was announced on the occasion of the republic's tenth anniversary in the fall of 1928. The winning proposal, designed by a renowned Czech sculptor Bohumil Kafka, depicted Štefánik in his pilot uniform, standing on the ground and looking across the Danube River. Situated behind Štefánik on a separate pillar was a large lion holding the Czechoslovak state emblem, symbolizing the strength, unity and heroism of the Czechoslovak legions, which Štefánik helped found. The proposal was attacked by Slovak autonomists who protested that the gigantic lion dominated the composition and symbolized Czech colonialism over Slovakia. By the time of the republic's decennial on October 28, 1938 when the controversial statue was to be ceremonially unveiled, Czechoslovakia no longer existed. The newly established Slovak autonomist government swiftly ordered the Czechoslovak state symbol on the shield held by the lion to be replaced with a Slovak one. Two years later, following Hitler's famous remark "Die katze musst gehen" ("That cat must go") on his visit to Bratislava, the "Czech" lion was removed completely. The lonely Stefanik's statue survived in its place until 1952 when it was destroyed by the communist regime as a relic of the corrupt bourgeois interwar system.[122]

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[121] See Macho, P. (2005). Milan Rastislav Štefánik - bohatier a muceník. Mýty naše Slovenské. E. Krekovic, E. Mannová and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, Ústav etnológie SAV, Sociologický ústav SAV: 163-173. Also see: Hronský, M. and M. Caplovic, Eds. (1999). Generál dr. Milan Rastislav Štefánik - vojak a diplomat. Zborník z vedeckej konferencie v Bratislave 4.-5. mája 1999. Bratislava.

[122] Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka: esp. Chapter 15.
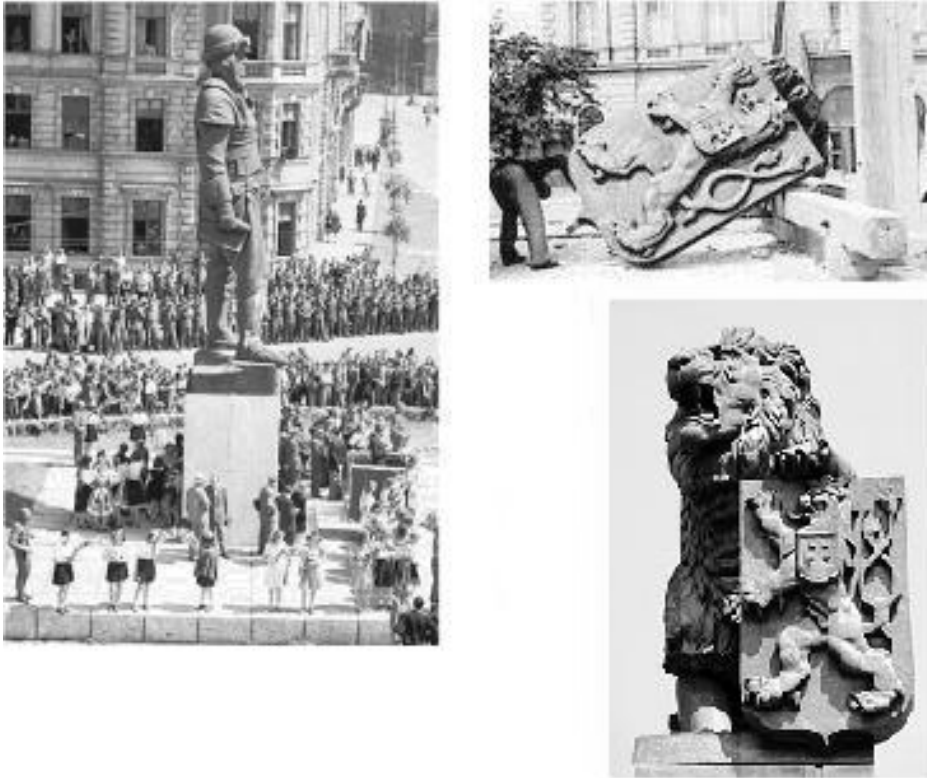
Picture 12: The fate of Bohumil Kafka's Stefanik monument illustrates the ups and downs in the Czecho-slovak relationship. The monument, featuring a 7.5 meter high statue of Stefanik and a 3.5 meter statue of lion standing on a 27 meter pillar and holding the Czechoslovak state emblem, was commissioned by the Czechoslovak government on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of CSR's establishment in 1928. Following the proclamation of Slovak autonomy in the fall of 1938, the Czechoslovak emblem was replaced with a Slovak double cross. The "Czech" lion was removed by the Slovak government in 1940 and Stefanik's statue was destroyed by the communists in 1952. In 1988 on the occasion of the republic's 70th birthday, the restored original statue of the Czechoslovak lion was unveiled in Bratislava as a Monument of Czecho-Slovak reciprocity. In 2009, on the 90th anniversary of Stefanik's tragic death, Stefanik and the lion were reunited again in front of the newly built Slovak National Theatre after nearly seventy years of separation. Source: TASR/AP archive SME- 4/5/2009 Sochu Štefánika uvidíme. Ale až o rok.

In order to legitimize the new state, however, drawing on recent history was not enough. The founders needed to show that their creation had a much longer pedigree. To demonstrate the longevity of the Czecho-Slovak union, Czechoslovakia's founders thus reached to the historically distant and murky period of the 9th century Great Moravian State and, just like Charles IV and the 19th century national awakeners had done before them, appropriated the Great Moravian heritage for their own purposes. In the so called Washington declaration signed by Masaryk, Benes and Stefanik on October 18, 1918, the

signatories spoke of "the right to be linked with [their] Slovak brothers in Slovakia", which, supposedly, "once was part of [their] national state [and] was later torn off from the body of [their] nation". Historically, of course, the claim was nonsense and the founders must have known that. At the time of the ninth century Great Moravian State, as stated in the preceding chapter, Slovaks as an independent ethnic group did not yet exist and what it meant to "be Czech" was far from clear. Nevertheless, the myth of Great Moravia being the first common state of Czechs and Slovaks took root and became one of the key pillars of Czechoslovakia's official historical narrative during the interwar years.

The Cyrillo-Methodius tradition took back seat to the Great Moravian myth. Although the two Slavonic missionaries invited to Great Moravia by the Moravian Duke Rastislav in 863 received a special date in the calendar of the new state (officially entitled "July 5, Day of Slavonic missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, founders of the Slavic script"), the date as well as the tradition were contested. Part of the controversy stemmed from the fact that, historically, Cyrilo-Methodius tradition had been celebrated only in Moravia and Slovakia and was relatively unknown in the Bohemian part of the republic.[123] In addition, the choice of July 5 as the date on which the Cyrilo-Methodius tradition was to be commemorated was problematic also because, traditionally, the holiday was associated with February 14, the date of Constantine's death in Rome in 869, not July 5.

Controversial as they were, neither the foundational myth of October 28, nor the newly reinterpreted Cyrilo-Methodius and Great Moravian myths, generated nearly as much anger and protests as did the official state promotion of Jan Hus, the 15th century Czech priest, advocate of the vernacular in religious practice and an unwavering critic of the medieval Church. Although the memory of Jan Hus had been commemorated by Czech

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[123] The relative lack of popular resonance of the holiday among the Czechs led some Czechoslovak parliamentarians to propose – albeit without success – that the July 5 holiday apply only to Slovakia and Moravia.

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nationalists since the mid-nineteenth century, establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 gave the Czechs an opportunity to celebrate their national hero with official pomp, which they did. July 6, the date of Hus' execution at Constance in 1415, was included in the new holiday law of 1925 as one of Czechoslovakia's four official memorial days and its annual commemorations were among the most festive commemorative events in the year.[124]

President Masaryk himself was a vocal promoter of the Hus myth, seeing in Hus a moral example for the nation, embodiment of the quintessential meaning of the Czech (now Czechoslovak) history, symbol of truth, freedom of conscience and defender of the vernacular, as he expressed already in his 1895 The Czech Question.[125] As did Masaryk, other Czechoslovak leaders also felt equally strongly that the new state needed a potent national symbol that would convey stability and tradition but at the same time emphasize Czechoslovakia's break from Austro-Hungary. And Hus fit the bill perfectly. Charles IV, despite his great contributions to the development of Bohemia, was a Holy Roman Emperor – thus a problematic symbol for the new state. Invoking Charles IV's legacy would suggest that Bohemian lands were merely part of an empire rather than a state in its own right. Saint Vaclav – another popular figure from the Czech history whose holiday the Czechs traditionally celebrated on October 28 – was unfortunately also known for negotiating with the neighboring Germanic kingdoms, presenting a somewhat ambiguous legacy for the new state. Hus, the steadfast promoter of the Czech language, defender of truth and national

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[124] The other three holidays included in the 1925 legislation under the rubric of "memorial days" were July 5 – Missionaries St. Cyril and Methodius, September 28 – St. Vaclav, and May 1 Labor Day.

[125] Masaryk's Ceska otazka (The Czech Question, first published in 1895) is considered one of Masaryk's major works. It discusses the role of Czechs and Slovaks (in Masaryk's view Czechoslovaks) in Austro-Hungary and their national awakening efforts. The book is also an overview of Masaryk's view of the meaning of Czech history, the core of which he sees in its humanistic message and especially in ideals represented by Hussitism, as carried by the Czech brethrens. Masaryk's view on history was sharply criticized by leading Czech historians (esp. Josef Pekar), spurring a long debate about the meaning of the Czech history. The Czech question was followed by Masaryk's Nase nynejsi krize (Our today's crisis). Masaryk, T. G. (1969). Ceská otázka : snahy a tužby národního obrození. Praha, Melantrich.

martyr, however, provided a highly resonant national symbol that was unambiguously distinct and opposed to the German culture.[126]

Official promotion of a Protestant martyr in a "nation" in which Roman Catholics comprised more than three-fourths of the population was bound to generate discord, however, and the Czechoslovak leaders were well aware of the fact. In fact, the controversial decision to shift the date of the Cyrilo-Methodius holiday from its traditional date in February to July 5 was an attempt by the Czechoslovak legislators to find a compromise and calm down protests of those Czech and Slovak Catholics who considered Hus to be a heretic and saw in the government's promotion of the July 6 holiday an open promotion of a Protestant state identity. By devoting another official memorial day in the same week to a religious symbol that was acceptable to the Catholic Church, Czechoslovak leaders were hoping to extend an olive branch to the country's Catholics and diffuse their objections against the official promotion of Hus.

The controversy reached its highest point in July 1925, when, following a state-sponsored commemoration of the 510th anniversary of Hus's immolation, the Vatican withdrew its official representative to Prague in protest and ceased all contacts with the Czechoslovak leadership. Although the Czechoslovak representatives tried to assure the papacy that the Czechoslovak people celebrated Hus for his national, not for his religious contributions, the Vatican insisted that Hus was a heretic and his official promotion by Czechoslovakia's government was an insult to the Catholic Church. The international discord between the Vatican and Czechoslovakia continued till 1928 when the two sides finally agreed that the Catholic Church would accept the designation of Hus' anniversary as a

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[126] Paces, C. (2001). Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s Czechoslovakia. Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present. M. Bucur and N. M. Wingfield. Lafayette, Purdue University Press: 209-235.

national holiday and the Czechoslovak government in turn would abstain from extending

official patronage to Jan Hus commemorations. Still, sour taste remained.[127]

In addition to reigniting deep-seated religious friction in the Czechoslovak society,

the Hus controversy had national undertones, as well. The July 6 holiday was fiercely

attacked by ethnic Germans to whom, in the words of one parliamentarian member of the

German Socialist party, celebrating Hus as an anti-clericalist might have been fully

acceptable, celebrating Hus-the Czech nationalist however was not and would never be.

Strong objections came also, quite predictably, from the Slovak side where the Hussite period

was tainted by memories of devastation and poverty that accompanied the medieval Hussite

raids into Slovakia and thus could hardly evoke feelings of national pride and exhilaration.

Moreover, in an atmosphere of rising disenchantment with the way Czechoslovakism was

implemented in practice, Hlinka's Ludak party used the Hus controversy as yet another

convenient illustration of the government's anti-Catholic and anti-Slovak orientation.   And

even though the more secular Czech politicians tried to diffuse Slovak objections by

emphasizing that they celebrated Hus as a symbol of truth and justice, rather than a religious

martyr or an exclusively national hero, none of this was sufficient to ease the growing sense

on the Slovak side that Slovaks were relegated to the role of second fiddle in the new state

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[127] Vatican had already voiced its objections to Czechoslovakia's promotion of the Hussite tradition
back in March that year after the Czechoslovak parliament adopted the new holiday law. The official
two-day state commemoration of the Hus anniversary, which was personally attended by President
Masaryk and during which the Hussite flag was displayed at Prague Castle in between the state and
presidential flags, however, was too much for Vatican to swallow. For a detailed account of the 1925
Hus commemoration, see Ibid. Interestingly, as Paces notes, the 1925 Hus festival was as much a
commemoration of Hus' memory as it was a celebration of the new state and the struggles of Czechs
and Slovaks during World War I. The past and the present were linked – Masaryk and those who
fought for Czechoslovakia's establishment were presented as embodiments of Hus' heroism, of
personal sacrifice in quest for truth and justice.

and that the character of the Czechoslovak identity that was being constructed was in fact

largely, if not exclusively, Czech.[128]

Picture 13: Jan Hus monument in Prague's Old Town Square
Historical photo from the mid-1920s featuring the Jan Hus monument built by Ladislav Šaloun in
1915. The monument which was the focal point of the 1925 Hus commemorations depicts Hus
standing on a granite base with an inscription "Love the truth and wish it to everyone." Behind Hus,
on the right side, there stand six Hussite warriors and an inscription below quotes the Hussite religious
hymn: "Who are the Soldiers of God and of His Law". On the left, there is a group of exiles and in the
back is a group symbolizing the Czech national revival with an inscription "Live the nation blessed in
God do not die." Another inscription on the side of the monument comes from Jan Amos Comenius
and reads: "I believe that self rule will return to you, oh the Czech nation." Source: Společnost pro
obnovu mariánského sloupu v Praze.

In an attempt to show respect for the country's Catholic population and make up, at

least partially, for the fury caused by the government's promotion of Hus, the Czechoslovak

leaders thought it important to dedicate one official memorial day to a Catholic hero. St.

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[128] For a fascinating discussion of symbolic disputes which arose over statues of Jan Hus in interwar
Czechoslovakia, see Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka: esp.
Chapter 7.

Vaclav, the patron saint and protector of Bohemia who instituted Christianity in the Bohemian crown lands and whose tradition represented the longest continually maintained tradition in Bohemia was a natural choice. Moreover, Vaclav's multifaceted persona made it possible for vastly different constituencies to adopt St. Vaclav legacy as their own. The Catholics could celebrate St. Vaclav for his deep religiosity, the progressives, led by Masaryk, used the St. Vaclav myth to demonstrate the long duration of Czech political leadership in the region. Vaclav's reputation of a just, peaceful and compassionate leader fit also quite nicely with Czechoslovakia's self-proclaimed liberal democratic character. Just as importantly, in contrast to other popular Catholic saints, such as Jan Nepomuk or even the Virgin Mary, St. Vaclav did not conflict with the tradition of Jan Hus. In fact, the progressives were able to combine St Vaclav's status as a national martyr with the martyrdom of Hus to create a powerful myth of the Czech's suffering on the road to sovereignty.[129]

Not even Vaclav's legacy was problem-free, however. Especially troublesome was Vaclav's politics of negotiating with the Germans which, in a state which derived its legitimacy from being opposed to Austria, presented considerable concerns. The Czech nationalists were especially worried that invoking Vaclav might suggest that compromise had been possible with Austria in 1918 – a fact that would put in question not only the inevitability of Czechoslovakia's establishment in 1918 but also the founders' contributions. Mentions of Vaclav's relations with the Germans were thus carefully avoided in the official celebrations of Vaclav's life and his contributions to the Czech statehood.[130] Despite the governments' efforts, however, the rift between Czechoslovak Catholics and their Protestant-

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[129] Wingfield, N. M. (2007). Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. Also see Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka: esp. Chapter 9.

[130] For a detailed account of the celebration, see Paces, C. (2001). Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s Czechoslovakia. Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present. M. Bucur and N. M. Wingfield. Lafayette, Purdue University Press: 221-230.

oriented government was healed only partially and disputes over a perceived one-sidedness with respect to the religious issue remained a constant theme that continued to paralyze the Czechoslovak regime for the entire interwar period.

To summarize, despite the rhetoric of Czecho-Slovak fraternity which permeated the official language of the First Republic, the national narrative constructed by Czechoslovakia's founders was Czechoslovak only in name. In substance, it was distinctly Czech and highly reminiscent of the historical interpretations of Palacky and his 19th century contemporaries. It rested on four key pillars - the foundational myth of October 28 accompanied by a widespread although benign personality cult of Masaryk and Stefanik, the Great Moravian and Cyrilo-Methodius tradition and a somewhat uneasy mix of the Czech Protestant and Catholic heritage expressed in the Jan Hus and St. Vaclav's tradition. Needless to say, such Czech-centered national discourse spoke neither to the historical experience of Slovaks nor to the experiences of the other national groups that comprised the Czechoslovak state. And so, even though interwar Czechoslovakia – unlike many of its neighbors at the time – went to some lengths to guarantee minority protection to its national minorities and made sincere attempts to diffuse Czechoslovakia's religious tensions, the one-sided Czech-centric language and imagery that the Czechoslovak Founding fathers invented for their new state could not but alienate many of Czechoslovakia's diverse ethnic and religious groups.

From the perspective of Slovaks, who, for over thousand years, had been an integral part of the Hungarian state, the achievements of the Premyslid medieval kingdom or memories of the Hussite wars evoked few feelings of belonging or national identification. The Hungarian King Stephen was probably more relevant to the Slovak national experience than was Jan Hus or St. Vaclav. As for Czechoslovakia's Germans and Hungarians, they were afforded no place in the Czechoslovak identity as it was newly defined. Understandably, they progressively found themselves in opposition to the new state and its leaders. Enter the

Great Depression which further magnified the economic grievances that existed throughout much of the interwar period and it comes as no great surprise that the national grievances which had been accumulating in interwar Czechoslovakia for some time found their expression in the radicalization of the Slovak and German nationalist parties in the late 1930s.

Intermezzo: World War II

Much like Czechoslovakia's establishment in 1918, its demise in 1938 was caused by developments largely beyond the Czechs' and Slovaks' immediate control. Without going into great details of the story of Czechoslovakia's dismemberment following the Munich conference in September 1938, a brief recapitulation of the events is in place – especially since these events left deep marks on the Czech and Slovak national psyche and significantly influenced Czechoslovakia's post-war geopolitical and symbolic reorientation toward the east, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The road to Munich began in mid September 1938 when Adolf Hitler at a meeting with Neville Chamberlain in Berchtesgaden first raised his demands on the Czechoslovak territory. Few days later, the Czechoslovak government was presented with an ultimatum by its British and French allies– either it accepts Hitler's demands and surrenders all of its German majority districts to Germany or it will stand alone and be solely responsible for the outbreak of a war. Under great pressure, the Czechoslovak leadership headed by President Benes complied. On September 29, another meeting took place, this time in Munich, at which Hitler increased his demands, insisting on total evacuation of Czechoslovakia's German majority districts and Czechoslovakia's acceptance of Polish and Hungarian territorial claims. Czechoslovakia was not invited to the talks and its western allies, France and Britain, once again, chose the path of appeasement. Abandoned by its allies, the Czechoslovak government accepted the new ultimatum and surrendered one third of its

territory with close to five million inhabitants, 1.25 million of whom were Czechs and Slovaks.[131]

Yet Hitler's ambition did not stop there. On March 13, 1939, aware of the growing tensions between Slovak autonomists and the Czech-dominated Czechoslovak government, Hitler summoned the Slovak autonomist leader, Jozef Tiso, to Berlin.[132] There, Tiso was presented with a choice – either Slovakia proclaims independence and requests Germany's protection or the country will be left to Hungary's mercies. Slovak autonomists did not conceal their desire for an eventual independence from the Czechs. In fact, on October 6, 1938, taking advantage of the weakened position of the Czechoslovak leadership after the Munich conference, they proclaimed Slovak autonomy the result of which was that Czecho-Slovakia (the new official spelling of the name of the country) became a loose federation with strong confederative elements. However, with the exception of the radical wing of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party HSLS represented by Alexander Mach and Vojtech Tuka, the majority of the party, including Tiso himself, believed that Slovakia was not yet ready for full independence and were in favor of gradual loosening of ties with the Czechs. It was also clear that independence guaranteed by Hitler would amount to no more than a puppet existence. Tiso's report of Hitler's offer was thus greeted with mixed feelings in the Slovak Parliament. Nevertheless, there were not many choices left and so, on March 14, 1939, without much enthusiasm or fanfare, the Slovak Parliament proclaimed Slovakia's independence. The following day the German army occupied the rest of Bohemia and Moravia and annexed it within the German Reich as the so-called Protectorate Bohmen und Mahren.

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[131] On October 5, President Benes resigned and went into exile. Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

[132] Jozef Tiso was a Catholic priest who succeeded Andrej Hlinka as a HSLS chairman after Hlinka's death in summer 1938.

The issue of the proclamation of Slovak independence in March 1939 continues to divide audiences. While some claim that the Slovak government represented by Tiso did not want independence and moved to create the Slovak state only due to pressures from Berlin, respectively due to fears of Hungarian occupation, others maintain that the demise of interwar Czechoslovakia was caused by Slovak betrayal. Neither view represents an adequate description of the situation and the choices that were available at the time. Threats of Hungarian occupation with which Hitler operated during his talks with Tiso were unreal; Germany had no interest in facilitating the emergence of a strong Hungary on its eastern border. Moreover, the autonomists did not conceal their desire for an eventual independence. They just did not want it right away. At the same time, however, Tiso's refusal of Hitler's demands would not have changed anything in the final outcome. The fact was that disintegration of Czechoslovakia was in Hitler's interest and if Tiso had not accepted Hitler's offer, Hitler would have found another willing Slovak politician to accomplish his aims. Arguments that the proclamation of Slovak independence on March 14, 1939 represented a knife in the back of the Czechs, therefore, does not stand either.[133]

Between 1939 and 1945, the paths of Czechs and Slovaks diverged. The Protectorate became an integral part of the Greater German Reich and the Czechs were relegated to a lower status of Protectorate citizens.[134] Although the Protectorate retained its own administration, police, gendarmerie and a tiny ceremonial army, the Reich controlled its foreign affairs, defense, customs, monetary policy and communications and the Reich Protector had the power to abrogate any of the Protectorate's government decisions. The harshest treatment, however, was undoubtedly reserved for the Protectorate's Jewish population which was placed outside the law, gradually stripped of all civic and human rights

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[133] See Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press. Lipták, L. (2000). Slovensko v 20. storocí. Bratislava, Kalligram.

[134] By contrast, Protectorate Germans were considered Reich citizens and enjoyed all associated rights.

and eventually deported to concentration camps.[135] Between October 1941, when the Jewish

deportations started, and May 7, 1945, when the Red Army finally liberated the concentration

camp in Terezin, approximately seventy thousand Bohemian and Moravian Jews were

deported to Nazi extermination camps (about 50,000 to Terezin and another 20,000 to other

camps).[136]

Still, in comparison to many other European countries, the Protectorate did not suffer

as much in terms of material and human losses (excepting the tragedy of the Protectorate's

Jews). Prague and other Czech cities were relatively unscathed by bombing. Most historians

also tend to agree that the actual war losses the Czechs suffered were lower than what they

definitely would have been had Czechoslovakia fought in September 1938 after the Munich

verdict came in or in March 1939 when Slovakia was offered independence by Hitler. The

economic measures introduced by the Germans were also milder in the Protectorate than in

most other nations due to Germany's strategy of trying to win the recalcitrant Bohemian and

Moravian workers over by offering them economic and material concessions. Food and

clothing rationing, for instance, was introduced later in the Protectorate than in the Reich.[137]

Nonetheless, as Derek Sayer notes, there was enough cruelty and humiliation to sear

new names and dates into the Czech collective memory. One such date was November 17,

1939. The name associated with it was that of Jan Opletal – a medical student who was shot

and mortally injured when the police broke up a demonstration on October 28, 1939, the

Czechoslovak Independence Day. Opletal's burial on November 15 spurred a wave of anti-

German student demonstrations throughout Prague. German retaliation two days later, on

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By contrast, Protectorate Germans were considered Reich citizens and enjoyed all associated rights.
ng of their property or buying land, received lower food ratios and were subjected to restrictions on
movement, including participation in educational, cultural or athletic activities.

[136] Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford
University Press: 215.

[137] Ibid.

November 17, was brutal and thorough, including the closure of ten Czech universities, execution of nine arbitrarily chosen ringleaders, imprisonment of over eighteen hundred and deportation to German concentration camps of over one thousand students and faculty members. After the war, November 17 became internationally recognized as the International Day of Students. Fifty years later, on November 17, 1989, police suppression of a peaceful student demonstration in Prague would mark the beginning of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution and the end of the country's forty-year-long communist rule.[138]

Another date, painfully seared into the Czech collective memory, was June 10, 1942, the day when the entire village of Lidice near Prague was slaughtered in an act of vicious German retaliation for the assassination of Reichsprotector Reinhard Heydrich by two Britain-based Czech parachutists on May 27, 1942. All 192 male and 196 female residents of the village were shot dead, 105 children were deported to concentration camps or stationed in German families. A similar fate befell another small village of Lezaky two weeks later.[139] These events (along with others) would be carefully (and selectively) cultivated by the Czechoslovak Communist Party KSC after the war as will be discussed in the next chapter.

As in most other German occupied countries, reactions to German repression in the Protectorate varied. On one end of the spectrum were those who openly resisted the Nazi rule, including organized resistance groups such as the Central Committee of Home Resistance UVOD, recognized by and linked to Benes's exile government in London, or the Communists linked to the Moscow center led by Klement Gottwald.[140] There were also several high profile Czech politicians such as General Alois Elias, executed by the Nazis in 1942 after his contacts with the resistance underground were revealed, for instance, who defied the Germans and maintained links with the domestic resistance. On the other end of

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[138] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

[139] Ibid: 223-231.

[140] In summer 1941, the two organizations agreed to coordinate their activities, creating a Central National Revolutionary Committee or UNRV.

the resistance-collaboration spectrum were some genuine quislings including the Protectorate President Emil Hacha or Minister Moravec, who were previously supporters of Benes. As in most other occupied countries, the majority of the population was in the gray zone between their circumstances and their preferences and resorted to passive resistance and symbolic protests.[141]

Importantly, for many Czechs during the war, national history and culture became the source of strength and perseverance. Although seemingly minor, this form of symbolic resistance was highly significant – especially since the purge of symbols of Czech identity and culture formed an important part of the German cultural policy in the Protectorate. To many Czechs, Palacky's statement about Czech history being the history of a struggle with the Germans was brutally confirmed by the experience of Munich and horrors of the war. The old 19th century myths and stereotypes of Germans as the oppressors, the Czechs as an exposed Slavic peninsula, Russians as liberators were revived.[142] After the war, these same images would provide an emotionally powerful symbolic material out of which the post-war Czechoslovak identity would be constructed. The same images would also be used to legitimize the forced expulsion of ethnic Germans from the Czech lands in 1945 and the communist takeover in February 1948.

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[141] Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University Press: 208-216.

[142] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 223-224.

Picture 14: Protectorate stamps. Nazis imposed themselves on signs, postage stamps, route maps, official documents, etc.

In contrast to Hitler-occupied Bohemia and Moravia, Slovakia officially enjoyed

formal sovereignty. Officially, the regime proclaimed itself to be a "wartime authoritative

democracy".[143] In reality, the political regime of the wartime Slovak state was

unambiguously totalitarian in character, bearing strong fascist elements. Fascization of the

Slovak regime had begun already in 1938 when HSLS, having eliminated its political

opponents, abolished freedom of speech, freedom of the press and other political rights, and

effectively established itself as a totalitarian party, ruling by decree.[144] Gradually, the party

took control not only of the administrative apparatus of the state but of the entire public life.

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[143] See for instance works of a Slovak exile historian Frantisek Vnuk who claims that national socialism in Slovakia existed only in verbal statements of a few radicals within HSLS and that the Slovak state in reality represented a wartime democracy. On the issue of deporations of Slovak Jews by the Slovak regime, Vnuk suggests that the action was no worse than "what the Jews did to Slovaks" before and after the war. Vnuk, F. e. (1991). <u>Mat svoj štát znamená život. Politická biografia Alexandra Macha</u>. Bratislava, Odkaz.

[144] Except for HSLS, only two parties were allowed, representing German and Hungarian minorities. These, however, could not run independently in the elections to the Slovak Diet. Having succeeded in eliminating all of its rivals, HSLS, (the only party on the ballot) captured over 97 percent of votes in the December 1938 elections.

Emulating the Italian and the Austrian model, Slovakia's constitution, adopted on July 21, 1939, was clerical, corporate and authoritarian. President Tiso combined the functions of the head of the state, the head of the government, head of HSLS and commander in chief of the armed forces; his title of the "Leader" was made official and mandatory in 1942 and unconditional obedience was required not only to Tiso himself but also to the totalitarian regime which he established and led.[145] HSLS also created institutions such as the Bureau of Propaganda, a paramilitary party organization called Hlinka's Guard as well as a network of concentration and labor camps for detaining its political opponents.[146]

Despite Slovakia's formal sovereignty, the regime's military and economic policies were fully subordinated to Nazi Germany. Two days after the proclamation of the Slovak independence by the Slovak Diet, president Tiso was forced to sign a special "Treaty of Protection" with Germany which subordinated the Slovak army and foreign policy to the Reich. In September 1939, Slovakia became the only state to join Nazi Germany in its attack on Poland. Less than two years later, in June 1941, the Slovak army began its operations on the Eastern front against the so called "judeo-bolshevik threat." Both of these conflicts, officially presented as acts of heroism and proof of Slovakia's loyalty to Germany, were highly unpopular among Slovak soldiers who saw no reason to fight their fellow Slavic neighbors.

Claims that wartime Slovakia represented some kind of an "island of peace and prosperity" or "Switzerland of Central Europe", which were systematically enforced by the Slovak state propaganda machinery during the war and repeated by the exiled regime's

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[145] Kamenec, I. (2005). Jozef Tiso - tvorca štátu a martýr? Mýty naše Slovenské. E. Krekovic, E. Mannová and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, Ústav etnológie SAV, Sociologický ústav SAV: 190-198.. Also see Kamenec, I. (1998). Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887-1947. Tragédia politika, knaza a cloveka. Bratislava, Archa. Bystrický, V. and t. Fano, Eds. (1992). Pokus o politický a osobný profil Jozefa Tisu. Zborník materiálov z vedeckého sympózia Castá-Papiernicka, 5.- 7. mája 1992. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press: Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied.

[146] See Lipták, L. (2000). Slovensko v 20. storocí. Bratislava, Kalligram. Kamenec, I. (1992). Slovenský stát (1939-1945). Praha, Anomal.

members and supporters after the war's end, are also unfounded. Although the economy of

the Slovak state did indeed benefit from wartime conjecture which helped alleviate the dire

economic and social situation the country had been suffering from for years, Slovakia's

actual economic and fiscal sovereignty was in reality severely curtailed. A secret protocol

about economic and financial cooperation between Slovakia and the Reich fully subordinated

Slovakia's economic policy to Nazi Germany, fixing the exchange rate between the two

countries' currencies to an unfavorable 10:1 ratio while the real value of the Slovak crown

relative to the German mark was 5:1.[147] Eventually, Germany's wartime debt to the Slovak

Republic reached close to eleven milliard crowns, not counting the 280 million crowns paid

by Slovakia to Nazi Germany as the so-called "settlement fee" for the Slovak Jews who were

deported to the Nazi concentration camps.[148]

The greatest stain on the shield of the wartime Slovak regime, undoubtedly, was the

regime's active participation in the Holocaust. Disregarding its own constitution,

international law as well as sharp criticism both at home and abroad, the regime led a brutal

ideological campaign against its eighty nine thousand Jewish citizens. The Jewish Codex of

September 10 1941 introduced a Nazi racial definition of Jew and provided the legal

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[147] The agreement included establishment of a fixed exchange rate, Slovakia's promise not to support production which was in sufficient supply in Germany,etc. In exchange for Slovakia's military and economic cooperation, Germany agreed to guarantee Slovakia's territorial borders. This guarantee, however, immediately proved to be an empty promise. When, between March 14-18, the Hungarian army attacked eastern Slovakia, Berlin, disregarding its just signed treaty with Slovakia, refused to step in to guarantee Slovakia's borders and instead assumed the role of an intermediary, manipulating the long-standing tension in the Slovak-Hungarian relations to its own advantage. Rychlík, J. (1997). Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press. In exchange for Slovakia's military and economic cooperation, Germany agreed to guarantee Slovakia's territorial borders. This guarantee, however, immediately proved to be an empty promise. When, between March 14-18, the Hungarian army attacked eastern Slovakia, Berlin, disregarding its just signed treaty with Slovakia, refused to step in to guarantee Slovakia's borders and instead assumed the role of an intermediary, manipulating the long-standing tension in the Slovak-Hungarian relations to its own advantage.

[148] Slovak economic losses spiraled especially in the last year of the war when the retreating the German army systematically destroyed Slovak communications and forcefully seized Slovak goods, raw materials, factory machinery and inventory. See Kamenec, I. (2005). Slovenská republika 1939-1945 a jej mýty. Mýty naše Slovenské. E. Krekovic, E. Mannová and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, Ústav etnológie SAV, Sociologický ústav SAV: 184-186.

foundation for transportation of the Slovak Jewish population. Hundreds of anti-Jewish laws

and regulations followed. Jews were proclaimed the enemies of the state and the nation,

stripped of all political, economic, social, civic, and eventually also human rights and

proclaimed responsible for all of the past and present wrongs perpetrated against the Slovak

nation, including the outbreak of the Second World War. Between March 25, 1942 and

October 20, 1942, Tiso's regime deported almost two thirds or 58,000 of Slovak Jews to Nazi

concentration camps.[149] Slovakia was in fact the only state in Europe not occupied by Nazi

Germany to conduct deportations of its Jewish citizens using its own administrative means,

even paying the Germans five hundred Reichsmarks for each deported Slovak Jew for the so-

called "resettlement costs". The deportations were stopped only under repeated protests from

theVatican and others after which the Slovak government began interning its Jewish citizens

in relatively more humane work camps. Only the second wave of deportations after

Slovakia's occupation by Germany between 1944 and 1945 was carried out by the German

military and police. It involved about 13,000 people. Altogether, by concealment,

exemptions, escape abroad, only about one third of Slovak Jews managed to survive the end

of the war.[150]

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[149] The law 68/1942 legalizing deportations of Slovak Jews was passed by the Slovak Diet on May 15 1942. It ordered deportation of Slovak Jews (except persons who converted to Christianity before the establishment of the Slovak state on March 14 1939 and their families, as well as non-Jewish spouses of Jews. Exempted were also certain categories of professionals and persons exempted based on ministerial and Presidential exemptions). The deported Jews were stripped of their citizenship and any remaining property. See Rychlík, J. (1997). Ceši a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press: 212.

[150] After September 1941, Jews who provided "essential services" such as health care, could receive presidential exemptions from transportation. Contrary to claims of some Ludak exile historians who have tried to exempt president Tiso from any responsibility for the Jewish tragedy by claiming that he granted over nine thousand exemptions, most Czech and Slovak historians estimate the number of the exemptions to be below one thousand, covering approximately 4000 persons. See for example Ibid. Also: Nižnanský, E. (2000). "Deportácie Židov zo Slovenska v novembri 1938." OS **4**. For more information on the tragedy of the Slovak Jews during WWII see Kamenec, I. (1991). Po Stopách Tragédie. Bratislava, Archa. Also see: Lipscher, L. (1992). Židia v slovenskom štáte 1939-1945. Banská Bystrica, Print-servis, Tóth, D., Ed. (1992). Tragédia slovenských Židov. Materiály z medzinárodného sympózia Banská Bystrica 25. - 27. marca 1992. Banská Bystrica, Ministerstvo kultúry SSR a Múzeum SNP v Banskej Bystrici, Salner, P. (1997). Prežili holocaust. Bratislava, Veda-SAV, Nižnanský, E. (1999). Židovská komunita na Slovensku medzi ceskoslovenskou parlamentnou

Slovak attitudes toward the wartime Slovak state were divided. There were those (especially Protestants, former Agrarians and left-leaning individuals) who considered the breakup of Czechoslovakia a loss of their state and remained critical of the new state and its regime. Part of this group soon began to form civic resistance groups seeking the overthrow of the Ludak regime and reinstatement of Czechoslovakia (although, it should be noted that their vision of postwar Czechoslovakia was not exactly identical with the form Czechoslovakia had before the war). There were also those for whom the wartime state, despite its satellite character, evoked feelings of national pride, confidence, as well as a sense of relative safety from the war atrocities.[151] Though they may have had reservations regarding the state's ideology, they generally identified with the state and its leadership. And then there were also genuine quislings, who supported and fully identified not only with the new state but also with the deadly ideology it professed. The majority of the population, however, most likely came to more or less accept the new regime as a "lesser evil", despite its many flaws.[152] (Post-war, communist, depictions of mass popular resistance against the Slovak wartime regime therefore need to be taken with a grain of salt.)

Gradually, as the war progressed and the regime's undemocratic character and blatant disregard for civic and human rights, especially the treatment of Slovak Jews, was revealed, however, Tiso's regime began to lose its legitimacy. By 1943, it became clear that policies and actions of the regime effectively burned Slovakia's chances of surviving the end of the war and entering the new post-war European order as an independent state. As the regime fell into a deep crisis, the opposition comprising the former Slovak Agrarians (called the

demokraciou a slovenským štátom v stredoeurópskom kontexte. Prešov, Universum, Nižnanský, E. (2000). "Deportácie Židov zo Slovenska v novembri 1938." OS **4**.

[151] War atrocities did not reach Slovakia until the summer of 1944.

[152] Objective evaluation of the wartime Slovak regime is extremely difficult. On the issue, see Lipták, L. (1965). Politický režim na Slovensku v rokoch 1939-1945. Slovenské národné povstanie roku 1944. Bratislava, Vydavatelstvo SAV**:** 20-49. Also: Kamenec, I. (1992). Slovenský stát (1939-1945). Praha, Anomal.

Civic Bloc and later the Democratic Party, represented by Jan Ursiny, Jozef Lettrich and

Matej Josko) together with the Communists (Gustav Husak, Ladislav Novomestsky and

Karol Smidke) formed a resistance organization called the Slovak National Council

(Slovenska Narodna Rada, SNR) and with the help of democratically oriented officers in the

Slovak army, began preparing a national anti-fascist uprising.

Picture 15: Slovak crown from 1944, depicting Slovak President Jozef Tiso with the inscription.
"Loyal to ourselves – together forward. 15 March 1939-1944." Source: Wikimedia Commons

The Slovak national uprising (Slovenske Narodne Povstanie, SNP) began on August 29, 1944. Lacking in coordination, heavy weapons, and external help it was defeated by the approaching German Army on October 27, 1944, only two months after its outbreak.[153] The role of the uprising has been one of the most divisive and controversial topics in recent Slovak history, dividing audiences from its very beginning. While sympathizers of the wartime Slovak State argue that the uprising took many Slovak lives, effectively ended even the limited autonomy that Tiso's state had enjoyed and led to the country's occupation by the German Army (until then Slovakia was relatively spared from the war atrocities), others see the uprising as one of the most significant positive chapters in recent Slovak history. From the military point of view, they emphasize the significance of the Slovak resistance army which created and for two months maintained a continuous military front, disrupted German delivery of supplies and held up part of German military units, causing the German side significant material and human losses. Politically, the uprising helped restore the country's democratic credentials, previously damaged by the policies of Tiso's regime. This in turn enabled SNR to be recognized by the USSR, USA and Great Britain as a legitimate representative of the Slovak Nation and a member of the anti-Hitler coalition and strengthened the Slovak position in negotiations with the Czech side about Slovakia's future status in postwar Czechoslovakia. Over time, interpretations of the uprising and its role have undergone significant modifications. The postwar communist regime appropriated, used and greatly abused the memory of SNP, modifying its narrative according to swings in its own ideological line. After the collapse of communism, SNP reemerged again as one of the most

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[153] Literature on SNP is extensive. A good place to start is Jablonický, J. (1990). Povstanie bez legiend. Bratislava, Obzor. See also: Precan, V., Ed. (1965). Slovenské národné povstanie. Dokumenty. Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, Jablonický, J. (1994). Glosy o historiografii SNP: Zneužívanie a falšovanie dejín SNP. Bratislava, NVK International, Takác, L., Ed. (1994). SNP v pamäti národa. Materiály z vedeckej konferencie k 50. výročiu SNP. Bratislava, international, Halaj, D. a. and D. Tóth, Eds. (1996). Nezodpovedané otázky. K spochybnovaniu odboja a SNP v našich národných dejinách. Materiály zo seminára s medzinárodnou účastou Banská Bystrica, Múzeum SNP 24.-25. 9. 1996. Banská Bystrica, Múzeum SNP.

controversial topics of the public debate. We will return to these debates in chapters five and six.[154]

WWII ended in Slovakia on April 4, 1945 when the Red Army entered the country's capital of Bratislava. Prague was not liberated until May 9, one day after the official German surrender in Berlin. The Prague uprising of May 5-8, 1945 was the last significant fighting of WWII; it claimed the lives of 1,691 Czechs and 436 Soviet soldiers.[155] After the war, President Tiso, President Hacha, the surviving members of the Czech and Slovak wartime governments and several leading German officials were tried in a national court in restored Czechoslovakia. President Tiso was executed on April 18, 1947, after requests for his clemency were denied by President Benes. Emil Hacha, the Protectorate President, died in a prison hospital on June 27, 1945.

All in all, the Second World War claimed more than 380,000 Czech and Slovak lives (3.7 percent of Czechoslovakia's prewar population). Although these loses pale in comparison to countries like Poland which lost some 6 million residents (about 1/5 of its pre-war population), Yugoslavia with over 1.5 million dead (over 10 percent of its prewar population), not to mention the 20 million Soviet lives that were lost in the war (about 10 percent of USSR's huge 200 million population), there was nonetheless enough suffering and humiliation to sear new unhappy memories into the collective psyche of Czechs and Slovaks and turn the political barometer in the country significantly to the left.

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[154] Negotiations about the post-war arrangement of Czechoslovakia between the representatives of SNR and Benes' government in exile took place in Moscow between March 22-29 1945. Their outcome was a success for the Slovak side. Essentially, all Slovak demands were met – Czechoslovakia was to become a very loose federation. The only areas which fell exclusively under the federal jurisdiction were foreign affairs, defense and foreign trade and even in these areas, Slovakia was to have appropriate influence. The compromise was then included in the government program which was announced on April 5 in Kosice which was to serve as the foundation of a new, post-war, Czechoslovakia. Kamenec, I. (2005). Slovenská republika 1939-1945 a jej mýty. Mýty naše Slovenské. E. Krekovic, E. Mannová and E. Krekovicová. Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, Ústav etnológie SAV, Sociologický ústav SAV: 181-189.

[155] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 235.

After the war, these memories provided a convenient justification for an extremely radical solution to Czechoslovakia's longstanding minority problem. By a series of governmental decrees, collectively referred to as "Benes Decrees", approximately three million of Czechoslovakia's ethnic Germans and 89,000 ethnic Hungarians were stripped of their Czechoslovak citizenship and expelled from the country on the grounds of their alleged wartime collaboration with the Nazis after the war. Their lands and property were confiscated by the state. All German institutions of higher education were dissolved and the newly evacuated border regions were resettled by Czechs and Slovaks.[156] In Slovakia, a strategy of a voluntary population exchange (rather than a straightforward expulsion) was used, resulting in the removal of about 89,000 ethnic Hungarian citizens.[157] All in all, between 1930 and 1950, the percentage of ethnic Germans in the Czech lands dropped from 29. percent to a mere 1.8 percent. The Hungarian population in Slovakia fell from 17.6 percent to 10.3 percent.[158]

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[156] The total number of Czechoslovak Germans who were deported or perished during the odsun remains a matter of controversy to this day. Most historians agree that around three million ethnic Germans is a fair estimate of the total population loss. Preceding the official state-organized odsun was the so called "wild transfer" – a wave of spontaneous acts of violence against the Germans which swept through the countryside from May until August 1945. The worst excesses ceased after August 1945 when the Potsdam conference accepted the orderly and humane transfer of the Germans. German sources name close to 19,000 people who died in the odsun, about 6,000 of them violently. On the postwar expulsions of Czechoslovak Germans see Stanek, T. (2005). Poválecné excesy v ceských zemích v roce 1945 a jejich vyšetrování. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dejiny AV CR. Also Stanek, T. (1991). Odsun Nemcu z Ceskoslovenska 1945-47. Praha., Kaplan, K. (1990). Pravda o Ceskoslovensku 1945-1948. Praha., Kaplan, K. (2004). Ceskoslovensko v poválecné Evrope. Praha., Kren, J. (1998). Poválecná nemecká literatura o ceských zemích. V rozdelenej Evrope: Cesi, Slováci, Nemci a ich štáty v rokoch 1948-1989. D. a. Kovác, J. Kren and H. Lemberg. Bratislava: 125-155., Kucera, J. (1992). Odsunové ztráty sudetonemeckého obyvatelstva: Problémy jejich presného vycíslení. Praha., Kopecek, M. and M. Kunštát (2003). "Sudetonemecká otázka v ceské akademické debate po roce 1989." Soudobé dejiny **x**(3): 293-318., Deak, I., J. T. Gross, et al., Eds. (2000). The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath, Princeton University Press.

[157] According to an agreement between the Czechoslovak and the Hungarian government, the Czechoslovak government could remove as many ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia as was the number of ethnic Slovaks living in Hungary who wished to voluntarily return to Slovakia. (The Czechoslovak government determined who was to leave the country). In total, about 89,000 Hungarians were exchanged for about 7,000 Slovaks. See Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press: 15-16.

[158] Belina quoted in Sayer, 243.

Czechoslovakia's ethnic makeup was changed beyond recognition. To use Ernst Gellner's eloquent characterization, what once looked like a painting by Oskar Kokoshka now looked like a picture by Amedeo Modigliani.[159] What the awakeners and the Czech and Slovak interwar elites had done in the symbolic sense was now accomplished in practice. The Germans, the Hungarians, the Jews, in short "the others" were removed not only from the national script but, finally, also from the physical body of the "nation". Traumas of Bila Hora and hundreds of years of "darkness", humiliation and injustice the Czechs and the Slovaks had suffered under their historical oppressors had finally been redressed. Stripped of its ethnic and social complexities, Czechoslovakia became a very different place than what it once was. And its fresh memories of the horrors of the war were added to the martyrdom of Hus and memories such as those of Bila Hora to provide a powerful symbolic material out of which the Czechoslovak nation could be re-imagined again, this time, in the color red.

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[159] Gellner, E. (1984). Nations and Nationalism. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 139.

Chapter 4: Constructing the Czechoslovak Nation – Act Two: Under the Red Star

Communism, above all, was a promise – a promise of humanism, universalism, equality and justice, of a new perfect civilization free of class divisions. As such, the central temporal category on which the communist project was built was the future. It was in the name of the flawless communist future that all actions taken in the present and in the past were validated. At the same time, however, it was only through the past that the proletariat's progress toward the communist utopia could be "scientifically" demonstrated and the inevitability of communism's coming proven beyond any doubt, regardless of the dire present circumstances.[160] This is why control of history was such a central concern in East Central European communist regimes. Czechoslovakia was no exception.

Similar to Orwell's "Ministry of Truth", the Czechoslovak communist regime claimed for itself an exclusive insight into the past, the present and the future and, using its sophisticated propaganda machinery – history texts, holidays, elaborate public commemorative rituals, museums, research institutes, literature and film etc. – worked to maintain its aura of infallibility by periodically purging and revising the content of the nation's past. Organized forgetting was the cultural counterpart of

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[160] Bradatan, C. (2005). "A Time of Crisis-A Crisis of (the Sense of) Time: The Political Production of Time in Communism and Its Relevance for the Postcommunist Debates." East European Politics and Societies **19**(2): 260-290. See alsoHanson, S. E. (1997). Time and Revolution: Marxism and the design of Soviet Institutions, University of North Carolina Press.

communist purges. In communist Czechoslovakia as elsewhere throughout the communist bloc, the past was purged to erase political alternatives, affirm the Party's monopoly on truth, and maintain power. This was much more than simply a matter of tilting to the left the mirror through which history was refracted. The key feature that distinguishes the use of the past by the Czechoslovak communist regime from, for instance, the interwar republic discussed in the preceding chapter is that no alternative "mirrors" were permissible under communism. Having full control over libraries, historical institutes, history departments, archives, printing presses, newspapers and publishing houses, the Party was able to exert control over the past with a magnitude, forcefulness, institutionalization and totality never seen before. The Party's interpretation of the past became the only correct, the only permissible, in fact the only possible, one.

A Story and a Photograph

Milan Kundera's Book of Laughter and Forgetting offers a telling glimpse of the communist practice of purging and rewriting history. The story Kundera tells is of a photograph taken in February 1948 when the communists seized power in Czechoslovakia. Pictured in the photograph is the newly elected Czechoslovak communist leader Klement Gottwald delivering his famous balcony address to thousands of Czechs and Slovaks gathered in central Prague. Standing on the balcony next to Gottwald's right was a fellow high-ranking communist named Vladimír Clementis who, in the middle of Gottwald's speech, removed his fur hat and placed it on the bareheaded Gottwald to protect him from the snow and the freezing temperature. Four years later Clementis was tried in a Stalinist-style show trial,

convicted of a national Zionist conspiracy and treason and hung, his image was

removed from all photos. Clementis' hat on Gottwald's head was the only trace of

Clementis' existence that remained. Clementis was removed from history with an

airbrush and soon, people could no longer remember he even existed. All that

remained was a hat. "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory

against forgetting" writes Kundera.[161]

Picture 16: The case of a missing comrade. Pictured in the first photo is Klement Gottwald delivering his February 1948 balcony address. Standing to the left of Gottwald is Vladimir Clementis. Few years later, Clementis became victim of the 1950s Stalinist-style show trials. The photograph was then edited and the figure of Clementis erased.

The Czechoslovak communist rule can be roughly divided into three main

phases: the years of the Stalinist terror (late 1940s-early 1950s), delayed de-

Stalinization (1960s-1968), and Normalization (1969-1989). Each phase is replete

with its unique silences and "white spots" similar to the Clementis story described in

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[161] Kundera, M. (1981). The Book of Laughter and Forgetting. New York, Penguin.

Kundera's novel.[162] As much as the mentions, the silences were an integral part of

the communist national narrative and formed the heart of the regime's legitimization

structure.   This chapter provides a brief (and unavoidably selective) account of the

transformation over the forty-year-long Czechoslovak communist rule. Contrary to

the popular belief that nationalism was an idea alien to the communist ideology (and

thus was supposedly temporarily frozen in East Central Europe, only to erupt with

vengeance after 1989), the chapter shows that the Czechoslovak communist regime

actively – and selectively – appropriated, used and periodically cleansed and revised

elements of the Czech and Slovak national past to consolidate and maintain its power.

Furthermore, in contradiction to extreme constructivist theories of national identity

which suggest that elites are capable of inventing national identities practically at

will, the chapter shows that the Czechoslovak communist regime, despite its

reputation of being one of the most rigid, repressive, neo-Stalinist regimes in the

region, was unable to achieve its goal of creating a "new socialist man" and

inculcating in him a new version of the past. Instead, decades of communist

massaging and erasing of history helped create a highly cynical, historically

disoriented and distrustful population – a population highly vulnerable, as it soon

became clear, to the temptations of various new "fantasies of salvation"[163] which

emerged after the communist experiment collapsed in 1989, the topic to be discussed

in Chapter 5.

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[162] One of the most insightful analyses of the phenomenon of "white spots" in the Czechoslovak historiography continues to be Jan Křen's Bílá místa v našich dejinách? (White spots in our history?), first published as a samizdat publication in the 1980s. See Kren, J. (1990). Bílá místa v našich dejinách? Praha, Lidové noviny.

[163] Tismaneanu, V. (1998). Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe. New Jersey, Princeton UP.

The Communist Rise to Power

Despite the widespread recent tendency throughout the former Eastern bloc –

the Czech republic and Slovakia included - to try to exorcise the communist period

from the popular memory as some kind of an alien, externally imposed idea,

communism was not only and exclusively externally imposed regime. As Bradley

Abrams persuasively argues in his recent book, there were internal, domestic, reasons

that brought Communists to power in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in East Central

Europe after the war. In fact, the spectacular forty-fold increase in the Czechoslovak

Communist Party membership between May 1945 and March 1946 took place in the

absence of the Red Army on the Czechoslovak territory. [164]   The enormous postwar

popularity of Czechoslovak communists was also confirmed in the 1946

parliamentary elections in which KSC obtained 38% of the total vote, becoming the

strongest party and the leading force in the new National Assembly. [165]

A look at some other countries in the region tells very much the same story.

The Hungarian CP grew from a mere 3,000 in December 1944 to 300,000 by August

1945 to twice as many by 1946. The Romanian Communist Party experienced a

similarly phenomenal growth from a mere 1,000 members during the war to almost

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[164] The KSC membership grew from barely 28,000 to over one million between May 1945 and March 1946.

[165] In the Czech lands, KSC obtained just over forty percent of the popular vote, becoming the strongest party, followed by National Socialists (23.6%), People's Party (just over 20%) and the Social Democrats (15.5%). In Slovakia, the Slovak Communist Party (KSS) gained just over thirty per cent of the vote, coming in second behind the Democratic Party with 62% of votes, and was followed by the Labor Party and the Freedom Party, each of which gained just over three percent of the vote. Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press. AlsoAgnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

800,000 by October 1945. Even in a traditionally strongly anti-communist Poland, the communists were able to increase their numbers from less than 30,000 in early 1944 to 235,000 by the end of 1945 and more than 550,000 the following year.[166] In short, the political barometer in the whole region (in fact, on the entire continent) was tilted to the left and the recent horrors of WWII as well as the fact that the region had been just liberated by the Soviet Red Army were without doubt some of the key factors responsible for this unprecedented shift.[167]

In addition, in the Czechoslovak case, the still fresh memory of having been betrayed by the West in Munich in 1938 played a powerful role in re-orienting the country's postwar foreign policy toward Moscow. From the perspective of the Czechoslovak postwar leadership and especially President Benes, geographical proximity between Germany and Czechoslovakia (and hence the threat of potential future German aggression) could not be eliminated by a simple act of signing expulsion decrees. A close and permanent alliance with the USSR seemed like the best, if not the only, option available. Besides, there was a genuine and widespread desire for reform. As Abrams demonstrates, virtually all recognized Czechoslovak post-war parties (with the exception of the Catholic People's Party which maintained a reserved attitude) paid at least lip service to socialist ideas and the nation's pro-Slavic/pro-Soviet orientation. All parties were in support of wide-scale nationalization, all were in favor of the expulsion of ethnic Germans, all lauded land

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[166] Abrams, B. F. (2004). The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism. New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.

[167] As Abrams correctly notes, the relatively greater postwar popularity of communism in the East reflected the greater material and human losses suffered by the Eastern Europe. However, the leftward turn in the postwar political mood was a characteristic that was common to the West as well.

reform. In short, the belief in the need for reform was strong, as was the deep

dissatisfaction and disappointment with the failures and unfulfilled promises of the

interwar "bourgeois" system.[168]

In addition to the overall leftward shift in the political mood, however, it was

in no small measure KSC's clever tactics of presenting itself as a patriotic and

moderate political force, committed to a calm, peaceful, gradual, parliamentary road

to socialism, which helped convince 38 per cent of Czechs and Slovaks to vote

communist in the 1946 elections. Frequent assurances that the Czechoslovak road to

socialism would be "our own, special, longer, slower, more complicated and more

winding …, [that it would] not necessarily lead through the soviets and the

dictatorship of the proletariat" [169] were key in winning sympathies of the majority of

Czechs and Slovaks who were opposed to radical Bolshevik measures that had been

implemented in the USSR.

The events leading to the communist takeover on February 25, 1948 have

been well documented.[170] Without dwelling on the details, it suffices to say that after

the 1946 elections, the Communists, under the pretext of fighting the Nazis and their

wartime collaborators, gradually eliminated their political rivals and secured for

themselves the control of the National Front.[171] In February 1948, KSČ provoked a

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[168] This of course is not to say that those who supported the communists in 1946 or even 1948 desired
the totalitarian system that was soon to materialize. See Abrams, B. F. (2004). The Struggle for the
Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism. New York, Rowman&Littlefield
Publishers.

[169] Klement Gottwald, cited in Kaplan, K. and M. Reiman (1965). "Naše revoluce a myšlenky o
socialismu." Plamen **7**(12): 114.

[170] Karel Kaplan remains by far the leading historian on Czechoslovakia's communist takeover and the
communist period in general. See for instance, also Kaplan, K. (1997). Pet kapitol o unoru. Brno.

[171] The National Front (NF) was a Communist-dominated umbrella organization which essentially
replaced the parliament. It discussed issues and passed decisions which were binding for all

governmental crisis, during which twelve non-communist ministers handed in their resignations, hoping to be joined by their Social democratic colleagues – an expectation which as it turned out did not materialize. Faced with lack of unity and resolve among the Czechoslovak non-communist parties on the one hand and well-organized communist demonstrations (and a prospect of a civil war leading to a potential Soviet intervention) on the other, president Benes, alone and seriously ill at the time, decided to accept the resignations and authorize the communist leader Klement Gottwald to form a new government. With Gottwald's appointment, the communist road to power and the country's full integration into the Soviet bloc was completed – seemingly legally, according to constitution and with mass popular support.[172]

Stalinist Terror of the Late 1940s / 1950s

In the Czechoslovak history, the late 1940s and 1950s represent the period of consolidation of the communist power and full Stalinization of the Party and its tactics. In accordance with the Stalinist strategy of the time, terror employed by KSC

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parliamentary representatives, party organizations and the press. Each party represented in the NF (the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, the People's Party, the Slovak Democrats and the Communists) had three members in the National Front government but since the KSS and KSC were counted as separate parties, communists controlled six portfolios. Since the Communists held a numerical advantage in the NF government and since the acceptance of the common program was a condition of admission, in effect no opposition was possible.

[172] The February coup was marked by two important deaths. On March 10 1948, less than two weeks after the communist coup, Jan Masaryk – the son of the first Czechoslovak president Tomas Garrique Masaryk and the only remaining minister in Gottwald's reorganized government not under communist influence – was found dead under his apartment window. Circumstances of his death remain unclear to this day. President Benes - the other remaining link to the interwar republic – resigned from the presidency in June and died on September 3 1948. With the death of these two important figures inextricably linked to the history of the First Republic, the break with the interwar Czechoslovakia and its legacy was complete. Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

was both random and targeted and included loss of employment, forced relocation, assignment to forced labor camps, uranium mines and other penitentiaries, show trials and executions. Initially, the prime targets of communist repression were non-communist party functionaries, intellectuals and officials of the old order. Particularly hard hit was the Roman Catholic Church, as well as entrepreneurs, farmers and small businessmen who formed the backbone of the interwar order. After the Stalin-Tito split in 1948, the Party terror spread to the Party's own ranks. Some 273 top Party officials were tried between 1952 and 1954. Although the exact figures of the total number of victims of the Stalinist purges in Czechoslovakia are impossible to trace, estimates place the number of those imprisoned at 230-240,000 (about 80 percent of those refer to political prisoners). Another 100,000 individuals were sent to forced labor camps. All in all, it is estimated that between 187 and 280 death sentences were carried out as a result of political trials under Gottwald between 1948 and 1953. This was a level of repression unmatched among Czechoslovakia's Eastern bloc neighbors (with the exception of Stalin's Soviet Union). The number of those who died in prisons or labor camps ran into many thousands.[173]

Though the use of terror and intimidation remained a feature of the regime throughout its existence, the regime's brutality reached particularly staggering proportions during the first years following the February 1948 takeover. One of the most publicized political show trials of the time focused on Milada Horáková, the popular Czechoslovak National Socialist Party politician, former member of the anti-

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[173] Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press. For more details and estimates see Hejl, V. and K. Kaplan (1986). Zpráva o organizovaném násilí. Toronto. Also Kaplan, K. and D. a. Tomášek (1994). O cenzure v Ceskoslovensku v letech 1945-1956: Studie. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dejiny AV CR.

fascist underground and Terezin concentration camp survivor who was sentenced to death for her alleged role as a leader of a supposed plot to overthrow the Communist regime.[174] (Horáková's memory would reemerge as a potent political symbol in the Czech public discussions after the fall of communism as will be seen in the next chapter). In another major show trial of the era, the so-called "Slánský process", named after the trials' most senior victim, Secretary General of KSC Rudolf Slánský, fourteen top Communist leaders and bureaucrats (eleven of them Jews) were found guilty of participating in "a Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist conspiracy in the service of American imperialism". Eleven of the convicted were executed; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. [175] Vladimír Clementis, the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs who appears in Milan Kundera's story cited at the beginning of the chapter, was among the executed.

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[174] Horáková's trial which took place between May 31 and June 8 1945 followed the script of the Soviet Great Purges of the 1930s, was supervised by Soviet advisors and broadcast on the radio. Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill and Eleanor Roosevelt all pleaded in vain for Horáková's life. their requests were rejected by Gottwald and Horáková and her three co-defendants were executed on June 27 1950. See Kaplan, K. (1995). Nevetší politický proces M. Horáková a spol. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dejiny AV CR.

[175] Similar to Horáková's trial, Slánský process exhibited features of the earlier Soviet show trials, including torture, intimidation, extorted confessions and a carefully crafted scenario that the defendants had to follow. Ironically Slánský was one of the leading creators and organizers of the earlier Stalinist purges in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet advisors who ordered Slánský trials were the same people that Slánský invited to Czechoslovakia following the László Rajk trial in Budapest in September 1949 to introduce the Stalinist methods of interrogation into Czechoslovakia. Among those executed together with Slánský were Vladimír Clementis (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Otto Fischl (Deputy Minister of Finance), Josef Frank (Deputy General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), Ludvík Frejka (Chief of the Economic Committee in the Chancellery of the President), Bedřich Geminder (Chief of the International Section of the Party Secretariat), Rudolf Margolius (Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade), Bedřich Reicin (Deputy Minister of National Defense), André Simone (editor of Rudé právo), Otto Šling (Regional Party Secretary) and Karel Šváb (Deputy Minister of State Security). On the Slánský trial, see Kaplan, K. (1990). Report on the Murder of the General Secretary. London, I. B. Tauris & Co. The Slánský trial was dramatised in the 1970 film L'Aveu ("The Confession"), based on the namesake book by Artur London – one of the three survivors of the trial.

The Slánský trial is also a key element of two memoirs written by the wife and the son of Rudolf Margolius, one of the eleven men executed during the Slánský trial. See: Kovály, H. M. (1997). Under a Cruel Star: A life in Prague 1941-1968, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Margolius, I. (2006). Reflections of Prague: Journeys through the 20th Century. Chichester, John Wiley&Sons.

In Slovakia, Stalinist purges were directed primarily against the so-called "bourgeois nationalists" – high ranking Slovak Communist participants of the Slovak national uprising who were found guilty of supposedly "betraying class interests" by collaborating with non-communist resistance during the war. Among those expelled were Gustáv Husák, Ladislav Novomeský and Karol Šmidke. All received long-term jail sentences (in Husák's case the sentence was for life).[176] Following his release from prison and rehabilitation, Husák came to play an important role in the Czechoslovak communist reform efforts in the late 1960s. Ironically, following the Warsaw Pact intervention in August 1968, after Husak became the General Secretary of the Party and later also Czechoslovakia's president, he became the chief destroyer of the very reform ideas he helped introduce, turning Czechoslovakia into one of the most rigid, ossified, neo-Stalinist regimes in the region.

The Communist Practice of Organized Forgetting

The post-1948 physical liquidation of enemies of socialism was supplemented by KSC's wide-ranging cultural massacre and memory purge. Approximately half of the entire state book holdings, in total about seven million books, were liquidated after February 1948. Out of those books that survived the massacre, only three million were declared safe enough to be held by public libraries. To fill the place of thus removed "unhealthy" literature, "ideologically safe" titles were published in

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[176] Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press, Rychlík, J. (1997). Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: Cesko-slovenské vztahy 1914-1945. Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press, Innes, A. (2001). Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye. New Haven/London, Yale University Press.

record numbers. Between 1950 and 1954, two million copies of Klement Gottwald's selected writings were published, together with three million copies of Lenin and almost four million copies of Stalin's writings.[177] Memory was purged not only (or simply) to eliminate political alternatives but also to enable a new re-construction of the nation's past.

The Silences

Among the many silences and "white spots" in the post-1948 communist narrative, the period of interwar Czechoslovakia represented one of the most conspicuous omissions. History of the interwar republic was either not recalled at all in the official communist historiography or, when it was recalled, it was reduced to the history of KSČ and its political and social struggles. The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was described as a direct outcome of the November 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, whereas the Munich events of 1938 and Czechoslovakia's demise in 1939 were blamed on the domestic bourgeoisie and its alleged "betrayal" of national interests. Similarly skewed was the picture of the social reality of the interwar republic. The complexity of the interwar social structure was reduced to a simplistic black and white caricature of the "bad bourgeoisie" versus the "good proletariat". Completely obliterated was interwar Czechoslovakia's vibrant and diverse middle class as well as the many formal and informal structures of everyday life which formed the basis of the Czechoslovak interwar democracy.[178]

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[177] In their zeal for ideological purity, the Communists surpassed even the Nazis who satisfied themselves with moving "objectionable" titles into deposits without physically liquidating them. Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press.

[178] Kren, J. (1990). Bílá místa v našich dejinách? Praha, Lidové noviny.

Although October 28, 1918, the date of Czechoslovakia's establishment,remained on the list of official state holidays, the Communists attempted to displace the memory of the First Republic in public imagination by attaching a series of new meanings to the date. In 1951, the official title of the holiday was changed to "Nationalization Day" – to commemorate the nationalization decrees signed by president Beneš in 1945.[179] The date also coincided with two other "milestones" of the communist-led Czechoslovak "national and democratic revolution": the launch of the first Czechoslovak two-year plan in 1946 and the end of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans. Both events were ritually recalled, and disproportionately glorified, by the communist propaganda to illustrate the accomplishments the country had achieved under its communist leadership and to outline the bright and joyous communist future it was marching toward.

While the Communists never concealed their dislike of the interwar republic – after all, KSC remained in opposition throughout the entire twenty years of the first CSR's existence – the memory of Czechoslovakia's popular first president, Tomas Garique Masaryk, was simply too emotionally powerful to be discarded. Initially, KSČ tried to claim Masaryk's mantle and integrate Masaryk's legacy into its own narrative scheme. In 1945, for instance, the Party press upheld Masaryk as "the most prominent defender of social progress, justice, and liberty".[180] In 1946, the Czechoslovak parliament, with the Communists' wholehearted support, approved March 7, the date of Masaryk's birthday, as one of Czechoslovakia's official

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[179] Národní shromáždení, R. C. (1946). Zákon c 52/1946 Zb ze dne 7. brezna 1946. Sbírka zákonu, c. 52/1946. Praha.

[180] Reisky de Dubnic, V. (1960). Communist Propaganda Methods: A Case Study on Czechoslovakia. New York, Praeger.

memorial dates.[181] Emphasizing Masaryk's socialist credentials, KSC went to great

lengths to highlight Masaryk's conflict with the bourgeois establishment of the late

Habsburg Empire, Masaryk's quest for truth in the famous "Manuscript Controversy"

and his anti-clericalism. This while at the same time brushing away as simply a mark

of the times Masaryk's open anti-Marxist position elaborated in his Social Question.

Some Communist commentators even went as far as to claim that nationalization,

expulsion of Germans and KSČ's monopolization of the National Front government

were measures Masaryk would wholeheartedly approved of.[182]

KSČ's glorification of Masaryk continued for a brief while even after the

communist coup on February 28, 1948. On the anniversary of Masaryk's birthday

that year, Zdenek Nejedlý, the Party's chief ideologue and historian who went to

become Czechoslovakia's minister of education, sang praises to Masaryk: "Today's

republic is Masaryk's state… If anyone claims that today's People's democratic

regime is not Masaryk's, it is an insult… Long live Masaryk's heritage!"[183] Before

long, however, the Party's propaganda course took a 180 degree turn. Masaryk's

humanist philosophy was discovered to be dangerous – a kind of Trojan horse, which

could eventually corrupt the Marxist ideology itself. The Party press therefore

insisted on vigilance:

> "Our problem now is to wipe out completely from people's minds the last
>
> remnants of Masaryk's influence, because it confuses the people and retards

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[181] Národní shromáždění, R. C. (1946). Zákon c 52/1946 Zb ze dne 7. brezna 1946. Sbírka zákonu, c. 52/1946. Praha.

[182] Abrams, B. F. (2004). The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism. New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.

[183] Reisky de Dubnic, V. (1960). Communist Propaganda Methods: A Case Study on Czechoslovakia. New York, Praeger.

them on the way forward. …The working man of this Republic, the patriot

who loves his country and his own people, can have nothing in common with

Masaryk."[184]

The centennial of Masaryk's birth in 1950 was not recalled at all, nor did March 7,

the date of Masaryk's birthday, make it onto the new list of official holidays of the

communist regime. Throughout the entire communist period, Masaryk did not appear

on a single stamp, banknote or coin, not even in the 1968 reform period when several

previously obliterated figures were temporarily rehabilitated.[185]

Together with Masaryk, obliterated were also Beneš, Štefánik and other

prominent politicians of interwar Czechoslovakia. Beneš Square in Prague became

the Square of the October Revolution, Štefánik Square became the Square of the

Soviet Tank Crews. In 1951, statues and busts of Masaryk, Beneš and other key

interwar politicians were removed from the Pantheon of the National Museum.

Similarly purged were also statues and references to President Woodrow Wilson – the

symbol of the interwar republic's attachment to the United States.[186] For the next 37

years, October 28 was commemorated without any mention of the country's

Founding Fathers. It was only in 1988 (one year before the collapse of the

communist regime), on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of

Czechoslovakia's establishment, the decaying communist regime finally conceded to

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Sayer, D. (1998). The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

[186] During the interwar period, President Wilson was celebrated as one of the heroes of Czechoslovak independence. The main terminal in Prague was named after him, monuments were erected to him, many towns named their main streets after him, and W. Wilson's picture had a prominent place in the public schools, often hanging side by side with Masaryk's picture. Reisky de Dubnic, V. (1960). Communist Propaganda Methods: A Case Study on Czechoslovakia. New York, Praeger.

public pressure and changed the title of the October 28 holiday back to "Czechoslovak Independence Day" and made it, once again, a state holiday.

In addition to the history of the First Republic and its leading figures, comprehensively screened and excised from public memory were also events related to Czechoslovakia's most recent, postwar, past. Completely erased for instance were all mentions of the once prominent but now nearly non-existent ethnic German population as well as the long history of the Czech-German co-existence in Bohemia. Erased was also the memory of Czechoslovakia's Jewish population which perished in the Nazi concentration camps. Expunged from public memory was also the period of the immediate postwar history, especially the forced postwar nationalization and collectivization as well as the political visions and programs of the Czechoslovak non-communist socialist parties[187]. Similarly silenced, as one would expect, were references to the many show trials and executions that took place during the Gottwald era. Last but not least, obliterated was the promise of the "unique Czechoslovak road to socialism", the key platform on which KSC won the 1946 elections. After the 1948 split between Stalin and Tito, the concept became an official taboo.[188]

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[187] Kren, J. (1990). Bílá místa v našich dejinách? Praha, Lidové noviny.

[188] Immediately after the war, KSC's belief in the possibility of a unique, natural progress toward socialism (the exact contours of which were never specified) was in line with Stalin's theory of different roads to socialism. Unsurprisingly, the concept became an official taboo in the Czechoslovak historiography after Yugoslavia's defection from the socialist camp in 1948. History of Gustav Bareš's edited volume of Klement Gottwald's speeches "Deset Let" (Ten Years) illustrates the gradual obliteration of the concept. The book was first published in 1947 and, in the original as well as in its first several reprints, contained Gottwald's many references to the specific "Czechoslovak road to socialism". In the 1949 edition, the passages referring to the "Czechoslovak road" were removed and in the definitive collection of Gottwald's works which came out in the 1950s, the term was no longer mentioned. See Abrams, B. F. (2004). The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism. New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.

The Mentions

Side-by-side with the purge of history went active cultivation of the preferred version of it. And while the censorship was largely invisible, the cultivation was a highly public matter, accompanied by organized public celebrations, mass gymnastic spectacles, parades, official speeches, and, of course, monument building. In contrast to the pre-1948 era when official commemoration was a reflection of civic activities, cultural climate and politics, official commemoration after February 1948 was fully controlled by the ideological commission of the Ministry of Culture and Education which spelled out those themes and events that were deemed desirable, appropriately "didactical" and thus worthy of commemoration. The Ministry's detailed directives were distributed to all schools and workplaces and compliance with them was closely monitored.[189]

Unsurprisingly, on top of the list of "ideologically correct" themes were Czechoslovakia's liberation by the Soviet Army and the Czech and Slovak antifascist resistance. May 9, the date when the first Soviet Army troops entered Prague in 1945, became Czechoslovakia's most important official holiday, carrying the status of a "state holiday".[190] Along with three other new holidays – November 7 (the anniversary of the Great October Revolution in Russia), August 29 (the anniversary

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[189] Lipták, L. (1999). Rošády na piedestáloch. Storocie dlhšie ako sto rokov: O dejinách a historiografii. L. Lipták. Bratislava, Kalligram**: 311-350.

[190] The communist holiday legislation followed a 3-tier structure and included state holidays (May 9 – "Liberation by the Soviet Army Day"), "other official days of rest" (May 1 – "Labor Day", October 28 – "Nationalization Day", Easter, Christmas and New Year's day), and "memorial and special days" (February 25 1948 (communist victory), 29 August 1945 (Slovak national uprising), 7 November 1917 (Great October revolution in Russia), July 5 (Jan Hus) and July 6 (Cyril and Methodius) which had the status of work days. See Národní shromáždění, R. C. (1951). Zákon ze dne 2. listopadu 1951 o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech. Sbírka zákonu, c. 93/1951. Praha.

of the beginning of the Slovak national uprising in 1945) and May 5 (the date commemorating the commencement of the Prague Uprising in May 1945), May 9 was to symbolize the crucial importance of the Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship and the gratitude that the Czechoslovak communist leadership and the Czechoslovak people felt toward the Soviet Union. Had it not been for the Soviet Union, the official mantra emphasized, there would be no free Czechoslovakia. In fact, there would be no Czechoslovakia at all since the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the establishment of the First Czechoslovak republic in 1918 was made possible only thanks to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Interpretations from the interwar period which cited the U.S. president Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination as a key contributing factor responsible for Czechoslovakia's establishment were proclaimed "bourgeois distortions", fabrications to cover up the "sell-out" of Czechoslovak resources to Western capitalist interests.

In contrast to October 28, 1918 which, according to the communist press, symbolized the "betrayal of the nation's revolutionary yearnings by bourgeois politicians", especially president Masaryk and Edvard Benes, May 5 and May 9 represented "true liberation" and the beginning of a "truly national democratic revolution" in Czechoslovakia:

> "With the liberation of our homeland from the fascist yoke a new historic era in the life of the Czech and Slovak nation began. Thanks to the victory of the Soviet Union over fascism, the Czech and Slovak hundred year long struggle for national independence was forever won. For the first time in their history, the people of Czechoslovakia created a truly democratic, sovereign and

independent state, free from foreign imperialists… [and]…under the
leadership of the KSČ…laid the foundations of socialism."[191]

The natural continuation of this heroic, "truly national", "democratic"
revolution was the expulsion of Czechoslovakia's ethnic Germans, nationalization of
private property and commencement of the first two-year plan.[192] In order to
compensate for a "small" historical inaccuracy in the communist narrative –
specifically the fact that Prague had been liberated and almost empty of Germans for
three days before the arrival of the Soviet Army,[193] competitions were arranged and
awards were given for the best amateur photographic record of the Red Army entry
into Czechoslovakia, showing troops being greeted by an enthusiastic population.
Journalistic contests were also organized, such as the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship
League's contest for the "best factual account" of the liberation by the Red Army.[194]

The "heroic and mass-based" Czech and Slovak anti-fascist resistance
symbolized by August 29, the date of the commencement of the Slovak national
uprising in 1944,[195] represented another major pillar of the communist legitimizing
mythology. That past, too, however, was highly selective and repeatedly revised.

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[191] (1955). Pozdrav Najvyššiemu sovietu SSSR, Rade ministrov SSSR a UVKSSS. Pravda. Bratislava**:** 1-2.

[192] Note a significant temporal reordering here – whereas for Palacky the age of "darkness" in the Czech history ended with the emergence of the Czech national emancipation movement in the 19th century, and for Masaryk it was in 1918 with the creation of Czechoslovakia, for KSC, liberation from the age-long suffering of the nation came only in 1945, respectively 1948.

[193] Only in Slovakia and parts of Moravia was the Soviet Army instrumental in ending the German occupation.   Add details from dubnic 50, Abrams 320 ft1

,[194] Reisky de Dubnic, V. (1960). Communist Propaganda Methods: A Case Study on Czechoslovakia. New York, Praeger.

[195] Since 1951, August 29 was an official memorial day. Národní shromáždení, R. C. (1951). Zákon ze dne 2. listopadu 1951 o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech. Sbírka zákonu, c. 93/1951. Praha.

The first noticeable revision came immediately after the February 1948 coup when non-communist participants of the Slovak national uprising were charged with collaboration with Beneš' London-based bourgeois government and their role in the uprising was belittled.[196] Later on, in the late 1940s, when the communist witch-hunt turned inward and bourgeois nationalism was discovered inside the Party itself, the narrative of the resistance changed again. This time, Gustav Husak, Ladislav Novomesky and other prominent Slovak Communists, participants of the resistance, were proclaimed traitors and collaborators of the bourgeois London government with which they were supposedly working toward the restoration of the pre-Munich bourgeois order. It was only thanks to KSČ's Moscow-based leadership, the Party line explained, that the Party was able to fulfill its historic role and save the resistance from being hijacked by the bourgeois elements in the leadership of the KSS.[197] Over the next several decades, the official narrative of the resistance changed several more times, always reflecting the current composition of the Party leadership, as will be discussed below.

In addition to the recent past, KSC attempted to boost its legitimacy by appropriating and reinventing several periods of the Czech and Slovak earlier history. Among them, the Hussite period and the Great Moravian era received particular

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[196] Some of the prominent participants of SNP who disappeared from public view after February 1948 include Jan Ursiny, Jozef Lettrich, Matej Josko, Martin Kvetko, Vavro Srobar, Milan Polak, etc. Jablonický, J. (1994). Glosy o historiografii SNP: Zneužívanie a falšovanie dejín SNP. Bratislava, NVK International.

[197] Some of the key examples of the Communist deformation of the history of SNP from this era include: Dolezal, J. (1954). Slovenské národní povstání. Praha, Gosiorovský, M. (1954). Slovenské národné povstanie. Bratislava, HUSAV, Ed. (1954). Slovenské národné povstanie: Zborník prednášok z vedeckej konferencie k 10. výrociu SNP konanej 8.-9. decembra 1953 v Bratislave. Bratislava, Kopecký, V. (1960). CSR a KSC. Praha, Lastovicka, B. (1960). V Londýne za války. Praha, Král, V. (1962). Pravda o okupaci. Praha.

attention, and a special place on the official communist calendar. July 5 (Slavic

missionaries Constantine and Methodius Day) and July 6 (Master Jan Hus holiday)

retained their status of memorial days – as they had in the interwar period. The

content of both holidays changed dramatically, however. The Hussite tradition in the

communist rendition became thoroughly secularized and contemporized. The

Hussites were essentially turned into class warriors. Emphasis was placed on the

radical Taborite faction led by Zizka and the abolishment of private property the

Taborites advocated. On the other hand, the core of the Hussite movement – its

religious dimension – was downplayed. Stripped of their religious significance, the

Hussites became KSC's revolutionary precursors and the Communist Party became

the Hussites' 20th century incarnation as the following excerpt from Zdenek Nejedly's

Communists- the heirs of the great revolutionary traditions of the Czech nation

shows:

> "We sincerely, wholeheartedly and truly acknowledge Hus and other Hussite
>
> revolutionary heroes. And we would not mind at all if Zizka appeared among
>
> us today and with his mace – a bit primitive but certainly a very effective
>
> method – helped make order in the world as he had done 500 years ago".[198]

While annual commemorations of the anniversary of Jan Hus immolation on

July 6, 1415 were to remind the nation of its great revolutionary traditions, July 5, the

date of the arrival of the Byzantine missionaries Constantine and Methodius in Great

Moravia in 863, was turned into a symbol of Czechoslovak "fraternity, solidarity and

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[198] The excerpt comes from Communists - the heirs of the great revolutionary traditions of the Czech nation by Zdenek Nejedly, the Party's chief historian and ideologue who also served as the Minister of education.   Nejedlý, Z. (1978). Komunisté - dedici velikých tradic ceského národa. Praha, Sekretariát ÚV KSC, Abrams, B. F. (2004). The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism. New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.

cooperation with other Slavic countries and People's democracies".[199] Much like the

Czechoslovak founders (and the 19th century national awakeners before them), the

communists presented the ninth century Moravian state as the first common state of

Czechs and Slovaks. The choice was deliberate, reflecting on the one hand a desire to

compensate for the relative lack of historical linkages between Czechs and Slovaks

prior to 1918 and on the other, gloss over the aberration that Slovakia presented from

the point of view of the official communist script. As has been mentioned previously,

the celebrated Hussite tradition played only a marginal (and, many would argue, a

largely negative) role in Slovakia and did not represent a useable past there, despite

concerted efforts to emphasize its significance. Even more problematic was

Slovakia's most recent fascist past which did not fit at all with the official

interpretation of the war and the resistance. The distant and easily moldable Great

Moravian history, on the other hand, offered a convenient way to demonstrate the

ancient Czecho-Slovak relationship while drawing attention away from some of its

darker, less convenient sides.

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[199] Národní shromáždění, R. C. (1951). Vládní návrh. Zákon o státním svátku, o dnech pracovního klidu a o památných a významných dnech. Spolecná cesko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna. Available, http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1948ns/.

Picture 17: Czechoslovak communist era banknotes. Banknotes, much like national flags and pledges of allegiance, are examples of instruments of everyday "banal nationalism" described by Michael Billig.[200] Subconsciously, they work to imprint the official ideology in the hearts and minds of their audiences. Depicted below is a sample of Czechoslovak communist era banknotes, depicting some of the key "pillars" of the official conception of the Czechoslovak history discussed in the text. The twenty-five-crown banknote depicts the one-eyed, nearly blind, Taborite leader Jan Zizka and symbolizes the long revolutionary traditions of the Czech and Slovak people. In the background one can notice examples of Hussite weaponry made of farm implements. The fifty-crown note is dominated by a drawing of a partisan and a Soviet soldier, symbolizing the Czechoslovak-Soviet brotherhood and cooperation during the Slovak national uprising. The hundred-crown note symbolizes the union of workers and peasants, depicting a woman with a bouquet of wheat ears, walking side-by-side to a male factory worker. Depicted in the background are factories with smoking chimneys, a symbol of socialist industrialization.

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[200] Billig, M. (1995). <u>Banal Nationalism</u>. London, Sage.

Compared to Hungary or Poland, critique of Stalinism emerged much more slowly and gradually in Czechoslovakia. The change in the Czechoslovak communist leadership that took place after Klement Gottwald's death on March 14, 1953 (exactly nine days after the death of Gottwald's master, J.V. Stalin) did not bring any relaxation to Czechoslovakia. Antonín Novotný, Gottwald's successor as the Secretary General of KSC,[201] was a man thoroughly implicated in the brutality of the Stalinist purges and abuses that took place under Gottwald in the early 1950s. Thus, unlike the Polish leader Gomulka or the Hungarian leader Janos Kadar, both of whom were victims of the Stalinist persecution in the 1950s, Novotný and his people had no interest in launching the process of de-Stalinization that Khrushchev urged in his 1956 "Secret Speech". It was only after the launch of Khrushchev's second de-Stalinization campaign in October 1961, that Novotný's regime grudgingly and half-heartedly accepted to acknowledge certain past excesses and offered a mild critique of Gottwald's "cult of personality". In 1962, the embalmed Gottwald's remains were removed from the Prague mausoleum and the gigantic Stalin monument erected in Prague in May 1955 to demonstrate Czechoslovakia's unrelenting commitment to Stalinism was finally destroyed and removed, officially, due to structural problems.[202] Victims of the Gottwald era purges were quietly released, several top functionaries of

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[201] Following Gottwald's death, the functions of the president and the General Secretary of the Party were separated. Antonín Zápotocký was „elected" the president, Viliam Široký as prime minister and Antonín Novotný as general secretary. After Zápotocký's death in on November 13 1957, Novotný was elected president, concentrating both top offices in his hands.

[202] Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka.

the Gottwald era were sacrificed as scapegoats and removed from their posts but

Novotný's position remained untouched.

Picture 18: "To our Liberator – from the Czechoslovak people." Stalin's memorial in Prague. Unveiled on May 1 1955, the mammoth, 15.5 meters high, 22 meters long and 17 ton heavy, Stalin's monument in Prague symbolized the leading role of the Soviet Communist Party in the Czechoslovak march to socialism and a close friendship of the Soviet and Czechoslovak people. It depicted Stalin, accompanied on his left by representatives of the Soviet people (represented by a worker, a scientist, a Kolchoz worker and a Red Army member) and by representatives of the Czechoslovak people on his right (including a worker, a peasant, an innovator and a soldier). The monument which was mockingly referred to by Prague residents as "the line for meat" (referring to chronic shortages of food supplies in the stores) was eventually taken down with 800 kilograms of explosives after Khrushchev's second public denunciation of Stalin's cult of personality in November 1962 – officially, due to foundational problems. The author of the monument, academic architect Otakar Švec committed a suicide shortly before the monument's official unveiling in 1955.

It was not until 1963 that conditions in Novotný's Czechoslovakia began to

finally thaw. Paradoxically, by that time, Brezhnev who replaced Khrushchev as the

Secretary General of CPSU after Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, already started a de-

Khrushchevization campaign in the USSR. The first open challenge to the Novotný

regime came from the younger generation of communist intellectuals,[203] who, joined

by older communists from the 1920s and 1930s, began voicing their disillusionment

and frustration with the slow progress of Destalinization, deep economic regress,

bureaucratization and low workers' morale. In Slovakia, dissatisfaction with the

heavy-handed centralism of Prague was one of the top grievances.[204] By the Fall of

1967, the dissatisfaction spread to the top Party ranks. After protracted in-party

struggles, Novotný was forced to resign from his post of the Party's first secretary.

He was replaced in January 1968 by a young and relatively unknown Slovak party

apparatchik named Alexander Dubček.[205] With Dubček's election, the Czechoslovak

experiment to reform socialism known as the "Prague Spring" (or Czechoslovak

Spring) began. Although, the Party's leading role remained unchallenged, Dubček's

regime committed itself to a number of reforms outlined in the Party's "Action

Program" of April 5, 1968. They included political pluralization, revival of the

National Front and the acceptance of debate within it, better legal guarantees of

personal rights and freedoms, including the freedom of information, speech,

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[203] Including Ota Šik, Pavel Kohout, Ivan Klíma, Ludvík Vaculík, Milan Kundera, Zdeněk Mlynář, Dominik Tatarka, etc.

[204] The first open challenge came at the Congress of the Slovak Writer's Union in Bratislava in April 22, 1963 which was followed one month later by the 22nd meeting of the Czechoslovak writers' union. The writers gathered at these meetings protested against Stalinist cultural policies, particularly the prevailing approach of „socialist realism" and called for authenticity, creative imagination and fantasy in art. (Another important development was taking place in the sphere of economics where the disastrous state policies created an unprecedented economic crisis in 1963, leading to calls for decentralization. The third line of critique focussed on the Slovak question, in particular the problem of institutional assymetry and the Slovak demand for genuine federalization.

[205] Novotny resigned the presidency on March 22 and two months later he was formally expelled from the party. Ludvik Svoboda became the president.

movement, travel abroad, guarantee of personal property, full rehabilitation of victims

of communist purges of the 1950s and genuine federalization of the state.[206]

The Czechoslovak Reform and the Role of Czech and Slovak Historiography

The struggle against dogmatism in the 1960s also meant attempts to achieve a

more balanced view of the Czechoslovak history. Especially important in this respect

was the Fourth Congress of Czechoslovak historians (in Brno in September 1966)

whose participants adopted a memorandum calling for a more professional and less

ideological, historiography. The demands raised at the Congress were couched in

terms of a struggle for truth. This was significant since these were demands not just

for revision of the history of the 1950s but for a change in the regime's approach to

all aspects of history.[207]

Among the areas that received particular attention during the 1960s were the

history of the interwar republic and the 1939-1945 period. Rejecting the previous

purely class-based explanations which assigned responsibility for the collapse of

interwar Czechoslovakia to greedy domestic bourgeoisie pursuing its own class

interests, a number of scholars began to highlight the role of objective, international

factors that contributed to Czechoslovakia's demise in 1939. Authors also began to

acknowledge some positive features of the interwar regime, for instance the fact that

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[206] The issue of federalization was one of the most divisive areas of the Action Program. Although both the Czech and the Slovak reformers agreed that the existing asymmetrical system needed to be replaced with a federal arrangement, the Czech side saw this as one issues among many and gave greater weight to democratization of the system. Most Slovak reformers on the other hand placed federalization at the top of their agenda, insisting that no genuine democratization could take place without resolving the unequal status of the two state-forming nations.

[207] See Precan, V. (1994). Historie a moc v komunistickém Ceskoslovensku 1948-1984. <u>V kradeném case. Výbìr ze studií, clánku a úvah z let 1973-1993</u>. V. Precan. Praha.

Czechoslovak leaders, unlike many of Czechoslovakia's allies, did not compromise themselves by signing agreements with Hitler's Nazi Germany. Undermined was also the long-standing communist thesis of a Soviet offer of unconditional support to Czechoslovakia in 1938. It turned out that no archival documents were found to support such a claim.[208] Topics of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance and Czechoslovak legions in World War I were also revisited.[209]

With regard to the 1939-1945 period, interpretations of the Slovak National Uprising underwent a thorough revision. Here, demands for historical reinterpretation went hand in hand with calls for a reckoning with the purges of the 1950s and the continuing debate between Czechs and Slovaks about Slovak autonomy. Alexander Dubcek together with the newly rehabilitated Gustav Husak and Ladislav Novomensky took a leading role in the public debates on pages of Kultúrny život, Historický časopis and other cultural and historical magazines. The debate was joined by writers and commentators (including Vladimír Mináč, Roman Kaliský, Miroslav Kusý, all of whom would become important public voices in the post-1989 period) as well as a number of historians (Ľubomír Lipták, Jan Křen, Jozef Jablonický, Anna Štvrtecká, Jiří Graca, Miroslav Kropilák, Vilém Prečan, among others).[210] Whereas until then, the Slovak national uprising had been depicted as

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[208] See for instance Olivová, V. (1965). "Ceskoslovensko-sovetská smlouva z roku 1935." Ceskoslovenský casopis historický **13**: 477-500, Kvacek, R. (1966). Nad Evropou zataženo. Praha, Olivová, V. (1967). Dejiny Ceskoslovenka od roku 1918 do roku 1945. Praha, Lukeš, F. (1968). "Poznámky k ceskoslovensko-sovetským stykum v září 1938." Ceskoslovenský casopis historický **16**: 706-707.

[209] See for example Pichlík, K. (1968). Zahranicný odboj 1914-1918 bez legend. Praha.

[210] The culmination of efforts to provide a new view of the SNP was the historiographical conference organized by the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Smolenice in June 1964. Papers and discussion proceedings from the conference were published in HUSAV, Ed. (1965). Slovenske narodne povstanie roku 1944. Bratislava, SAV. Other important publications from the

a communist affair directed from Moscow, the new perspectives which emerged

during the reform months included calls for recognition that the uprising had been

primarily a Slovak undertaking, directed not by Moscow or Moscow-based exiles but

instead by Slovaks at home, especially the disaffected units of the Slovak Army. The

role of non-communist participants in the uprising was also acknowledged. Further

recognized was the fact that the Czech participation in the uprising was under the

Slovak command, and that the goal of SNP was not a return to pre-Munich

Czechoslovakia but a development of Slovak stateness under new conditions.[211]

Inevitably, debates about the interpretation of the uprising touched upon

a whole host of controversial questions and white spots related to the history of the

Slovak wartime state and its leadership. While until then, Tiso and his state had been

depicted as lacking in popularity and legitimacy among the wider Slovak public, in

the relaxed atmosphere of the weeks and months preceding the Warsaw pact invasion,

historians and commentators began to more openly research the period,

acknowledging certain positive aspects of the wartime state, especially the increased

sense of confidence and self-realization that Slovak independence wartime brought

along. Gustav Husak himself in his memoirs of the uprising for instance

acknowledged that, despite its many negatives, the Slovak wartime state was at least

temporarily accepted by a large portion of the population.[212] Less pleasant aspects

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reform era include: Kropilák, M. and J. Jablonický, Eds. (1964). <u>Maly slovnik Slovenskeho narodneho povstania</u>. Bratislava, Jablonický, J. (1994). <u>Glosy o historiografii SNP: Zneužívanie a falšovanie dejín SNP</u>. Bratislava, NVK International, Precan, V. (1994). Historie a moc v komunistickém Ceskoslovensku 1948-1984. <u>V kradeném case. Výbìr ze studií, clánku a úvah z let 1973-1993</u>. V. Precan. Praha.

[211] Cohen, S. J. (1999). <u>Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism</u>. Durham/London, Duke University Press.

[212] Husák, G. (1969). <u>Svedectvo o Slovenskom národnom povstaní</u>. Bratislava, Epocha.

related to the period of the Slovak wartime state, including issues of Slovak

collaboration with the Germans and the Slovak role in the deportation of the Slovak

Jews began to be also discussed.[213]

Picture 19: Transformation of Czechoslovak communist era banknotes. The liberalization of the late 1960s found its reflection on new Czechoslovak bank notes where ideologically driven motives of workers, partisans, pioneers and Soviet soldiers were replaced by portraits of Czech and Slovak cultural figures, including the Slovak writer Pavel Országh Hviezdoslav (featured on the ten-crown note), the 17th century Bohemian educator and writer Jan Amos Comenius (twenty-crown note), the 19th century Slovak national awakener Ľudovít Štúr (fifty-crown note) and the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana (one thousand-crown note). (Special care was given to ensuring that figures from both the Czech and the Slovak history were equally represented.) Paradoxically, the last banknote in the series– the hundred crown note featuring Klement Gottwald issued in 1989 – marked a reversal back to orthodoxy. It represented one of the last attempts by the decaying Czechoslovak communist regime to hold onto power. By that time, however, the days of the communist regime were already counted.

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[213] Ľubomír Lipták's monograph *Slovensko v 20. storočí*, still considered the most serious study of Slovakia's 20th century history, came out in 1968. It was the first rigorous study that treated problems of Czech-Slovak relations, the Jewish question and other aspects of the Slovak wartime state with real documentation. The text was briefly used as a university textbook. It was withdrawn after the Soviet intervention in 1969 and was reissued only after 1989. See Lipták, L. (2000). Slovensko v 20. storočí. Bratislava, Kalligram.

Although the reformists headed by Dubcek went to some lengths to control and direct the process of liberalization in a way as not to provoke a Hungarian-style response from Moscow, the unprecedented public mobilization in the country could not but raise alarm in the Soviet leadership. After months of private and public discussions between Prague and Moscow, Brezhnev concluded that the Czechoslovak reform movement had gone too far and decided to put a military stop to it. On the night between August 20 and 21, 1968, armies of five Warsaw state countries, masqueraded as "fraternal assistance" to Czechoslovak leaders who had appealed to the USSR for help, entered Czechoslovakia. The intervention was the largest military action in Europe since World War II. It involved over half a million soldiers, over 6,300 tanks, 800 airplanes and approximately 2,000 artillery pieces and even special missile units.[214]

The Czechoslovak response was quick and took the Soviets completely by surprise. On August 22, the Extraordinary Fourteenth Party Congress in Vysočany, Prague categorically condemned the invasion, demanded withdrawal of the occupying armies and an immediate release of Dubček and his group who had been interned by the Soviets. Anti-reformist leaders were removed from their seats and a new Central Committee was elected. The Congress also called for a "one hour general strike", which was promptly carried out the next day.[215] In the atmosphere of massive

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[214] Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). <u>Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945</u>. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press. Dawisha, K. (1984). <u>The Kremlin and the Prague Spring</u>. Berkeley, University of California Press.

[215] The condemnation was broadcast on the radio and published the next day, followed by similar statements of condemnation by the Czechoslovak parliament, president Svoboda and the National Front. This was completely at odds with the original scenario of the invasion, which was drawn up

national resistance, thousands of ordinary Czechs and Slovaks rose against the

occupying forces, expressing support for Dubček's group, ridiculing the occupiers

and demanding their immediate withdrawal.[216] Faced with such an unexpected turn

of events, the Soviets had no choice but to begin negotiating with the imprisoned

Czechoslovak leaders. During the negotiations in which the Soviets held all the

trumps, however, there was very little Dubček's team could realistically accomplish.

In the end, although the Czechoslovak leaders won some verbal concessions, the

victory was clearly the Soviets'.

The Moscow Protocol of August 26, 1968 established the basis for removing

the reformers and launching a wide-ranging process of "normalization." The

document annulled the Extraordinary Fourteenth Party Congress, promised to re-

impose censorship, purge the Party and state offices of reformist elements and

provide protection for the anti-reformist party leaders. Most importantly,

Czechoslovak leadership was forced to agree to a "temporary" stationing of

approximately 80,000 Soviet soldiers on the Czechoslovak territory without

with cooperation of a few Czechoslovak hardliners led by Vasiľ Biľak and anticipated a smooth trouble-free process – a request for help from a group of leading Czechoslovak communists was to provide a pretext for military intervention, the reformists would then be removed and a new revolutionary government would be formed. As it turned out, most of the assumptions made by the Soviet strategists and their Czechoslovak collaborators misfired. The request for help which was to be broadcast on the Czechoslovak radio failed to appear – the Czechoslovak radio employees thwarted attempts to do so. Later when an anonymous letter of request of "group of members of KSC's Central Committee, the government and the Parliament" turned up in the press, not a single politician was willing to own up to it. Within the KSC's Central Committee, Biľak group's failed to obtain a majority to pass a friendly resolution supporting the intervention. See for example Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press.

[216] Virtually overnight, road signs and house numbers began disappearing throughout Czechoslovakia, telephone books were removed from the telephone booths, the names on the signs of villages and towns were changed into "Dubčekovo" or made unreadable, street signs and signposts were moved, turned round or removed completely, streets in towns and cities were covered with graffitti demanding the withdrawal of the occupying troops. The resulting demoralization of the occupying forces went so far that several troops had to be replaced only three days after the intervention. Not even the domestic hardliners whose collaboration the Soviets were counting on had the courage to show their support for the invasion. Ibid.

a timetable of the troops' withdrawal which de facto amounted to a permanent Soviet military presence in the country. Although Dubček's team temporarily returned to their posts, under military occupation and Soviet pressure, they were reduced to the role of passive observers of the gradual destruction of the reforms they had fought for.

Public activism with sporadic anti-Soviet mass protests continued for another few months. One of the greatest waves of mass protests erupted in January 1969 when a student, named Jan Palach, set himself ablaze on Wenceslas Square in protest against the invasion. A month later another student, Jan Zajíc, burned himself to death in the same place, followed by several others. Scattered demonstrations also took place on the anniversary of Czechoslovakia's establishment on October 28 and the anniversary of The Great October Revolution on November 7. The final crisis arose in March during the World Ice-Hockey Championships when the Czechoslovak team defeated the Soviets, sparking a wave of rejubilation and mass anti-Soviet demonstrations throughout the country. Eventually, however, after months of gradual chopping off of the reforms, the public – disenchanted, demoralized, and feeling betrayed – resigned. When in April 1969 Dubcek stepped down from the Presidium of the Central Committee, the public did not even put up a fight. Official "normalization" of conditions in Czechoslovakia could begin.

1970s: The Gray Years of Normalization

The name intimately associated with the Czechoslovak normalization process is that of Gustav Husak. The "president of forgetting" as Milan Kundera famously

called Husak in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Husak became the Party's first man (paradoxically on Dubcek's personal recommendation) after Dubcek's resignation in April 1969.[217] Assidously trying to court Moscow, Husak quickly moved to undo the reforms he supported only a few months earlier. In a document entitled "Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the Thirteenth Congress of KSC", KSC under Husak's leadership fully adopted the Soviet version of the Czechoslovak events of 1968. The Action Program was labeled "revisionist", the situation in the country a "contra-revolution", the main leaders of the Prague Spring "traitors". In line with the official Soviet interpretation, the document, which was distributed in large numbers throughout the country for compulsory study, also contained a passage about the Czechoslovak request for help.[218]

Normalization purges under Husak reached their peak between 1970 and 1974. Estimates show that membership of the party decreased by one-third during that period (although, as will be discussed below, the degree of persecution was milder in Slovakia). Approximately 327,000 members of the party were expelled; another 150,000 left voluntarily.[219] Additionally, in the twenty years following the

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[217] Dubcek's downfall was lengthy and humiliating – to some extent owing to his stubborn attempts to stay in office at all costs... After resigning from his post of the General Secretary of the Party, Dubcek accepted the post of the chairman of the parliament. In September, he was dropped from the Presidium and the following month he was removed from his position in the parliament. In January 1970 he resigned from the central committee to become ambassador to Turkey. In May he was recalled from Ankara and a month later expelled from the Party.

[218] Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press, Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

[219] The situation in Slovakia was slightly different. Purges in Slovakia were less extensive than in the Czech republic after 1968. In addition, normalization brought partial fulfillment of Slovak national ambitions. Czechoslovakia became a federation in 1969. In reality, however, the communist centralism prevented any meaningful devolution of power between Prague and Bratislava.

1968 invasion, over half a million people emigrated (in a country of only 15 million)[220]. Especially hard hit were research, educational and cultural institutions. Five university departments were completely abolished; about nine hundred university professors (out of the total number of 3,500) lost their jobs. The Academy of Sciences was thoroughly reorganized, five of its institutes were closed down and as many as 1,200 scholars were dismissed. The purges reached all the way down to the level of secondary and elementary schools which lost one-fourth of their teachers. The Czechoslovak cultural sphere, vibrant and flourishing during the reform period. turned into a cultural cemetery. Out of 299 writers gathered in the Czech section of the Union of Czechoslovak writers, 117 were proscribed. All twenty-five cultural and literary journals were closed, strict censorship of film, theatre and music was imposed. Control over the media was tightened, 1,500 employees of the Prague-based Czechoslovak Radio were removed. Intellectual life became frozen.[221]

In comparison with the show trials and persecutions of the Gottwald era, however, Husak's normalization represented a form of "civilized violence", or "Stalinism with a human face", as Ernest Gellner once called it.[222] The initial purges of 1970-74, combined with the omnipresent spying eye of the secret police were sufficient in instilling fear and distrust and subduing the already disenchanted, demoralized and apathetic population. The regime, in short, did not have to resort to more drastic measures. In addition, much like Kadar's "compromise" in Hungary and

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[220] Crampton, R. J. (1994). Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century. New York, Routledge.

[221] Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

[222] Gellner, E. (1995). Reborn from below: The forgotten beginnings of the Czech national revival. Encounters With Nationalism. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell.

Gierek's labor compromise in Poland, Husak's regime used positive incentives to maintain order and "normality". Docility and obedience were rewarded with a reasonable standard of living, occupational opportunities and other material advantages the regime could offer due to its relatively good economic standing in the early 1970s.[223]

It should also be remembered that the Party itself was deeply transformed by the 1968 experience. Neither the top leadership nor the regular members of the Party possessed (or even bothered to pretend to possess) anymore the former idealism and faith in socialism that inspired so many to join the Party in the 1940s through the 1960s. Although the party membership recovered from its low point of 1.2 million, boasting a record 1.7 million by 1988 (an equivalent of about 12 percent of the population), the rate of participation was at its lowest.[224] The true believer had practically disappeared from the Party ranks. He was replaced by a pragmatic Party apparatchik, periodically participating in ritualized manifestations of loyalty, whose only interest was the preservation of his advantages.[225] As Slovak dissident Martin Simecka put it, the aim of the 1970s purges "was not creation of some new, ideologically right-minded membership", their goal was "simply to turn the membership into what it used to be (prior to the 1960s reform months): an apolitical conglomerate of the most varied concealed denominations, united only by obedience

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[223] For an illustration, between 1968 and 1980, the number of cars per capita increased from less than five percent (one out of 21 persons) to over fourteen percent (one out of seven). In the same period, the number of weekend houses owned by Czechs and Slovaks approximately doubled. Renner, H. and I. Samson (1993). Dejiny Cesko-slovenska po roku 1945. Bratislava, Slovak Academic Press.

[224] According to a confidential report from 1972, one third of KSC members did not take part in any organized party activity and many cells did not hold even a fraction of the required ten meetings . Agnew, H. (2004). The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Standford, Stanford University.

[225] Tismaneanu, V. (1992). Reinventing Politics. New York, Free Press.

and a readiness to fulfill its role as a trustworthy receiver of instructions and directives."[226]

The Czech and the Slovak Normalization Experience

Before discussing the role of historiography in Husak's normalized Czechoslovakia, a brief note about differences between the Czech and the Slovak experience during the normalization is in order. Using a now classic taxonomy by Linz and Stephan, the Czechoslovak communist regime during the 1970s and 1980s can be characterized as a case of a "frozen post-totalitarian" regime. Unlike the communist regimes in Poland or Hungary, which by the mid-1980s had already transitioned to Linz and Stephan's category of "mature post-totalitarian regimes", the Czechoslovak communist regime resisted the slightest attempts at regime change or liberalization to its very last day. [227] A closer look at the Czech and the Slovak society during those last two decades of communism however reveals a noticeable difference between the ways in which normalization proceeded in the two parts of the Czechoslovak joint state. Whereas the number of those purged from the Party between January 1968 and October 1970 approached 31 percent in the Czech lands, the number of Slovaks expelled from the Party in the same period was only 16 percent.[228] Normalization in Slovakia was also gentler in terms of its repression tactics. While the majority of the Czech reform activists from 1968 were purged

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[226] Simecka, M. (1984). The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969-1976. London, Verso.

[227] Linz, J. J. and A. Stepan (1996). Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe. Baltimore, John Hopkins UP.

[228] Manak, J. (1997). Cistky v Komunisticke strane Ceskoslovenska v letech 1969-1970 (Sesity Ustavu pro soudobe dejiny AV CR), Ustav pro soudobe dejiny AV CR.

from the Party and usually had no other choice but to become manual laborers and stokers, Slovak reformers from 1968 were more often demoted from their professional fields, rather than purged.

There are several reasons for the divergent course of normalization in the Czech lands and in Slovakia. To a significant degree, the milder scope and degree of normalization repression in Slovakia was linked to the fact that intelligentsia, the primary target of the post-1968 purges, was considerably thinner in Slovakia and thus would be much harder to replace had the purges proceeded at the same pace as they did in the Czech lands.[229] Moscow's strategy of divide and conquer certainly played a role, as well. As previously mentioned, political goals and orientations expressed by Czech and Slovak communist reformist elites during the Prague Spring were not entirely in sync and Moscow was well aware of that fact. While the Slovak demands focused primarily on achieving a more equal status between the two parts of the republic through federalization, the Czech reformers envisioned a much deeper process of democratization. By offering their blessings to Czechoslovakia's federalization, which officially came into effect on January 1, 1969, and backing Gustav Husak (a Slovak communist) as the new head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Soviets managed to take care of two birds with one stone. They and their domestic puppets could now point out that the hopes and dreams of the Prague Spring have in fact been met. And, even though federalization had minimum impact given the overall centralization of the state and its dependence on Moscow, by symbolically supporting the Slovaks at the expense of the Czechs, the

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[229] Kopecek, L. (2003). Stranicky system Slovenska. Stredoevropske systemy politickych stran: Ceska republika, Madarsko a Slovensko. P. Fiala, R. Herbut and e. al. Brno, Masarykova univerzita.

Soviets effectively put another wedge into the already fragile Czecho-Slovak relationship.

All this had important consequences. For one, different levels of repression applied in the Czech lands and in Slovakia produced slightly different attitudes toward the normalization regime in the two republics, with a somewhat more positive view of the regime in Slovakia. They also generated different types and strategies of dissent. The somewhat more lenient approach of the Czechoslovak communist leadership toward Slovakia meant that even in the depths of normalization, things could be published in Bratislava which could not be published in Prague. On the other hand, however, since Slovaks still had something to lose, dissent in Slovakia proceeded much more quietly and cautiously than in Prague, operating as "islands of positive deviance" or the so called "gray zone". [230] This included individuals who, unlike the dissidents of Charta 77, refrained from taking an open stance against the regime (due to obvious professional, family and other risks involved) but who nonetheless sympathized with the dissidents and, in their own individual ways, expressed their opposition or disloyalty to the regime indirectly. They included sociologists, preservationists, environmentalists, Hungarian activists, members of the secret Church, etc. While this segment of the dissent was less isolated from the rest of the society than were the official dissidents (who, though admired, were also often

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[230] "Islands of positive deviance" was a term coined by Slovak sociologists Butora, Krivy, Szomolanyi in the 1980s as an attempt to provide a somehow more differentiated view of the Czechoslovak society during the later phase of normalization. See Butora, M. and Z. Butorova (1993). "Slovakia: The Identity Challenges of the Newly Born State." Social Research **60**(4): 705-736. The "gray zone", on the other hand, was a term coined by Czech dissident, sociologist Jirina Siklova to describe a growing and socially heterogeneous segment of the population which still played the 'loyalty game' (some may have even been members of the Party) but which was attitudinally close to the dissent and wished a regime change, feeling the regime stifled their growth.

resented by the general population for the image of moral superiority they carried), the fear of losing their privileges kept these various individuals and groups from uniting until late 1980s.

To summarize and push the discussion onto a more theoretical level, what the preceding discussion suggests is that Czechs and Slovaks lived under two slightly different regime types during the last two decades of the communist rule. While the Czech regime resembled a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime type described by Herbert Kitschelt et al., the Slovak regime represented a mixture of bureaucratic-authoritarianism with some consensual and paternalistic features.[231] This divergence, though slight, is significant for the present discussion since it significantly influenced the types of post-communist elites and consequently the character and the process of coming to terms with communism and its legacies in the two countries after the collapse of the Iron curtain and breakup of Czechoslovakia – a topic I will return to in more detail in Chapter 5.

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[231] Kitschelt divides communist regimes in their final phase into three types: patrimonial, bureaucratic-authoritarian and national-consensual. Patrimonial regimes (e.g., Russia, Serbia, Romania) established themselves in largely agrarian societies and were characterized by a high level of power hierarchy and personalism. Opposition in these regimes was almost non-existent. Bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes (Czech lands, GDR) sprung up in already modernized, advanced industrialized societies. They allowed for virtually no competition inside the power elite and, compared to national-consensual regimes, opposition was systematically repressed. Unlike the patrimonial communist regimes, however, bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes used more sophisticated rational bureaucratic methods rather than brute totalitarian force. National-consensual models (Poland, Hungary) allowed for a degree of competition inside the party elite as well as for a moderate articulation of societal interests. The communist elite presented itself as the defender of national autonomy (vis a vis the Soviet hegemony) and it was partially open to compromise with opposition. See Kitschelt, H., Z. Manfeldova, et al. (1994). Post-Communist Party Systems. Cambridge, Cambridge UP. Although Kitschelt characterizes Slovakia as a "difficult case" and places it between patrimonial and bureaucratic-authoritarian categories, on a closer examination, a combination of bureaucratic-authoritarian, patrimonial and national consensual system seems more appropriate. Elements of national-consensual regime type can be seen for instance in the efforts of Slovak reform communists to promote federalization in the 1960s as well as by the already mentioned milder repression against the opposition. The Slovak communists styled themselves as champions of Slovak autonomy against the Prague center. See for instance Szomolanyi 1999a;27.

Normalized Historiography and the Emergence of Dissent

The dramatic end of the 1960s reform movement in Czechoslovakia put a drastic end to all official attempts to reform Czechoslovak historiography and produce a more balanced view of the nation's recent past. Under Husak's leadership, history once again became the handmaiden of political and ideological indoctrination. The vast majority of historians who had been active during the Prague Spring were silenced and expelled from historical institutes, their works banned. (Ironically, the ultra dogmatic communist historian Václav Král who had been Husák's chief critic and enemy during the reform months was awarded professorship by Husák himself and became one of the regime's most celebrated historians). In the absence of continued public discussion, new historical interpretations generated during the short period of the Prague Spring were never institutionalized.[232] Historical discussions after 1969 could continue only on pages of clandestinely distributed samizdat publications.

On most of the issues that were discussed in the liberalized atmosphere of the 1960s, the normalized official historiography retreated back to the dogmas and silences of the Stalinist years. With regard to the history of interwar Czechoslovakia this meant a rehabilitation of the thesis about the crucial role of the Bolshevik revolution in the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918.[233] The official narrative went back to the pre-1968 official line also with regard to interpretations of the

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[232] Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press.

[233] Král, V. (1985). Vznik CSR. Praha.

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wartime history and resistance.[234] Once again, the role of the non-communist

resistance was belittled, its key figures, Jan Golian, Karol Smidke and others were

pushed out from the official narrative, the role of KSS (and within it, the role of

Husak) was exaggerated. The uprising was painted, once again, as mass-based,

involving the majority of Slovaks who "heroically stood up against the despised

fascist regime of the Slovak state," Czechoslovak in orientation, demonstrating the

"cordiality and friendship" of the Czecho-Slovak relationship and unequivocally

aimed at restoration of the common Czechoslovak state. Naturally, the key role in the

uprising was attributed to the Moscow leadership.[235] In fact, so much official praise

and credit was given to the role of the USSR in ending the war that on the thirtieth

anniversary of the liberation in 1975, newspapers were ordered to replace the heading

"30th anniversary of the victory over fascism" with "30th anniversary of the

liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army".[236] Topics related to the immediate

postwar period, including the forceful expulsion of Czechoslovakia's German and

Hungarian minorities, were once again pushed into obscurity. The official history of

the reform period became thoroughly normalized and "whited out" as one would

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[234] Speaking at a „scientific historical conference" organized by the Institute for the study of Marxism-Leninism on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Uprising in Banska Bystrica in March 1974, Ľudovít Pezlár, the Secretary of the Central Committee of KSS, for instance spoke of devious attempts by the reform historians "to embellish not only the politics of the London-based emigre government but also activities of the so-called civic bloc, to obscure its class character, to dilute the real progressive character of the legacy of the Slovak national uprising. (1976). Slovenske narodne povstanie. Zbornik materialov z vedeckej konferencie k 30. vyrociu SNP. Bratislava.

[235] Representative examples include: Kropilák, M. (1974). Slovenske narodne povstanie. Bratislava, Plevza, V. (1974). Revolucny odkaz Slovenskeho narodneho povstania. Bratislava, Král, V. (1975). Osvobozeni Ceskoslovenska. Praha. The pinnacle of historical deformations of the Slovak antifascist resistance and SNP was a 5-volume *History of the Slovak national uprising 1944*, published on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of SNP in 1984, Plevza, L., Ed. (1984). Dejiny Slovenskeho narodneho povstania 1944. Bratislava.

[236] Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press.

expect. Official silence was imposed on events surrounding the August intervention, the issue of the invitation letter, the Moscow Protocol and other developments "at the top". The official interpretation, canonized in the "Lessons", labeled the reform period as "revisionist" and the situation in the country "a contra-revolution" which supposedly put the country on the brink of a civil war.[237]

Not everybody succumbed to the officially imposed historical amnesia, however. Some historians defied official censorship by publishing their work in small underground circles, teaching at flying universities or illegally gaining access to closed archives.[238] Some others subverted the system by maintaining solidarity with their dismissed colleagues and organizing petitions and letters of protest. A minority adopted methods of open resistance, refusing to follow the official line despite the personal and professional risks involved and the most stubborn researchers oriented their work specifically toward those periods and topics that were officially silenced. Among the staunchest critics of normalized historiography in Husak's Czechoslovakia were historians Vilem Precan and Milan Otahal who in the fall of 1968 compiled an illegal Black Book about the first week of the August invasion. They managed to distribute 2,900 copies before the book was withdrawn. Both authors were subsequently dismissed and charged with subversion. Precan then became the leading historian who documented the repression of the historical profession and a lead critic of normalization. Since 1976, he lived in exile in West

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[237] Kren, J. (1990). Bílá místa v našich dejinách? Praha, Lidové noviny.

[238] As in Poland, starting from the early 1970s, the Czechoslovak opposition created a wide array of unofficial university-type seminars in Prague, Brno and Bratislava in cooperation with lecturers of prestigious Western universities. Many of the seminars focused on morality and ethics, public responsibility and engagement, very much in keeping with the general philosophy of the Czechoslovak dissent. See Day, B. (1999). The Velvet Philosophers. London, Claridge Press.

Germany where he established an archive of samizdat manuscripts. In Slovakia,

Jozef Jablonicky had been constantly watched for more than fifteen years because of

his samizdat publications on the history of SNP. Even though his manuscripts and

documents were confiscated by the police numerous times, he always stubbornly

began his research again.[239] Other historians who challenged the regime's

falsification of history included Milan Hubl, Jan Kren, Lubomir Liptak, among

others.

Samizdat activities of Czech and Slovak historians gained strength especially

after the establishment of the Czechoslovak human rights movement Charta 77. Led

by dissident philosophers Jan Patocka, Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Benda, Charta 77

reflected the strategy of self-limitation; a strategy that was at the heart of the Polish

KOR and would be later employed by the Hungarians in their negotiations with the

Kadar regime. Describing itself as "a free informal, open community of people of

different convictions, different faiths and different professions united by the will to

strive individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights in

(Czechoslovakia) and throughout the world", Charta's strategy aimed at subverting

the stale Czechoslovak post-totalitarian order by creating what Havel termed an

"independent life of society". The bulk of Charta's activities focused on publication

of documents detailing specific violations of human rights and demanding that the

regime respect its own constitution, laws and international agreements, including the

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[239] DeBaets, A. (2001). Resistance to the Censorship of HIstorical Thought in the Twentieth Century. Making Sense of Global History: The 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Oslo 2000, Commemorative Volume. S. Sogner. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget: 389-409.

newly signed Helsinki accords of 1975 to which Charta was a direct response.[240]

Equally important were Charta's samizdat publications.[241]

Vaclav Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" remains the most lucid theorization of Charta's philosophy and of dissent in East European communist regimes in general. According to Havel, the Czechoslovak communist regime of the late 1970s fundamentally differed from its Stalinist predecessor in that it was based on appearances, on lies. An individual living in Husak's Czechoslovakia was no longer expected to believe in the communist ideology; all that was required of him/her was to behave as if he/she believed. Ritualized manifestations of loyalty to the regime were part of a "loyalty game" between the regime and its subjects in which both sides knew it was just a game, a pretense.

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[240] In 1975, Czechoslovakia along with other Eastern Bloc countries endorsed the Final Act of the Helsinki Accord, formally committing itself, among other things, to upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief. Charta 77 was a direct response to this. During its first decade of existence, Charta issued approximately 340 documents and reached out to many West European peace activists, UN organizations as well as other dissidents and social movements in the region. Charta functioned as an umbrella movement, uniting together a number of disparate dissident initiatives and informal groupings: non-communist dissidents, the E-club or "ex-communists" (a few reform-oriented communist leaders who were stripped of power during the normalization; most prominent were Zdenek Mlynar, Jiri Hajek, Frantisek Kriegel, etc); and religious groupings, including the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Catholic church. It was originally signed by 240 signatories; eventually the number of the document's signatories reached some 2,000. Skilling, H. G. (1989). Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe. Oxford, Oxford UP.

[241] After the creation of Charta 77, alternative Czech and Slovak samizdat publications began to mushroom both inside and outside of Czechoslovakia, publishing documents, open letters, communiqués, novels, essays on history and philosophy, as well as collections of poetry, academic books and many other types of literature officially banned by the regime. Among the most famous independent presses were *Edice Petlice* (Edition Hasp) established by Ludvik Vaculik in 1972 and Haclav Havel's *Edice Expedice.* Highly influential were also publishing houses established and operated by Czech émigré authors abroad. The most important one was Josef Skvorecky and Zdena Salivarova's publishing house Sixty-Eight Publishers, Corp. established in Toronto in 1971. Another indispensable source of information were journals published abroad, esp. Jan Kavan's *Palach Press* published in London, Jiri Pelikan's Rome-based *Listy*, or journal *Svedectvi* published by Pavel Tigrid in Paris.[241] In Slovakia, independent publishing houses focused on publishing Catholic books and theological periodicals.

Havel illustrates the demoralizing effect of this "loyalty game" using a parallel about a greengrocer who habitually places a sign "Workers of the world unite!" in his fruit-and-vegetable shop. Though the greengrocer is indifferent to the ideological content of the message, he nonetheless continues to fulfill his end of the social bargain by obediently displaying the sign in his shop window. In exchange for ritually legitimizing the system in this way, the greengrocer is left in peace by the regime. Nevertheless, as Havel explains, it is precisely such tiny, seemingly innocent, and almost invisible compromises manifested in everyday language, social practices and behaviors which help perpetuate the post-totalitarian system. By thoughtlessly participating in these everyday rituals of loyalty to a despised regime – by living a lie – ordinary people like the greengrocer "confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, *are* the system".[242]

Given that lie forms the backbone of the post-totalitarian order, Havel argues, "living in truth" becomes the most effective weapon against it. Since the system requires unconditional obedience, every individual act of dissent, no matter how small, is meaningful because of its destabilizing quality. It is here that the power of the powerless resides. By stopping to display the sign in his shop window, by refusing to participate in the "loyalty game" required by the regime, the greengrocer liberates himself. Additionally, his personal decision to "live in truth" serves as an example to others, marking the beginning of wider opposition, of a genuine civil society:

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[242] Havel, V. (1991). Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990. London, Faber and Faber.

"By breaking the rules of the game, (the greengrocer) has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. He has broken through the exalted façade of the system and exposed the real, base foundation of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth."[243]

Though Charta defined itself as primarily a human rights organization, the right to independent history was central to Charta's concept of "living in truth". In Husak's normalized Czechoslovakia, Havel wrote, history was reduced to no more than an ideological ritual; just like statistics and elections, it too, had been falsified. "In our country, one has the impression that for some time there has been no history We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn't matter overwhelms us.[244] Under these conditions, Havel continued; to struggle against forgetting represented a revolt against the mechanized, unthinking, ritualistic existence demanded by the communist regime, or, as Slovak

[243] Ibid.

[244] Skilling, H. G. (1989). Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe. Oxford, Oxford UP.

dissident Milan Simecka put it, it was a simple act of "self-preservation, a striving for human dignity".[245]

Some of the key historical topics discussed in the Czech samizdat in the late 1970s and 1980s included such official taboos as was the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans by the Czechoslovak postwar government (the so-called Benes decrees debate which continued for over a decade in the Czech samizdat and became one of the most controversial foreign policy issues in the Czech post-communist politics),[246] the rehabilitation of the Catholic historiography which had been looked down upon in Bohemia ever since the time of Palacky and the Czech national awakeners,[247] or a debate about the cultural location of Czech identity, spurred by Milan Kundera's samizdat essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" in the mid 1980s.[248] In Slovakia, samizdat discussions on history, though less extensive than the Czech samizdat debates, due to a smaller number of Slovak dissident historians and dissidents in general, centered primarily on the Slovak wartime past, specifically the character of

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[245] Ibid.

[246] The debate on the expulsion of Sudeten Germans after the war was spurred by an essay "Theses on the expulsion of Sudeten Germans" by Slovak historian Jan Mlynarik writing under a pseudonym Danubius, in which the author sharply criticized the official handling of the expulsion by the Czechoslovak postwar government. The essay prompted a discussion which continued on the pages of *Svedectvi* and *Pravo Lidu* for the next eight years and was re-opened after the fall of the communist regime in November 1989. Danubius (1978). "Tezy o vysidleni sudetskych Nemcov." Svedectvi **XV**(57): 105. See also: Hubl, M. (1990). Cesi, Slovaci a jejich sousede. Praha. Cerny, B., J. Kren, et al., Eds. (1990). Cesi, Nemci, odsun. Diskuse nezavislych historiku. Praha.

[247] This was a debate prompted by Vilem Precan's analytical study "Right to History" published in May 1985 in which Precan defended the right of Catholic historiography and was consequently sharply criticized by some ex-communist members of Charta 77.

[248] Milan Kundera's 1984 essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" sparked another important debate about the cultural location of the Czech identity, in which Kundera (alongside Czesław Miłosz, Václav Havel and several other prominent East Central dissident intellectuals) revived the 19th and 20th century concept of Mitteleuropa, redefining it as a broad territory comprising those countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary) which culturally belonged to the West but were politically subordinated to the East. Kundera, M. (1984). "The tragedy of Central Europe." New York Review of Books(26 April 1984): 33-38. (The article was initially published in French under the title "Un Occident kidnappe ou la tragedie de l'Europe centrale", *Le Debat*, november 1983, no 27).

the Slovak state and its leadership. Especially sensitive was the debate about the role of the Slovak wartime leadership in the deportation of the Slovak Jews.   The main protagonists of these debates were Slovak Catholic dissidents and members of the Secret Church who were in conversation with Slovak civic dissidents as well as some Slovak émigré historians.[249]

It should be noted that many of the participants in these debates were not professional historians and so from the professional point of view, their writings were sometimes no less flawed than the official myths they were criticizing. Nevertheless, as Chad Bryant has perceptively argued, the real value in these debates about history was not so much the final product as it was the act of independent writing and speaking in a society where official and self-imposed censorship were the norm.[250] By speaking and writing about historical themes which were officially proscribed, Czech and Slovak dissidents were in fact expanding little islands of human freedom, autonomy and solidarity and rehabilitating values such as truth, dignity and dialogue in a society that was based (and depended) precisely on the negation of these values.[251]

Even though Charta 77 and the initiatives it spawned never reached the mass-base of the Polish Solidarity and to the very end remained an affair of intellectuals, who were isolated not only from the general public but often from each other, the role of the dissent and civil society more generally in contributing to the peaceful collapse of communism in 1989 cannot be denied. For when the Annus Mirabilis did finally

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[249] Add more details

[250] Bryant, C. (2000). "Whose Nation? Czech Dissidents and HIstory Writing from a Post-1989 Perspective." History & Memory **12**(1): 30-64.

[251] Tismaneanu, V. (2009). "They wanted to be free." TLS.

arrive in Czechoslovakia in November 1989, it was the dissidents who acted quickly,

enabled the mobilization of the society and used the momentum generated to press for

the end of the communist system. And it was the ideas of "truth", "solidarity",

"love", "non-violence" and "dialogue", which had been circulating in the dissident

circles prior to 1989, which became the key slogans of the 1989 revolutions.

Chapter 5: Constructing the Czech and Slovak Nations. Post-communist Politics of the Past in the Czech and Slovak Republics

With the fall of communism in 1989, the past, the present and the future were re-opened again and a new phase of national imagining began. Moreover, in the case of Czechoslovakia, the peaceful, or "velvet", overthrow of communism in November 1989 was soon followed by a peaceful dissolution of the country into two independent states which added yet another – national – dimension to the already complicated task of shedding the difficult communist legacy. This chapter maps the discourses of memory that have accompanied the Czech and the Slovak transition from communism. The key argument of the chapter and the dissertation as a whole is that, instead of a spontaneous "unfreezing" or "return" of some previously repressed or tabooed memories, the so-called post-communist "return of the past" represents simply a new, or better yet, the most recent, phase in the long and convoluted process of composing and re-composing Czech and Slovak histories and identities – of searching for useable pasts and arranging them into narratives meant to offer a sense of meaning and belonging to their listeners.

What sets this most recent, post-communist, phase of national imagination apart from the past ones are communism's enduring legacies which continue to shape the character and the content of East Central European societies. These legacies include for instance the many silences, taboos, deformations and white spots in national histories which require critical reckoning and re-evaluation before we can speak of a successful democratic consolidation. But they also include legacies in the

form of popular and elite attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, in short, the so called "habits of the heart" to use the term of Alexis de Tocqueville.[252]

After a brief overview of the main actors and political cleavages that emerged in the Czech and Slovak republics after the collapse of communism and the subsequent dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the chapter zeroes in on the Czech and Slovak post-communist discourses of memory. I demonstrate that the two sets of discourses have developed in noticeably different ways and attribute this difference to two main factors. The first factor is the difference between the communist regime types that were in place in the Czech republic and Slovakia toward the end of the communist rule. As discussed, the Czechoslovak communist regime as a whole represented a case of bureaucratic-authoritarianism. In Slovakia, however, a mixture of bureaucratic-authoritarian and national accommodative strategies was used during Gustav Husak's normalization. As a result Slovakia experienced a relatively higher economic growth and a somewhat milder degree of normalization repression than did the Czech republic. This, in turn, translated into relatively more forgiving attitudes toward the communist regime in Slovakia. After the collapse of Czechoslovak communism in November 1989, the two different normalization experiences produced two different types of post-communist elites and consequently two different sets of political and economic strategies and priorities in the Czech republic and Slovakia, foreshadowing the breakup of the state.

The second major factor accounting for the different character of the Czech and Slovak post-communist symbolic politics, I will argue, is not a legacy of

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[252] de Tocqueville, A. (2000). Democracy in America. Chicago, University Of Chicago Press.

communism but rather a legacy of the first Czechoslovak republic. Specifically, its

failure to produce a national narrative that would facilitate the emergence of a

common Czecho-Slovak identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, the national identity

constructed by Czechoslovakia's founders was distinctly Czech and soon came to be

opposed by Slovak autonomists. The Czech lack of sensitivity toward Slovak calls

for a more equal status in the Czechoslovak interwar state made it difficult for part of

the Slovak political elite to identify fully with the new Czechoslovak state and its

identity. From that point on, the Czech and Slovak paths began to move parallel to

each other, rather than together.

In the post-independence context, this meant that while the Czech sense of

identity was not significantly altered by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the

Slovaks were faced with an acute need for a new set of founding myths to justify their

new statehood. From the perspective of the Czech political elites, their starting point

after the Czechoslovak split was also significantly simplified by the fact that the

Czech republic became a practically homogenous state and thus was not confronted

by an internal need to redefine its identity. For the first time in history, the Czechs

were the only occupants in their "house". The Czech post-communist discourse has

reflected this vacuum. Devoid of grand debates about the meaning of Czech history

and identity which had occupied the imagination of Czech cultural elites since the

19th century, the Czech post-communist symbolic battles have been largely

ahistorical, focused on the relative role of morality vs. pragmatism in politics, a

conflict exemplified by the Vaclav Havel vs. Vaclav Klaus debate. By contrast, the

Slovak cultural elites, having briefly surveyed their new "national house" and

discovering that they were left in it with their eternal Hungarian "other", adopted a more ethnic, 19th century like, style of identity politics.

Who is speaking? Key socio-political cleavages and actors in the Czech republic and Slovakia after 1989

From Velvet Revolution to Velvet Divorce

I begin my analysis of the Czech and Slovak postcommunist/post-independence symbolic transformations by looking at the transformation of the field of political power. Transitional scholars typically emphasize links between the mode in which former authoritarian countries exit from authoritarianism and their post-authoritarian trajectories.[253] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Czechoslovak communist regime roughly approximated Herbert Kitchelt's ideal type category of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes.[254] High institutionalization combined with ideological rigidity – the regime's two key characteristics – meant that the regime was highly effective in silencing potential opposition but was utterly unable to adjust to the changing mood in the society and the international environment. This, in the end, proved to be the regime's Achilles heel.

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[253] See for instance: Kitschelt, H., Z. Manfeldova, et al. (1994). Post-Communist Party Systems. Cambridge, Cambridge UP.

[254] Kitchelt defines bureaucratic authoritarian regimes as communist regimes characterized by very low levels of political competition and interest articulation combined with relatively high levels of rational bureaucratic institutionalization. The Slovak regime, as has been mentioned, exhibited in addition to strong bureaucratic authoritarian features also characteristics of mixed national-consensual/patrimonial models. See Kitschelt, H., Z. Mansfeldova, et al. (1999). Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation. Cambridge, Cambridge UP: 21-28.

When, on November 17 1989, police repression of a peaceful student

demonstration in Prague on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the martyrdom

of Jan Opletal (a Czech student murdered by the Nazis in 1939) galvanized the up

until then passive masses and set in motion what came to be known as the

Czechoslovak anticommunist "Velvet revolution", the ossified Czechoslovak

communist leadership was caught completely off guard. Unable to swiftly react and

adapt to the rapidly changing mood in the country (and acutely aware that, unlike in

August 1968, "friendly help" from Moscow and other Warsaw Pact countries would

not come forward this time), the regime practically collapsed – astonishingly fast and

without putting up a fight.

Political analysts have produced a number of terms to describe this

unprecedented and unexpected turn of events. Kitschelt talks of implosion, Linz and

Stephan have suggested the term collapse.[255] Using a slight hyperbole, Timothy

Garton Ash has summarized the spectacular events that accompanied

Czechoslovakia's anti-communist revolution in one sentence: "In Poland it took ten

years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks: perhaps in Czechoslovakia

it will take ten days!".[256] As we now know, Timothy Garton Ash's prediction was

only very slightly off. By the end of December 1989, Husak and his entourage were

out of job, the Party's "leading role" was scratched out from the Czechoslovak

Constitution, Vaclav Havel, the rebel playwright and the articulator of the dissident

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[255] Kitschelt, H. (1995). "The Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies." Party Politics **1**(4): 453. Linz, J. J. and A. Stepan (1996). Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe. Baltimore, John Hopkins UP: 322-323.

[256] Ash, T. G. (1990). The Magic Lantern: The Revolutions of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague. New York, Vintage: 78.

philosophy of living in truth, was sitting in the Prague Castle as Czechoslovakia's

new president, while Alexander Dubcek, the symbol of the 1968 Prague Spring, was

elected chairman of the Federal Assembly. The communist government was replaced

by a new "government of national reconciliation" and democratic elections – first

after 44 years – were scheduled to take place in June. From the perspective of only a

few months back, nothing could be more extraordinary that this.

Once the initial revolutionary euphoria subsided and revolutionary posters

disappeared from the streets, however, ideological differences within the opposition,

previously muted by common opposition to Husak's communist regime, gradually

began to come to surface. Both the Civic Forum (Obcanske Forum or OF) in the

Czech republic and the Public Against Violence (Verejnost proti nasiliu, VPN) in

Slovakia – the two diverse umbrella movements which emerged during the revolution

and comprised the dissidents, liberals, conservatives, nationalists, students, artists,

former '68 reform communists, technocrats and people from the gray zone –

underwent significant splintering.[257]

The OF split between the right-wing, represented by Vaclav Klaus, newly

appointed as the federal finance minister, and the left-wing, represented by reform

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[257] One of the first divisive moments came already during the round table talks. The issue was whether or not to include reform communists going by the name of Obroda ("Revival") in the new "government of national reconciliation". Obroda was a movement of expelled reform communists from 1968 which emerged during the normalization period and operated in secrecy, without links to the dissidents. Its members and activities were thus veiled in mystery. Alarmed by rumors that Obroda had been holding separate negotiations with the communist regime and seeing in this a ploy to split the opposition, Czech dissidents initially refused to include Obroda members in the negotiations and instead allied themselves with a group of monetarist economists from the former gray zone, headed by Vaclav Klaus. It was only due to the insistence by the Slovak dissidents from VPN who were closer to the reform communists in outlook and argued that Obroda members, especially Alexander Dubcek, were far more popular in Slovakia than the dissidents themselves (and thus could not be omitted from a national reconciliation government which claimed to represent "the nation") that Obroda was included in the last rounds of the negotiations.

communists. The main conflict between the two was over economic policy, in particular the speed of economic reforms and the nature of privatization, with Klaus championing overnight liberalization and privatization, while the reform Communists argued for a more restrained approach, involving a set of structural reforms that would break the large inefficient state enterprises into smaller, more efficient ones and make them ready to compete in the market. Rejecting the reform communist proposals as a slippery slope that would take the country back to communism, Klaus moved to dissolve the Civic Forum and create his own Civic Democratic Party (ODS). Reform Communists then joined the Czech Social Democrats (CSSD). Conservative dissidents formed two smaller parties – the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) and the Christian Democratic Union (KDU) both of which became captive allies of Klaus' much larger ODS. Liberal dissidents formed their own splinter party, the Civic Movement (OH).

Vaclav Klaus' other battle was directed against the dissident group around President Havel. Here, the key divisive issue centered not on the economics or rejection of communism but rather on the form and character of the OF, with Klaus favoring a traditional political party format, while Havel and other dissidents advocated a more informal structure of a movement.[258] Klaus' opportunity to divide and weaken the dissident camp came with the lustration debate. This was not so much a debate about the meaning of the communist past (on this point Klaus and the dissidents were united in rejecting communism in all its forms, contrary to reform communists who argued for preservation of certain ideals championed in 1968),

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[258] Havel, V., V. Klaus, et al. (1996). "Civil Society After Communism: Rival Visions." Journal of Democracy **7**(1 (January 1996)).

rather it was a debate about how to name and punish the perpetrators of communist crimes. And on this point, the dissidents were divided. While the liberals around Havel emphasized the theme of universal complicity in the crimes of communism and called for a thick line approach,[259] the conservatives, together with Klaus, championed an approach that came to be known as "lustration" – a form of banning the former members and collaborators of the secret police from certain high level positions for a period of five years.[260] The evidence determining who was guilty and who was not was to come from the STB files.

The reason why lustration constituted such a powerful weapon in the post-1989 Czechoslovak political context was that it could be effectively used to discredit both the 1968 reform communists and the dissidents – the reform communists because their names were likely to appear in the files since they had been at some point involved with the regime and the dissidents because their private lives (unlike those of people from the gray zone like Vaclav Klaus) had been under constant scrutiny by the STB for years and were thus likely to be captured in the files. Moreover, those whose names appeared in the files had nothing but their word to counter the accusations of collaboration as the case of Jan Kavan, prominent Czech émigré who had served as a link between the dissidents and the West during normalization, shows. Kavan was one of the ten parliamentarians, fifty top civil servants and ten officials in the presidential chancellery, who were named a secret police informer in a nationally televised parliamentary session in March 1991. Even

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[259] This was Havel's well-known argument that since everyone, the whole population, was co-opted by the communist regime, all collaborated and therefore all were guilty. The proper response therefore was to admit the complicity, apologize and move on.

[260] The Latin word lustrum means five; it also means to shine.

though he and many others denied the accusations, it was not until 1996 that the court finally ruled in Kavan's favor and cleared his name.[261] The incident, however, undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the former dissidents and tore the dissident community apart. Soon after, the polls began showing OH's support declining and in the June 1992 elections, the OH liberal dissidents did not even pass the threshold necessary to enter the parliament. They were forced to join the social democrats, the cooperation with whom they had previously rejected.

Having undermined his ideological opponents in the Czech republic, Klaus's political battle now turned to the other side of the federal state – Slovakia – where Vladimir Meciar, a former reform communist, member of the Obroda group, now the Slovak Prime minister and, crucially, the exact ideological antithesis of Vaclav Klaus, was making a spectacular political rise.[262] As Gil Eyal argues, Meciar's successful political strategy rested on using his reform communist credentials and the 1968 reform rhetoric of "authentic federation" to position himself in between three dominant trends in the Slovak society: (1) the liberal VPN wing championing federalism, rejection of the communist past and rapid economic transformation, (2) Slovak ultranationalists of the Slovak National Party (SNS) whose strategy was based on rejecting communism and presenting themselves as the only true defenders of Slovak national interests, and (3) Slovak Catholic nationalists represented by

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[261] Unofficial lustration began already in October 1990 (one year before the lustration law passed in the parliament), when OF members were required to sign a statement denying their past collaboration with STB.

[262] In terms of his political outlook, Meciar was clearly a product of the 1968 reform period. He was a lawyer who had studied in Moscow, had been involved with the Young Communists, and was dismissed during normalization. He belonged to the Obroda group together with Dubcek, and was perceived by many as a skilled politician and a great speaker. On Dubcek's recommendation he became the Slovak Interior Minister in the interim 1989-1990 Czechoslovak government.

Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) who, although sympathetic to Slovak independence, carefully avoided open criticism of the federation out of fear of being labeled "fascist" due to their links to the wartime Slovak state.[263]

By picking up the 1968 reform mantle of "authentic federation" Meciar was able to present himself as the best possible defender of the Slovak national interests and gain support of a wide spectrum of the Slovak population, including the reform Communists, moderate nationalists, technocrats, managers of state enterprises, workers and the poor. In his speeches, Meciar lauded democracy, spoke of federalism based on the 1968 principle of "authentic federation", opposed Klaus's economic shock therapy in favor of a more gradual economic restructuring, opposed communists' presence in the parliament, condemned Tiso's Slovak fascist state, criticized Slovak Christian Democrats (KDH) for their links to clericalism and fascist past, and chastised the Slovak nationalists of the Slovak National Party (SNS) for their extremist tactics.[264] In short, there was little in Meciar's rhetoric to distinguish

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[263] Eyal, G. (2005). The Making and Breaking of the Czechoslovak Political Field. <u>Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics</u>. L. Wacquant. Cambridge, Polity: 168-174. Note: Jan Carnogursky, the head of KDH, is the son of Pavol Carnogursky, a prominent interwar politician and member of the autonomist Hlinka's People Party (HSLS) and a senior official under Slovakia's Tiso governance.

[264] For instance, during the so-called "hyphen-war" over the name of the country in late 1989 and early 1990, SNS, Matica Slovenska and a few other ex-parliamentary nationalist groups, capitalizing on the growing discontent in Slovakia over Prague's decision to shut off arms production in Slovakia, organized mass demonstrations and hunger strikes in front of the Parliament. Several variants of the name of the country were proposed in the debate. These included a proposal to name the country "Czechoslovak Federal republic" (i.e., a format which would omit the word "socialist" from the existing name) and a modified proposal that would allow Slovakia to internally apply a hyphen in the name (i.e., "Czecho-slovak Federal republic"), while the name used in the Czech republic as well as internationally would be "Czechoslovak Federal republic". Both proposals were criticized by the nationalists as being insensitive and insulting to Slovaks. The debate lasted into April when eventually, the two sides agreed on the name "Czech and Slovak Federal republic". At the time, Meciar identified himself with the VPN line and condemned the nationalist demonstrators and their organizers as extremists. Similarly, in July 1990, when the Catholic nationalists around KDH approved and participated in a ceremony of unveiling the bust of the wartime Slovak resident Jozef Tiso in Banovce nad Berbravou, Meciar strongly condemned the action, distanced himself from the nationalists and continued to advocate common state. See Cohen, S. J. (1999). <u>Politics without a Past:</u>

him from his reformist colleagues in VPN, much less to indicate that he was someone who would soon become co-responsible for the Czecho-slovak split.

It was only later, in the Spring of 1991, after Meciar was deposed from the post of the Slovak Prime Minister by his VPN colleagues, following a scandal involving allegations that he had doctored important STB files to protect himself and potentially harm his opponents, that Meciar began to form closer ties with the oppositional Slovak National Party and adopt their anti-Hungarian rhetoric, which he had previously criticized as extremist. Even then, however, Meciar still continued to steer a middle course with regard to the Czechoslovak issue and it was only in response to Klaus that he eventually opted for independence.[265] Without going into the details of the protracted Czecho-Slovak negotiations that preceded the breakup of Czechoslovakia in January 1993, suffice it to say that the breakup was neither a result of popular disenchantment with the federation, nor the outcome of some sinister cynical elite power play or Vladimir Meciar's rabid nationalism. Rather, as several authors argued, it stemmed from the incompatibility of the two very different ideological packages that won in the 1992 elections.[266] With Klaus' election in the Czech republic and Vladimir Meciar's in Slovakia, the ideological conflict between the left and the right in Czechoslovakia was transformed into a national conflict

The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press: 146, 150.

[265] For instance, when a controversial debate broke out in August 1991 concerning a preamble to a new treaty with Germany which called for invalidation of the Munich treaty and continuity of the Czechoslovak state from 1918 (which would invalidate also the wartime Slovak state), Meciar maintained a vague attitude and refrained from joining the nationalists from SNS, Matica Slovenska, partially from KDH and even from his own party who organized petitions and demonstrations pushing for Slovak sovereignty. Ibid: 151-152.

[266] Zak, V. (1995). The Velvet Divorce. The End of Czechoslovakia. J. Musil. Budapest, Central European University. Also see Kusy, M. (1995). Slovak Exceptionalism. The End of Czechoslovakia. J. Musil. Budapest, Central European University Press.

between the Czech right wing and the Slovak left wing. With it, the split of the country became inevitable.[267]

There are couple important points to note about Vaclav Klaus' ODS and Vladimir Meciar's HZDS. First, both represent examples of the so-called "catch all parties" – a specific post-communist phenomenon and legacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism, perceptively described by scholars like Abby Innes for instance.[268] The identities and political programs of ODS and HZDS are mostly the outcome of the Czechoslovak transition itself. They are linked neither to deep societal cleavages nor to strong pre-Communist identities such as Catholic populism, agrarianism, social democracy, etc. Nor do they show connection to identities or debates of the Czechoslovak dissent. Instead, the identities of the two parties developed in response to more immediate concerns of the Czechoslovak transition – issues of economic reform and market regulation, questions of anti-communist retribution, the Czecho-Slovak question, and later civil society and corruption. Innes correctly attributes the absence of deeper historical rootedness of political parties like ODS and HZDS to a specific legacy of bureaucratic-authoritarianism and its success in erasing and isolating all non-communist political alternatives.[269] Shari Cohen, another scholar of the region, uses the term "mass elite parties" to describe the same phenomenon.[270] Parties like ODS and HZDS represent "mass-elite parties" in the sense that they are

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[267] Eyal, G. (2005). The Making and Breaking of the Czechoslovak Political Field. Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics. L. Wacquant. Cambridge, Polity.

[268] On this point, see Innes, A. (2002). "Party Competition in Postcommunist Europe: The Great Electoral Lottery." Comparative Politics **35**(1): 85-104.

[269] Innes, A. (2001). Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye. New Haven/London, Yale University Press:96.

[270] Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press: 135.

comprised of post-communist elites who, due to having been subjected to decades of communist rewriting of history, are noticeable by their lack of identifiable links to pre-communist political identities.[271]

The second point to note is the influence of transitional expectations on the choice of strategies and political programs of postcommunist catch all parties like the ODS and HZDS. As Innes points out, the fact that political identities of ODS and HZDS assumed diametrically opposite content in the Czech and Slovak post-communist context was due not so much to the different character of political elites that comprised them (both Klaus and Meciar were representatives of the gray zone as were most of their party colleagues; both represented "mass elites" to use Cohen's term) but rather to different levels of economic development and consequently different prospects of success or failure (and by extension, likely social costs) of rapid economic reform in the two countries. ODS under Klaus's leadership became a classic type of a technocratic catch all party, juxtaposing its own economic expertise to what it portrayed as a naivete and impracticality of the liberal dissident group around Vaclav Havel. It presented itself not only as the most competent party on the Czech political scene but also as the only democratic one, branding all others, especially its social-democratic rivals, as anti-system. Rather than one option among many, ODS's neoliberal economic views were presented as the only correct approach –a scientific formula to prosperity, democracy and return to Europe.[272] By contrast, Vladimir Meciar's HZDS chose the populist path, capitalizing on growing fears of the

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[271] Ibid.

[272] Innes, A. (2002). "Party Competition in Postcommunist Europe: The Great Electoral Lottery." Comparative Politics **35**(1): 98.

likely negative impact of austerity measures required for the success of the rapid

economic transformation envisioned by Klaus and emphasizing the need for more

gradualist economic policies that would better reflect Slovakia's economic

conditions.

Both Cohen's and Innes's insights are highly relevant for my discussion since

they suggest that debates and battles over the meaning of the past that have animated

the two decades of post-communist politics in the Czech republic and Slovakia have

not been a reflection of some spontaneous "return of the past" or some sudden

outburst of previously suppressed identities as has been popularly claimed but rather

involved actors who often lacked (or possessed only weak) identifiable links to pre-

communist identities and social cleavages and were reacting to immediate demands

of the transition as they came.   Before turning to those debates, however, a very brief

sketch of other relevant political actors in post-communist Slovakia and Czech

republic is in order.

The Czech post-1993 political scene – key actors

Since the Czechoslovak split on January 1 1993, the Czech political scene has

been dominated by four major political formations – the Civic Democratic Party

(ODS), the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), the Communist Party of

Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) and a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union

and the Czech Populist Party (KDU-CSL). In terms of their ideological makeup,

ODS represents political right, CSSD left center, and KDU-CSL typically oscillates

between the two. Despite its relatively high electoral gains, KSCM remains isolated

and has not been part of any governing coalition since 1993 – a factor which has

severely limited possibilities of power alternation on the Czech political scene. Since

1993, the power has alternated between the Civic democrats (ODS) (in power in

1993-1998 and 2006-2009) and Social democrats (CSSD) (in power between 1998

and 2006), while KDU-CSL has played the role of a balancer.[273]

As mentioned, ODS presents itself as a party of the right, espousing

conservative values and principles of classic European liberalism such as individual

liberties, competitiveness, private ownership and limited role of the state (limited to

areas of national defense, protection of rights and enforcement). In its views on

foreign policy, ODS emphasizes the principle of national sovereignty and

transatlantic cooperation. The party takes a clearly Euro-skeptic stance, stressing the

role of national states and opposing federalization and loss of sovereignty.

ODS' chief political rival since the mid 1990s has been the Czech Social

Democratic Party (CSSD) which has managed to transform itself from a relatively

insignificant party (with only 6% votes in the 1992 elections) to a major player on the

Czech political scene and ODS' chief political contender. CSSD's political program

approximates those of standard Western European social democratic parties. The

party supports ecologically and socially-conscious market economy, active

intervention of the state in the economy, healthcare, education and the social sector.

CSSD has also been a firm supporter of Czech membership in Western organizations,

including the NATO and the EU.[274]

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[273] Mrklas, L. (2004). Ceska republika. Politicke a ustavni systemy zemi vychodni Evropy. M. Kubat and e. al. Praha, Eurolex Bohemia: 110.

[274] Ibid. Also see: Fiala, P. and V. Hlousek (2003). Stranicky system Ceske republiky. Stredoevropske systemy politickych stran. P. Fiala, R. Herbut and e. al. Brno, Masarykova Univerzita: 13-50.

The KDU-CSL coalition represents another stable actor on the Czech post-communist political scene. Unlike ODS and CSSD which fit the profile of catch-all parties (ODS of the technocratic type, CSSD of the populist one), KDU-CSL represents a historical party. It is a successor to the historical Czech Peoples Party with roots reaching back to the 19th century and the Czechoslovak People's Party which was co-opted by the Communists and participated in the so-called National Front prior to November 1989. In terms of its ideological make-up, KDU-CSL presents itself as a center-right party Western European Christian democratic orientation. It focuses on the role of the family and the Church, social-market economy, private property and decent living conditions for all, and typically opposes liberal and social-democratic values.   In terms of its foreign policy views, it has been a firm supporter of Czech entry into the NATO and an enthusiastic supporter of the Czech membership in the EU. Over the past two decades, KDU-CSL has gravitated from its original center-right position toward the center and now attempts to play the role of a balancer in the Czech politics. It participated in coalition governments with both ODS and CSSD.

KSCM is the direct successor party to the pre-November KSC. Since 1990, KSCM has always held seats in the parliament but due to its anti-systemic nature, has never been invited to be part of the ruling coalition. Like all post-communist parties, KSCM has undergone internal differentiation since November 1989. In December 1992, after an unsuccessful attempt to radically transform the party, the reformist wing led by Jiri Svoboda left the party. Since then, KSCM has been dominated by the orthodox wing led by Miroslav Grebenicek. KSCM's greatest election success

came in June 2002, when the party received 18.5% votes (an increase of more than

7% over the previous elections and the best election result since the 1946

Czechoslovak elections), mostly due to the disenchantment of former CSSD voters

once CSSD entered into coalition with ODS. In terms of its political program, KSCM

remains an anti-systemic party, committed to socialism and is highly critical of the

existing democratic system which it blames for growing economic inequalities, the

rise of criminality, corruption, prostitution and other societal ills. It calls for an

increased role of the citizens in decision making, wide application of the referendum,

strict separation of the church and state, constitutionally guaranteed right to work and

shelter, full employment. It is sharply opposed to the Czech membership in NATO

and EU in their present form. According to its own data. KSCM had about 107,800

members on Jan 1 2003, making it the largest Czech political party.[275]

The Slovak post-1993 political scene – key actors

Compared to the relatively stable development and relative simplicity of the

Czech political scene, Slovakia's party scene in the last two decades has seen a great

degree of institutional instability. The most salient dividing line in the Slovak politics

between 1993 and 1998 was not ideological but personal, focused on the figure of

Vladimir Meciar and his increasingly demagogic and authoritarian style. It was not

until 1998, however, when Slovakia was already internationally isolated and engulfed

in corruption scandals, that the until then fragmented anti-Meciar forces finally

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[275] Mrklas, L. (2004). Ceska republika. Politicke a ustavni systemy zemi vychodni Evropy. M. Kubat and e. al. Praha, Eurolex Bohemia: 113-114.

created a common front. In the June 1998 elections, the newly established Slovak

Democratic Coalition (SDK) under the leadership of Mikulas Dzurinda, defeated

Meciar's HZDS and restarted the much needed democratization and economic

reforms.[276] After two terms in power, internal tensions stemming from great

ideological differences between SDK coalition members,[277] combined with growing

public discontent with economic pains brought about by the effective but painful

economic reforms introduced by Dzurinda's cabinet contributed to SDK's decline. In

the June 2006 elections, SDK lost to a new populist catch-all party named Smer

(Direction) under the leadership of charismatic Robert Fico, former high functionary

of the Party of the Slovak Democratic Left (SDL).

Currently, the Slovak political scene consists of about half a dozen political

parties with potential to enter the parliament. Robert Fico's Smer is by far the most

popular among them at the moment. Established in late 1999, Smer initially

presented itself in rather vague terms – as a formation trying to de-ideologize Slovak

politics, restore order, institute a rule of experts, put an end to political revenge, etc.

The party's fast rise was due to an effective media campaign in which Robert Fico

presented his party as a political alternative to Mikulas Dzurinda's coalition as well as

to Vladimir Meciar's HZDS and the Slovak nationalists in SNS. In an effort to

increase its international credibility before the upcoming elections in 2002, Smer

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[276] In the 1998 elections, SDK received 26.3% of the total vote. Although Meciar's HZDS received 27%, it was unable to find coalition partners (save the nationalist SNS) that would be willing to form a coalition with Meciar.

[277] The original SDK comprised a really diverse group of actors, including the conservative Christian democrats (KDH), liberal Democrats (DU) and a few smaller parties such as the conservative-liberal Democratic Party (DS), the leftist Slovak Social democratic Party (SDSS) and the ecologically-focussed Slovak Green Party (SZS) (and during its second term also the Slovak Hungarian Coalition, and a few small new parties).

began to present itself as a Western-style social democratic party committed to the so called "Third way." This image, however, was largely intended for the foreign audiences. Internally, in addressing its Slovak constituents, Smer's language remains highly populist. After the 2006 elections, Smer formed a ruling coalition with Vladimir Meciar's HZDS and the ultra nationalist Slovak National Party under the leadership of Jan Slota, the parties it previously criticized.

After HZDS' political isolation between 1998 and 2006, Smer's coalition offer to HZDS enabled Meciar and his party to return to politics. Nevertheless, HZDS is no longer the mass party it used to be in the early to mid 1990s and its role in Robert Fico's coalition government remains limited. Since its defeat in June 1998, HZDS has gone through several phases of internal frictions and splintering, the most devastating of which was the 2002 exit of the faction around Ivan Gasparovic, formerly the second man in the HZDS hierarchy, who then went on to defeat Meciar in the 2004 presidential elections.[278] HZDS'popularity has been steadily declining. In 2006, the party received 11.7% votes, enough to secure a position in the Smer-led coalition government but nonetheless a dramatic decline over HZDS's previous election results (37.3% in 1992, 27% in 1998, 19.5% in 2002). Even though Meciar's HZDS formally presents itself as a centrist party, committed to three pillars – Christian, national and social, it remains a highly personalistic party. Due to Meciar's strong formal (institutional) and informal standing within the party, efforts to change

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[278] Gasparovic was re-elected as the President in 2009.

the leadership of the party have repeatedly failed. HZDS thus remains closely linked

to the figure of its founder.[279]

From early 1990s, Slovak National Party (SNS) represents one of the most

radical mainstream parties on the Slovak political scene. Although SNS formally

claims continuity with the Slovak national party of 1871-1938 (the oldest historical

party in Slovakia led during the interwar period by a Slovak writer Martin Razus),

there are in fact no historical links between the current SNS leadership and the

historical SNS. Instead, the party can be more appropriately characterized as a catch

all party of the nationalist type. It was established after 1989 by previously unknown

political entrepreneurs, many of whom, by their own admission, joined the party

because they saw in the nationalist platform a promising niche to launch their post-

communist political careers.[280] SNS played an especially active role during the 1990

"hyphen war" over the name of Czechoslovakia and in subsequent protests and

petitions for Slovak autonomy. Since then the party has championed a number of

exclusionary policies directed against the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, most

recently, a proposal that would mandate the use of Slovak national symbols in

classrooms in public schools and the playing of the national anthem at the beginning

of classes on Monday mornings. The party maintains close ties with the radical

nationalist organization, Matica Slovenska, as well as Slovak nationalist émigrés with

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[279] HZDS experienced its greatest internal crisis following the 2002 elections when, disillusioned with the party's declining support, a number of HZDS leaders called for Meciar's resignation from the post of the head of the party.

[280] See for instance Shari Cohen's discussion of the personalities and background of the current SNS leadership in Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press: 136-139.

links to Tiso's wartime regime who have been actively advocating rehabilitation of the Slovak wartime state and the figure of its president, Jozef Tiso.

The Slovak democratic camp, currently in opposition, constitutes an ideologically diverse group of center-right parties. As mentioned, the present SDKU was established in 2000 by a group of leading politicians from the anti-Meciar Slovak Democratic Coalition (est. 1998). The original core of SDKU included the KDH group around Mikulas Dzurinda and Ivan Simka and most of the leadership from the Democratic Union (DU). Programmatically, SDKU defined itself as a union of political parties belonging to center right, strongly orientated toward Christian-democratic, conservative and liberal values. It has also been a strong supporter of Slovakia's entry into the EU.[281]

The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) was established by former Catholic dissidents, Jan Carnogursky, Frantisek Miklosko and several others in 1990. Its ideology and political program derive from two sources: Western-European Christian democratic tradition and the pre-war Slovak political Catholicism of Andrej Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS).[282] KDH's political program emphasizes Christian, Conservative and national values, especially the role of the family, social market economy, and protection of Slovak national identity and national interests.

Since its establishment in 1998, Slovak Hungarian Coalition (SMK) has been the most important representative of the Slovak Hungarian minority. The party

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[281] As mentioned, SDKU's admission of new parties from the political left (specifically the Social democrats and the Greens) introduced serious inter-party tensions, which resulted in several secessions during SDKU's second term and, in combination with rumors of corruption scandals of some SDKU politicians and increasing economic hardships contributed to SDKU's defeat by Robert Fico's populist Smer in the 2006 elections. Since 2006, SDKU is in opposition.

[282] Jan Carnogursky's father was an important HSLS member of parliament in interwar Czechoslovakia.

comprises members of several different ideological families (the conservative Hungarian Christian-democratic movement, the nationalistic Coexistence and the liberal Hungarian Civic Party) and officially presents itself as a right-left party espousing Christian, conservative and liberal values. It promotes decentralization and minimal role of the state. In 2009, protracted personal and ideological frictions within the party led to the split of the group around SMK's leader Jan Buday and establishment of a new party named, Hid, Most (Bridge) which strives for cooperation between Slovak ethnic Hungarians and Slovak parties. The original SMK, now under a new leadership of Pal Csaky, has adopted a more exclusionary, ethnic language.

The left end of the Slovak political spectrum is represented by the Party of the Slovak Democratic Left (SDL) a reformed successor party to the pre-November KSS, a neo-communist Slovak Communist Party (KSS) and a radical-leftist Union of Slovak Workers (ZRS). In contrast to communist successor parties in Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic, none of the Slovak communist successors succeeded in establishing themselves as major post-communist political players. SDL, the largest of the three leftist formations, represents a reformed communist successor party which denounced the deformations of its predecessor and began reform process in the early 1990s. The party's failure to attract voters in the first post-independence elections significantly weakened the position of its reform-oriented leadership and led to a deep inter-party crisis which in 1996 culminated with a replacement of the reformist party boss Peter Weiss with a radical socialist leader Jozef Migas.[283] KSS

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[283] In the 1994 parliamentary elections, SDL competed in a coalition with three other smaller leftist parties under the name Common Choice (Spolocna Volba, SV). The expectation that SV would

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and ZRS represent radical neo-communist streams that split from the SDL in the early 1990s. Much like KSCM in the Czech republic, KSS represents the far end of the Slovak left political spectrum. Even though the party distanced itself from some of KSC's gravest pre-November deformations, it remains committed to Marxist-Leninist socialist internationalism and for this reason remains politically isolated by both the Meciar and the anti-Meciar camp.[284] Ideologically similar to KSS, ZRS is a small radical leftist party which split from SDL in the early 1990s and was part of Vladimir Meciar's coalition during the 1994-1998 period. Participation in Vladimir Meciar's cabinet, however, damaged ZRS's reputation among its voters and in all subsequent elections, the party failed to pass the 5 percent threshold necessary to enter the parliament.

To summarize, two decades since the fall of communism, the Czech and the Slovak post-1993 political scene continue to be marked by legacies of Czechoslovak bureaucratic authoritarian rule. Both are characterized by strong presence of ideologically diverse political formations of the "catch all" style, usually dominated by strong charismatic leaders (Vaclav Klaus, Vladimir Meciar, Mikulas Dzurinda, Robert Fico), which tend to form ideologically mixed coalitions, producing considerable political instability, which, in the case of Slovakia, was further deepened by the polarizing effect of the figure of Vladimir Meciar. Having briefly introduced

reproduce the success of the Hungarian or Polish post-communists, however, did not materialize when the coalition barely passed the 10 percent threshold for four-member coalitions. See Kopecek in Fiala, 165.

[284] In the 2002 elections, KSS for the first time since 1989 passed the five percent threshold and entered the parliament with 6.3 percent votes (11seats). This success largely reflected the protest of the Slovak periphery, esp. Eastern and to some extent Central Slovak regions which had been disproportionately negatively affected by the Dzurinda government's economic reforms, against the negative impacts of the economic transformation. Nevertheless, despite holding 11 seats in the parliament, KSS remained isolated. See Kopecek in Kubat, 380.

the main post-communist actors, I now turn to the discussion of their political uses of the past in the post-1993 political context.

Goodbye Lenin

As miraculous and exhilarating as the 1989 East Central European anti-communist revolutions were, they represented only the beginning of what was to become a long and complicated goodbye to communism. Unlike in Poland or Hungary where power transitions were negotiated and meant that the new post-communist parliaments were still dominated by former communists, the sudden collapse of Czechoslovakia's bureaucratic-authoritarian rule put the country at a clear advantage with regard to its prospects for shedding its communist legacy. In addition, the Czechs and the Slovaks experienced massive purges after 1948 and 1968 and so personal changes after the collapse of communism in 1989 were perceived by many as the element of minimal justice. It is not surprising then that Czechoslovakia was one of the last countries in the region to overthrow communism yet the first one to enact a lustration law.

Decommunization, however, has been a process far more complex than the mere act of purging previously compromised persons from politics. It has entailed complicated and often contradictory moral, political and technical considerations as well as a mix of strategies, including symbolic rejection of the past, political rehabilitation of victims, material restitution, punishment of perpetrators of past crimes, history lessons, etc. In Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere in the region, the first visible signs of regime change involved the physical removal of street signs, statues,

plagues, busts and other symbols of the communist era. Unlike in the Baltic states for instance, where symbols of communism were often violently destroyed by exuberated masses riding tractors and pulling the despised communist statues down from their pedestals, the Czechs and the Slovaks removed their Lenins, Gottwalds, sickles, hammers and numerous other symbols of communism largely peacefully and quietly. In part this was because non-violence constituted one of the key ideals of the Czechoslovak Velvet revolution but also because the Czechs and the Slovaks were almost immediately after communism's sudden collapse thrust into a symbolic battle of a different kind – the infamous hyphen debate over the new name of their federal state.[285]

The first memorials to depart were statues of Lenin and Gottwald. Unlike in Hungary, proposals to establish a special communist statue park did not bear fruit in Czechoslovakia, though they were suggested. A humorous initiative involved a proposal by the "Society for a merrier present" to establish a Museum of lawlessness in a small Czech village named Lawlessness, situated near Chocen.[286] In the end, the majority of the removed statues and symbols of the old regime found their final refuge in storage areas of local museums. A few were sold abroad. Some remained in their original spots but had their tablets with celebratory socialist inscriptions either

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[285] The so-called "hyphen-war" was a debate over the name of Czechoslovakia which took place in late 1989 and early 1990. Several variants of the name of the country were proposed in the debate. These included a proposal to name the country "Czechoslovak Federal republic" (i.e., a format which would omit the word "socialist" from the existing name) and a modified proposal that would allow Slovakia to internally apply a hyphen in the name (i.e., "Czecho-slovak Federal republic"), while the name used in the Czech republic as well as internationally would be "Czechoslovak Federal republic". Both proposals were criticized by Slovak nationalists as being insensitive and insulting to Slovaks. The debate lasted into April when eventually, the two sides agreed on the name "Czech and Slovak Federal republic".

[286] Hojda, Z. and J. Pokorný (1996). Pomníky a zapomníky. Praha, Paseka: 229.

removed completely or replaced with more balanced texts. Still others were melted

down and the material thus obtained was used to build new memorials, such as the

one by Marie Uchytilova, commemorating the tragic mass murder of the Lidice

children by the Nazis during WWII.[287]

Picture 20: Fates of communist memorials (1). The Lidice Children Memorial by academic sculptor Marie Uchytilova was made of bronze which was obtained from communist statues melted down after 1989. The sculpture depicting 82 figures of children commemorates the martyrdom of Lidice children by the Nazis during WWII.

Of course, there were a few deviations from the otherwise peaceful and

orderly exit of communist symbols in post-November Czechoslovakia. One such

instance was the destruction of the Gottwald statue in Bratislava where a group of

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[287] Ibid: 221.

exhilarated revolutionaries colored Gottwald's hands in red paint and attached a sign

"murderer" on the statue. When the authorities attempted to protect the statue from

further destruction by surrounding it with a wooden wall, the crowd set the statue on

fire and later demolished it.[288] A similar desacralization took place in Blansko where

another statue of Gottwald had its hands painted in a red color. The four meter high

statue was then removed and spent the next eighteen years in storage before it was

renovated and exhibited as an example of artistic qualities and craftsmanship of

Blansko sculptors.[289]

Without doubt, however, the most debated case of post-communist statue

transformation in Czechoslovakia was the case of Prague's "Pink Tank number 23".

On April 28 1991, the tank – monument to Soviet tank troops and symbol of

liberation from fascism which after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of

Czechoslovakia came to symbolize Soviet occupation and normalization – was

painted in a candy pink color by a 23-year old sculpture student David Cerny (the

same artist whose work Entropa created to mark the Czech presidency of the

European Union Council in 2009 generated heated international controversy).[290] A

few days later, just in time for the 46th anniversary of the Liberation, the "vandalized

pink tank", which in the meantime inspired a petition entitled "Pink is prettier",

signed by several thousand Prague residents, was restored to its original military

green color by Prague's authorities. Cerny was charged with disturbance of public

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[288] Lipták, L. (1999). Rošády na piedestáloch. Storocie dlhšie ako sto rokov: O dejinách a historiografii. L. Lipták. Bratislava, Kalligram**: 345.

[289] (2008). Klement Gottwald se po letech stehoval. Blansko online. Blansko.

[290] The criticism was directed at Cerny's stereotyped depictions of the EU member states. In addition, the work generated outrage because it turned out that it had been created by Cerny and his two friends, rather than a team of artists from each member state as it had claimed.

order and arrested. Consequently a group of fifteen deputies of the Federal Assembly

voiced their open protest against Cerny's arrest and, in an act of solidarity (and in

becoming work uniforms), re-painted the tank in pink once again while a group of

Prague residents spontaneously removed stones from the five-point star shaped flower

bed near the monument and built an improvised memorial to General Vlasov, the

Soviet General who defected from Stalin's Red Army, briefly joined the Nazis in

order to defeat Stalin, and during the May Prague uprising at the end of the war

fought against Hitler and contributed to Prague's liberation – a piece of WWII history

which had been silenced by the Czechoslovak communists. Eventually, after a heated

parliamentary debate, Cerny was released, Tank 23 was officially crossed out from

the list of national cultural monuments and the tank was eventually moved to the

military museum in Kbelice.[291]

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[291] Horakova, P. (2005). The complicated history of Prague's Tank No. 23. Prague, Radio Praha.

Picture 21: Pink tank number 23, David Cerny and fifteen Czechoslovak Federal Assembly deputies.

Picture 22: Fates of Czechoslovak communist memorials (part 2). Top: The Blansko statue of Klement Gottwald with red-painted hands. Bottom: Klement Gottwald statue in front of a pub in Doubice, surrounded by statues of fictional monster characters

Removal of communist statues and symbols, however, was only the beginning of a long road to decommunization, which even today, twenty years after communism's collapse, remains incomplete – in the Czech republic, in Slovakia, as elsewhere in the region. Timothy Garton Ash has usefully grouped strategies of transitional justice into three broad categories of trials, purges and history lessons.[292] The fundamental question preceding each of these different approaches, however, is whether judgment on the past ought to be passed at all or whether the "forgive and forget" strategy of drawing a thick line behind the painful past may not be a better, more constructive and morally superior way to deal with the dark communist legacy. In post-communist Czechoslovakia, the dilemma was exemplified by the symbolic battle between Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus. As mentioned, Vaclav Havel, like Adam Michnik in Poland, took the position of universal complicity, arguing that since every person, by participating in small compromises and rituals of obedience to the regime, helped perpetuate the communist system, everyone was guilty. Therefore, the morally appropriate response was to confess and let bygons be bygons – draw a thick line behind the past and focus on the future. Vaclav Klaus, on the other hand, explicitly rejected the dissident thesis of universal guilt and argued that concrete individuals, not society as a whole, were guilty: "It was not 'we' who did this … Behind every arrogant attempt to draw up completely new social institutions, there is the intellectual and sometimes physical violence of a handful of self-important intellectuals," explained Klaus in one of his interviews in 1990, turning the debate

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[292] Ash, T. G. (2002). Trials, Purges and History Lessons: Treating a Difficult Past in Post-Communist Europe. Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past. J.-W. Muller. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press**: 265-282.

against the dissidents (in particular the former reform communists within the OF and VPN), portraying them as people who were responsible for having supported the system and whose reasons for opposing lustration stemmed not from their moral conviction but out of a fear that their past complicity with the regime would be made public.[293]

In addition to the philosophical question of who was to be held responsible for the crimes of the previous regime, there were many technical problems involved in the lustration process, which in turn raised new moral dilemmas. In particular, the meaning of collaboration was contested since to collaborate meant very different things under Gottwald during the 1950s than for instance during Husak's normalization. Moreover, lists of Secret police (STB) collaborators included several different categories of people who collaborated under very different circumstances. There was a difference between "potential collaborators", i.e., those listed as candidates for future collaboration and "real collaborators", i.e., people who actually did inform on their co-workers, neighbors, spouses and family members. There was also a significant difference between those who signed collaboration documents under pressure and the opportunists who willingly and enthusiastically offered their services to the Secret Police. These were clearly very different circumstances and categories of people, which, so the critics of lustration argued, required different treatment.

Secondly, the reliability of the Secret Police files was questionable. The information was located in several places and was often false, distorted or inconclusive. After all, as mentioned, the files were produced by individuals who

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[293] Vaclav Klaus, quoted in (1990). Respekt **7**(13).

were either forced to cooperate or by careerists who were eager to please their

supervisors. There was also a justified concern that the information contained in the

files could potentially be manipulated and abused for political purposes in post-

communist political battles. At least a third of the active files disappeared in the

interim period between November and December 1989 when the Interior Ministry

was still in control of the old security staff with unlimited access to the secret files.

There were also allegations that Richard Sacher, the interim Interior Minister from

the communist statellite Czech People's Party, protected officials of the old order and

leaked information about dissidents.[294] Similarly in Slovakia, Vladimir Meciar, who

headed the Slovak Interior Ministry in 1990, frequently used the secret files as a

means to blackmail his political opponents. Several times, he publically mentioned

that he had just found the secret police files of various people on his table.

Compromising information from Meciar's own files, on the other hand, went

mysteriously missing.[295]

Questions were also raised (initially by foreign observers, though the

argument was later picked up by domestic opponents against lustration) regarding

infringement on individual rights that lustration potentially constituted since

individuals were prevented from holding certain positions based on the logic that they

belonged to a specific category ("informers") without being given proper

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[294] The allegations against Sacher were that he protected General Alojz Lorenz, a pre-November deputy internal affairs minister and the fact that after dismissing STB officers he continued to keep them on payroll for another six months. See for instance Whipple, T. D., Ed. (1991). After the Velvet Revolution. New York, Freedom House: 49-51. Also (1995). Report of Parliamentary Commission of November 17, 1991. Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes. N. J. Kritz. Washington D.C, U.S. Institute of Peace. **3:** 307-11. Spurny, J. (1990). "Sef (The Boss)." Respekt(27): 3.

[295] Cohen, S. J. (1999). Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism. Durham/London, Duke University Press: 171-173.

consideration to individual circumstances which led to their inclusion in STB files or to their actual collaboration. The law was criticized, for instance, by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1992, the Council of Europe in 1996, as well as a number of human rights organizations.[296]

In addition, there were doubts about the law's effectiveness since some high positioned public officials were never screened or were able to obtain false clearing licenses. Members of Parliament, for instance, were not covered by the lustration law. The issue of clearing license fraud became the topic of public controversy in 2001when the Czech Interior Minister Stanislav Gross announced that negative lustration certificates were illegally issued to many former members of the army intelligence. The subsequent check found that 117 lustration certificates issued mostly in 1992 were issued as a result of "incorrect analysis" of STB documents.[297] Particularly damaging to public trust was also the 2007 scandal at the Czech Interior Ministry which revealed that the Ministry employed about 150 former Secret Police agents, including high ranking STB officials.[298]

The Czech Parliament extended lustration's life-span twice –in 1995 during the period of center-right ODS domination and in 2000 when power was more balanced between ODS and CSSD. Both times, President Havel vetoed the proposals but his veto was overridden by the Parliament. The Lustration law expired in 2007

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[296] More recent transitional literature, however, indicates that these early criticisms overlooked the legitimate aims of the lustration law which could, according to international law, justify proportional encroachment of certain rights in democracies. See David, R. (2003). "Lustration Laws in Action:The Motives and Evaluation of Lustration Policy in the Czech Republic and Poland (1989-2001)." Law &Social Inquiry **28**(2): 389.

[297] (2001). Vnitro prislo celkem na 117 neopravnenych lustracnich osvedceni. Ceske noviny.

[298] Skrivanek, J. (2006). Dekomunizace po nasem (Decommunisation our way). MF Dnes**:** D6-D8.

when new civil service and security laws were passed.[299] In Slovakia, by contrast, the

Federal Lustration law was hardly employed before 1993. It was completely ignored

during Vladimir Meciar's tenure as the Slovak Prime Minister and formally expired

in 1996. During Meciar's time in power, the Slovak Information Service (SIS) was

alleged to employ a large number of former secret police agents and actively

participated in violations of basic democratic principles, including monitoring of

members of the opposition parties, churches, trade unions as well as journalists

critical of Meciar, organizing kidnapping of the son of the then Slovak President

Michal Kovac, sabotaging public meetings and blowing up cars of journalists.[300]

Yet, significantly, there have been no attempts to revive the lustration debate

since Meciar's defeat in 1998. As a result, personal continuity with the previous

regime has remained one of the defining characteristics of Slovak politics even in the

post-Meciar era. Indicative of a relatively high degree of Slovak tolerance for

politicians with communist past is also for instance the fact that all post-1989 Slovak

presidents had been members of KSC prior to November 1989. Rudolf Schuster, the

second Slovak president, in fact had to leave the post of the Czechoslovak

ambassador to Canada because of his lustration report. This did not prevent him,

however, from winning the Slovak Presidential elections in 1999.[301] All this confirms

the point made earlier – unlike most Czechs who remain highly critical of the

communist era, many Slovaks saw and still continue to see the communist past, and

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[299] David, R. (2003). "Lustration Laws in Action:The Motives and Evaluation of Lustration Policy in the Czech Republic and Poland (1989-2001)." Law &Social Inquiry **28**(2): 409.

[300] Ibid: 416.

[301] Sedlak, G. (2001). "Lustrace v postkomunistickych krajinach (Lustrations in Post-Communist Countries)." RFE/RL.

especially the period of Husak's normalization, in positive light, as the times of enhancing national autonomy and not as something to be purged or erased completely. Herein, in the divergent attitude toward the communist past (exemplified by the Klaus vs. Meciar conflict during 1991-1992), lie some of the seeds of the Czechoslovak breakup.

Moving to the second strategy of overcoming totalitarian past, discussed by T.G. Ash – the trials – here, the outcomes have been even more discouraging. The numbers of the pre-November Communist Party functionaries who were tried and sentenced in the Czech and Slovak republics remain very low. In part, the low figures stem from the fact that post-communist Czechoslovakia assumed legal continuity with the pre-November regime. This means that actions taken in the past are to be judged by the laws that were applicable at the time when those actions took place, not by current laws. In effect, this meant that gross violations of human rights perpetrated during the communist era are considered crimes only if their perpetrators broke communist laws while carrying out their duties. For instance, if a particular official used especially brutal tactics in the process of the interrogation, his or her conduct can be investigated. Otherwise, the action, even though unlawful, is considered legal.[302]

Complicating issues further is the factor of elapsed time. As discussed, the most gruesome of crimes committed by the Czechoslovak communist regime took place in the 1950s, i.e., almost forty years before the 1989 regime change. In the meantime, memories have faded, witnesses have died and material documents may

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[302] Stern, J. (2007). Prerusovana tlusta cara (An Interrupted Thick Line). <u>MF Dnes - Kavarna</u>**:** D6/D8.

have gotten lost and/or destroyed (not to mention the fact that the most important orders during the communist era, regarding executions for instance, were given orally so there were no material traces left behind to investigate). All of this introduces enormous difficulty and inconclusiveness into the investigation and prosecution of communist crimes – not to speak of the fact that both the Czech and the Slovak post-communist judicial sectors exhibit great degree of personal continuity with the pre-November regime. Prosecution of communist officials is therefore often delayed and obstructed.

Finally, mass rehabilitation of communist victims in the early 1990s represents one more reason why the number of sentences against communist perpetrators remains very low. On the positive side, compared to rehabilitation on a case by case basis, as in the 1960s, for instance, mass rehabilitation to all victims of communist repression represented an efficient and expedient way of providing some minimum sense of moral justice and financial compensation to those unlawfully prosecuted by the previous regime. Logistically speaking, it would have been simply impossible to individually rehabilitate all of the 270,000 victims of the communist regime. At the same time, however, the approach of mass rehabilitations precluded any meaningful prosecution of the perpetrators of the communist crimes and resulted in a paradoxical situation where more communist crimes went punished in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s than in the 1990s.[303]

Attempts at critical re-evaluation of history, or "History lessons" as Timothy Garton Ash labels the third strategy of coming to terms with totalitarian past, have

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[303] Ibid.

also been the source of considerable controversy and debate in both countries. As of May 2010, both the Czech republic and Slovakia have functioning institutes of national memory, set up to implement and popularize new research on the period of Czechoslovak communist dictatorship. The road to their establishment, however, was a rocky one in each case. The first pre-requisite for any kind of research of the communist era was open access to Secret Police files. As mentioned, only a fraction of the actual files, which the Czechoslovak Secret Police had kept on some 600,000 people, have been preserved. Very large quantities of files (up to one third) were destroyed under General Lorenc and there were allegations of potential wrongdoing in both the Czech and the Slovak Interior Ministry. Though calls for declassification of the files came early on, it was not until 1996 in the Czech republic and much later, in 2002 in Slovakia, that citizens were allowed to examine their own files.

The Czech Act 140/1996 from April 26 1996 allowed individuals to access their own files, with private information about the third parties blacked out (this was in order to alleviate concerns about human rights violations voiced by many dissidents whose private information frequently appeared in the files). Six years later, in 2002, a new law (Act 107/2002) was proposed by ODS that would allow a much broader access, making available to citizens not only their own files but also files of STB collaborators and STB personnel files. The law was approved by an overwhelming majority both in the Parliament and in Senate. The Communists and a majority of CSSD members voted against. Criticism came also from the dissidents, who warned that the files were full of fabrications and lies and would reveal more about the STB victims (including details of their personal lives) than the STB

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collaborators. President Vaclav Havel voiced some concerns about the discord that opening of the files was bound to generate in the society, but in the end signed the bill, saying it was a necessary step toward reclaiming the value of truth in Czechoslovak society.[304] The next year, electronic version of the files was published on the internet. Access to materials of the STB was opened one step further with the passage of the new archival law in 2004 (Archive Act 499/2004). The law exempts communist era documents from restrictions on personal information concerning third individuals who are still alive. Private information is therefore no longer blacked out.[305]

The opening of the Secret Police files in Slovakia took much longer than in the Czech republic or in most of Eastern Europe for that matter. Though the Slovak debate on file access started immediately after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (initiated by dissident Jan Langos), it had no chance of success during the Meciar tenure. After Meciar's defeat in the 1998 parliamentary elections, the discussion was re-opened by Jan Carnogursky, the new Minister of Justice, but met with strong opposition, not least from the then President Schuster who argued that opening of the secret files and study of the communist repressive methods represented an "unwelcome return to the past".[306] It was not until the fall of 2001 that the Slovak debate really took off, spurred by a special issue of the journal Kritika&Kontext on the "Phenomenon of STB". In it, leading Slovak intellectuals attempted to diagnose

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[304] Janik, B. (2002). Havel podpisal zakon o spristupneni zvazkov STB. Pravda.

[305] Nedelsky, N. (2009). Czechoslovakia and the Czech and the Slovak republics. Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. L. Stan, Routledge.

[306] Carnogursky nonetheless established a mini-institute, staffed by two people, under his own Ministry.

the causes of a relatively low interest in the topic of decommunization (not only among the general public but also, somewhat surprisingly, among researchers and historians) as well as what appears to be a fairly large public tolerance of continued STB presence in the Slovak public life, attributing them to the relatively milder repression levels, increased standards of living and the resulting weakness of Slovak dissent during Husak's normalization in Slovakia.[307]

The bill which opened Secret Police files to the general public was finally passed in the Slovak Parliament in 2002. It's passage was opposed by Meciar's HZDS and the SDL as well as President Schuster who vetoed the bill but was overridden by the Parliament. In addition to opening access to Secret Police files, the bill also set up an Institute of National Memory (Ustav Pamate Naroda, UPN), under Jan Langos's leadership, and charged it with responsibility for the investigation of the 1939-1989 period. An important difference between the Czech and the Slovak laws regulating access to communist Secret Police files is that the 2004 Czech law complements the lustration law and thus carries legal repercussions which the 2002 Slovak law does not. As a result, the Slovak approach has been referred to as "lustration without legal consequences", even though the internet publication of the files has led to some scandals and a few cases of self-lustration in Slovakia.[308] In the Czech republic, an institute similar to the Slovak UPN was established in 2007, under the name Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes 1938-89 (Ustav pro stadium

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[307] According to a 2001 poll conducted by the MVK, 59 percent of respondents answered that life was better under the communist regime than after November 1989. Even more surprisingly, 73% of respondents approved of the presence of former STB agents in public life. (2001). Kritika&Kontext **2-3**.

[308] Nedelsky, N. (2009). Czechoslovakia and the Czech and the Slovak republics. Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. L. Stan, Routledge.

totalitarnich rezimu, USTR). The Institute also contains Archive of security Services which, for the first time, gathers and administers all of the Secret Police archival materials in one place. USTR complements another institute, Bureau for Documentation and Investigation of Crimes of Communism (Ustav dokumentace a vysetrovani zlocinu komunismu, UDV) which was established in 1995 and carries also investigatory powers.

Both the Czech and Slovak institutes of memory remain subject of considerable controversy. In 2010, after months of intensive public criticism coming both from the right and the left, Pavel Zacek, the key initiator and head of the Czech USTR was voted out. USTR under Zacek's leadership was charged with lack of professionalism, selectivity and politicization of its research. Especially damaging were public scandals concerning the sensational manner in which the institute released information about the alleged STB collaboration of the Czech writer living in France, Milan Kundera, and the dissident artist and a close friend of Vaclav Havel, Joska Skalnik.[309] In both cases, the information was leaked to the media without giving the accused an opportunity to explain their side of the story. In Spring 2010, Pavel Zacek was replaced by historian Jiri Pernes who himself became the victim of the Czech election struggle between CSSD and ODS and was forced to leave the institute less than a month after his arrival, after questions about his communist past and his expert research were raised in the media.[310]

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[309] Cunningham, B. (2010). New Chief at Controversial USTR. The Prague Post.

[310] See for example: Czech News Agency, C. (2010). Pernes Sacked as Head of Totalitarian Institute. Prague Daily Monitor., Jansky, P. (2010). Kdo jsi, vydeseny Pernesi? Britske Listy.

In Slovakia, UPN became the object of controversy when, following the tragic death of its founder and director Jan Langos in 2006, the new governing coalition (Smer, SNS, HZDS) in cooperation with Matica Slovenska appointed to the post of the head of the institute a young Slovak historian, Ivan Petransky, known for his sympathies for the Slovak fascist wartime regime. Since Petransky's appointment, UPN has uncritically sponsored several controversial publications related to Slovakia's WWII history, most recently a book of memoires of Karol Sidor, a prominent member of Tiso's HSLS, chief editor of the strongly anti-Semitic HSLS newspaper Slovak who spent the wartime years in Vatican as a Slovak ambassador.[311]

Goodbye Czechoslovakia

Goodbye to communism was not the only goodbye the Czechs and the Slovaks said after the fall of communism in 1989, however. With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on January 1 1993, the entire history of Czechoslovakia's existence was in need of re-evaluation. Naturally, the impetus was much stronger in Slovakia where the new post-communist elite headed by Vladimir Meciar rejected the Czechoslovak past and, finding themselves in a desperate need of new founding myths to legitimate Slovakia's new independence, embarked upon a brave project of constructing the Slovak identity anew. In the Czech republic, on the contrary, there was considerably less need for such a thorough revision. After all, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Czechoslovak national imagery invented by Czechoslovakia's founders in the 1920s, was distinctly Czech in outlook. And since the majority of Czechs

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[311] Todova, M. (2010). UPN o Sidorovom antisemitizme pomlcal. <u>SME</u>.

identified with the Czechoslovak state and its national mythology, no major revision of the Czech national character after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was needed. October 28, the date of Czechoslovakia's establishment in 1918, for instance, still remains on the list of Czech national holidays as one of the key milestones in the Czech national history, as do all of the other state holidays and memorial dates celebrated during the interwar period.[312]

Simplifying the Czech post-independence position even more was the structural shift that took place following the Czechoslovak breakup. After the Czechoslovak split, the Czech republic became one of the most homogeneous nation-states in Europe. After centuries of sharing borders with multiple ethnic "others" and defining one's identity in relation to these "others" – whether they were the Germans, the Jews, the Slovaks, the Poles, etc. – there was suddenly no "other" to differentiate oneself from. In words of Petr Pithart, a leading Charta 77 signatory and post-November politician, all of a sudden, there were no important questions to ask, no challenges to overcome. In this "homogeneous, isolated, and therefore uninteresting" new Czech world, Pithart observed, the need for great historical images and narratives had suddenly dramatically decreased.[313] In fact, it is precisely the absence of grand historical debates (save the traditional squabble between the Catholic and the Protestant vision of Czech identity, as exemplified in the struggle between the

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[312] Ref to Z 245/2000 Sb

[313] Pithart, P. (1998). Po Devetaosemdesatem: Kdo Jsme? (After 89: Who are we?). Bratislava, Kalligram - Doplnek: 61.

proponents of Jan Hus vs. St. Vaclav myth), [314] which represents one of the most striking features of the Czech post-communist political discourse.

Instead of battles over the meaning of the past, it was the struggle between two starkly different visions of the present, epitomized by the Havel vs. Klaus controversy, that has dominated the Czech post-1993 public discourse. In a nutshell, Vaclav Havel's position is a moral, apolitical vision of the world which places premium on morality and humanism, promotion of civil society as a pre-requisite of a healthy democracy, and the concept of common good, rather than individual profit.[315] In contrast, Vaclav Klaus' is an infinitely pragmatic technocratic view which celebrates individualism and the logic of the free market and rejects the idea of civil society as unnatural and "aberrant", deriding its proponents as "dreamers" and "social engineers".[316] As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it was Vaclav Klaus' skillful political maneuvering of the lustration issue which proved successful in stripping the dissidents and their ideals of the symbolic power they possessed during the initial weeks and months following the 1989 Velvet revolution. After the early 1990s lustration scandals, the dissident group was labeled as impractical naïve dreamers or people who had something to hide and became increasingly marginalized.

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[314] Essentially, this is the exact reproduction (albeit with new actors) of the interwar battle between the Protestant proponents of the Hussite tradition and the Catholic defenders of St. Vaclav.

[315] See Havel, V., V. Klaus, et al. (1996). "Civil Society After Communism: Rival Visions." Journal of Democracy **7**(1 (January 1996)). Also : Havel, V. (1993). Summer Meditations. New York, Vintage Books.

[316] Skalnik Leff, C. (1996). The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation versus State. Boulder, Westview Press: 157.

There has been one important exception to the general absence of historical

themes in the Czech post-1993 public debate, however. It is the so called Benes

decrees controversy. As discussed in chapter 4, "Benes decrees" refer to a set of laws

issued by Czechoslovakia's postwar President Eduard Benes between 1945 and 1946.

Approved at the Potsdam conference by the four powers, the decrees required

immediate confiscation of property and expulsion from Czechoslovakia of all

Germans and Hungarians who had identified themselves as German or Magyar in any

census since 1929. The majority of the expelled Sudeten Germans settled across the

border in Bavaria and a smaller number settled in Austria. Exemption was given to

those who could prove that they had remained loyal to Czechoslovakia during the

Nazi occupation.

Briefly, the Benes decrees controversy began in December 1989. At that

time, the Bavarian Prime Minister Max Streibl asked the new Czechoslovak leaders

to apologize to the Sudeten Germans for the post-war expulsion the same way as

Germany apologized for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis during the war. (During

the Cold war, the Czechoslovak government steadfastly ignored statements by FRG

governments which repeatedly condemned the decrees as illegal.) Formal apologies

from the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Jiri Dienstbier and Czechoslovak President

Vaclav Havel were followed, two years later, in 1992, by a "German-Czechoslovak

Friendship Treaty" and in 1997 by "German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations

and their Development". None of these steps, however, were sufficient in resolving

the most fundamental dispute between Bonn and Prague. Sudeten Germans

continued to demand their right to repatriate and receive back the property that was

confiscated from them after the war, while the Czech side continued to vehemently

oppose any such demands.[317]

The position of the European Union on the Benes decrees controversy has

been inconsistent – wavering between detached statements which argued that the

issue was a purely bilateral matter between Germany and the Czech republic and was

unrelated to the Czech EU membership prospects and strong statements of

condemnation which explicitly emphasized respect for fundamental human and

minority rights as a precondition of future Czech membership in the EU. The Czech-

German conflict over the decrees spiraled in the early 2002 when the Czech Premier

Milos Zeman (CSSD) and Vaclav Klaus (ODS), independently of each other, used the

rising frustration among the Czech population over what was perceived as constant

German and Austrian attacks on the postwar order to increase their prospects in the

upcoming June parliamentary elections. In a January 2002 interview to the Austrian

magazine Profil, Zeman completely negated Havel's and Dienstbier's previous

apologies for the expulsions when he called the Sudeten Germans "Hitler's fifth

column" that destroyed Czechoslovakia in 1938. For his part, Vaclav Klaus

demanded that the EU inserts a separate clause in the future EU accession treaty with

the Czech republic which would explicitly guarantee that the Benes decrees would

never be revised or annulled. In April that year, 179 Czech parliamentary deputies

unanimously passed a resolution rejecting any attempts to reopen the Benes decrees.

The EU expressed concerns over the statements but did not reprimand the Czech

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[317] For a good summary of the Czech-German Benes controversy, see: Nagengast, E. (2003). "The Benes Decrees and EU Enlargement." European Integration **25**(4): 335-350.

leaders and refused to block the Czech access to the Union.[318] The latest episode of the decrees controversy, which is likely to animate Czech politics for some time to come, was president Klaus' 2010 threat to veto the European Union Lisbon Treaty unless a special clause was added exempting the Czech republic from the EU Bill of Fundamental Rights (this, in order to prevent possible future property demands by Sudeten Germans). After weeks of heated debates and negotiations between Prague and Brussels, the Czech Constitutional court ruled the Lisbon treaty was not in conflict with the Czech Constitutional Law and President Klaus grudgingly signed the treaty.[319]

If the Czech post-independence debate has mostly avoided historical topics, in Slovakia, by contrast, 1993 marked the beginning of a frantic search for a new set of legitimizing mythologies. Unlike the Czechs who did not even begin to seriously discuss their national holiday legislation until 2000, the Slovak political leadership was immediately thrown into a passionate battle over the meaning of Slovak identity. Less than three months after the Czechoslovak split, the Slovak parliament adopted a brand new National Holiday bill. In comparison to the Czech holiday legislation, which, as mentioned, maintains historical continuity with the Czechoslovak interwar holiday order, the Slovak bill is overwhelmingly national in character. Out of the total number of twenty two historical dates included in the 1993 Holiday Bill and its subsequent modifications,[320] twelve refer to various milestones on the Slovak road to independence (mostly drawn from the 19th and the early 20th century Slovak

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[318] Ibid.

[319] Dnes, M. (2009). Lisabonska smlouva je v poradku, rozhodl Ustavni soud. <u>MF Dnes/iDnes</u>.

[320] These are classified as "State holidays", i.e. days of rest and "memorial days", i.e. regular working days.

history).[321] Only seven of the newly adopted holidays refer to events symbolizing

universal values: four to antifascism[322] and three to anti-communism[323]. For

comparison, the 2000 Czech holiday law, includes 17 non-religious holidays and

memorial days, five of which are identical to the interwar Czechoslovak holiday

order,[324] four commemorate events related to WWII and Czech anti-fascist

struggle,[325] two commemorate Czech anti-communist resistance,[326] four refer to

universal values,[327] one commemorates the establishment of the Czech republic in

1993 and one refers to the date of Czech entry into the NATO in 1998.

Among the first victims of the Slovak post-1993 efforts to nationalize Slovak

history (and Slovakia's new holiday law) was October 28, the date of the

establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918. In 1993, the date was removed from the

"State holidays" category and temporarily placed in the category of "Other non-

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[321] They include two "State holidays": January 1 (establishment of Slovakia in 1993), September 1 (Slovak Constitution Day, 1992), and nine "memorial days": May 4 (M. R. Stefanik, 1919), June 7 (Memorandum of the Slovak Nation, 1861), July 5 (Slovaks Abroad Day), July 17 (Declaration of Slovak sovereignty, 1992), August 4 (Matica Slovenska, 1863), September 19 (Slovak National Council, 1848), October 27 (Cernova tragedy, 1907), October 29 (Ludovit Stur), October 30 (Declaration of the Slovak Nation, 1918) and December 30 (Declaration of Slovakia as an Independent Ecclesiastic Province, 1977).

[322] August 29 (Slovak National Uprising, 1945), May 8 (Victory over Fascism, 1945), October 6 (Dukla Victims, 1944), September 9 (Holocaust victims day)

[323] March 25 (Struggle for human rights day, 1988), April 13 (Unjustly persecuted day, 1950), November 17 (Struggle against totalitarianism day/ Velvet revolution, 1939/1989)(originally in the "memorial day"category, was added to "state holidays" category only in 2001)

[324] They include four state holidays: July 5 (Slavic missionaries Cyril and Methodius), July 6 (Master Jan Hus), September 28 (St. Vaclav), October 28 (Czechoslovak independence) and one holiday in the "other holidays" category, May 1 (Labor Day).

[325] May 8 (Liberation), May 5 (Czech May Uprising), January 27 (Holocaust memorial day), June 10 (Lidice massacre)

[326] November 17 (Velvet revolution), June 27 (Victims of communism memorial day)

[327] March 8 (International Women's day), December 11 (Veterans' day), April 7 (Education day, John Amos Comenius), May 15 (Family day)

working holidays".[328] The anniversary's annual celebrations grew more and more modest by the year and the 90th anniversary of Czechoslovakia's establishment in 1918 went without official commemoration in Slovakia (save a very modest military ceremony in front of the Memorial of Czechoslovak stateness in Bratislava and Premier Fico's brief visit of the Czech embassy in Hanoi where he was on official state trip). Instead, the official celebrations of Czechoslovakia's 90th birthday took place on October 30, the date of the Martin Declaration of 1918.[329]

Having discarded their most immediate, Czechoslovak, history as insufficiently Slovak and therefore unusable for their nationalist project, Slovak post-1993 political elites looked to more distant pasts for sources of symbolic capital. Historians and archeologists literally dug for evidence which would demonstrate the longevity of the Slovak presence in the region and specifically show that the Slovaks were there "first" – before the Magyars and before the Czechs. Archaeological evidence was discovered suggesting that the remains of 5th and 6th century Slavic settlements were identical with the Slovak settlements mentioned in historical sources from the 11th century. This was meant to stretch the existence of Slovaks as a nation by several centuries and show that they were not merely some undifferentiated Slavic tribe but that they were indeed the first state-bearing nation in the area.[330]

Enormous efforts were also put into re-discovering Great Moravia as "the first Slovak state" and the Moravian population as the first Slovak nation. Matica

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[328] After the defeat of Meciar's HZDS in 1998, the date was moved to the category of "Memorial days". SeeNarodna rada Slovenskej Republiky, N. (1993). Zakon c. 241/1993 Z.z. 20.10.1993 o o štátnych sviatkoch, dnoch pracovného pokoja a pamätných dnoch. Zbierka zákonov. 61/1993: 1057.

[329] Kern, M. (2008). 1918? Stat s oslavou pocka. SME.

[330] Eyal, G. (2004). "Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory." History & Memory 16(1): 14.

Slovenska published a number of publications on the topic, mostly written by Slovak nationalist émigrés, some of which became compulsory reading materials in elementary schools. In 1996, for instance a controversial textbook *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovakov* written by Milan S. Durica, a Slovak émigré Catholic priest, was distributed to elementary schools as a required reading by the Slovak Cultural Minister, a close ally of the Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar, Eva Slavkovska. The textbook which referred to the ancient Slavs living in the Danube basin as Slovaks spurred a lively debate both in Slovakia and at the EU level due to its many factual mistakes, including its skewed interpretation of the Slovak wartime history which will be discussed in a moment. As a result of strong domestic and international criticism, the book was eventually withdrawn from the elementary school curricula in June 1997.[331]

That same year, another heated historical debate arose in connection to a book *Veľký omyl Veľká Morava (Great Mistake Great Moravia)* written by another Slovak émigré, Dominik Hudec who situated the origins of the Slovak nation to "the 2nd century AD or maybe even earlier",[332] and in the language and style of the 19th century national awakeners, urged his readers to "liberate themselves" from the "Czechoslovakist" and Hungarian "lies and myths" and present the "true story" of the 9th century Great Moravian state:

> "Now is the time! We cannot let these lies take root in the heads of our young
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> students, journalists, politicians… He, who is not willing to fight for his truth

[331] Durica, M. S. (1996). <u>Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov</u>. Bratislava, Slovenske Pedagogicke Nakladatelstvo.

[332] Hudec, D. (1994). <u>Velky omyl Velka Morava</u>. Martin, Matica Slovenska.

and even sacrifice his life for it, is not worthy of freedom. He, who is

interested only in material possessions and servitude to a foreign master, will

forever remain a political and a cultural slave"[333]

Similar to Durica's textbook, Hudec's book was heavily promoted by the nationalist

circles around Matica Slovenska.[334]

After the 2006 elections, the language of Great Moravia as the first Slovak

state was picked up by Premier Robert Fico who, in an effort to revive the dormant

Slovak patriotism, has persistently ignored heavy criticism and even ridicule from

Slovak historians and cultural elites and referred to Great Moravia as the first state of

"old Slovaks".[335] His most recent effort to inspire Slovak national pride and promote

societal understanding of Slovak ancient history is the construction of an extravagant

8 meter tall bronze equestrian statue of the Great Moravian Duke Svatopluk,

according to Robert Fico, the first Slovak king, which is due to be unveiled in the

courtyard of the newly renovated Bratislava castle later this year. According to Pavol

Paska, current head of the Slovak Parliament and member of Robert Fico's SMER,

new archaeological findings indicate that Svatopluk's seat was not in Nitra but in

Bratislava. Historians vehemently oppose such claims.

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[333] Ibid: 71.

[334] See for example: Hudec, D. (1996). Ako sa kuje nova historia (pravdiva) Polemika. <u>SME</u>.

[335] SME-mz, p., bl (2008). Fico nadalej hovori o starych Slovakoch nie Slovanoch.Ibid.

Picture 23: Searching for new Founding Myths: Svatopluk the first Slovak king? The bronze statue of the Great Moravian Duke Svatopluk, an initiative of Premier Robert Fico, President Ivan Gasparovic and Head of the Parliament Pavol Paska is scheduled to be unveiled in the courtyard of the Bratislava castle.

Despite great political efforts to revive the memory of Great Moravia, however, the Great Moravian history is simply too distant of an era to generate strong national feelings in contemporary Slovak society – not to mention the large volume of historical evidence that contradicts such claims. This leaves the Slovak wartime state, led by monsignor Tiso, as the other potential source of continuity and legitimacy. Although historically closer (thus more likely to achieve popular resonance) than the distant 9th century Great Moravian history, Slovakia's wartime past is far from unproblematic, however. If, as discussed in Chapter 3, Tiso's wartime state was merely a puppet regime of the Nazi Germany, there is little reason to be proud of its wartime economic achievements. These would have to be considered a

mere temporary consolation before Hitler's grand plan of wiping out all Slavs could be fully achieved. On the other hand, if the Slovak state was not a puppet regime but an autonomous achievement of its leaders, then its leaders ought to be held responsible for the crimes that were perpetrated in the name of this state (i.e., deportations of the Jews and Roma, forced expulsion of Czechs, enlisting German help in order to contain the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising, etc.). Either way arguments that the wartime Slovak state represents a piece of the Slovak past which is worthy of admiration are difficult to sustain.

Much like the Great Moravian debate, the debate about the wartime Slovak state was inserted into Slovak post-communist political discourse by Slovak émigré nationalist historians, supported by a handful of political elites of the Slovak National Party (SNS), Matica Slovenska (MS), and some members of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in the early 1990s. First calls for rehabilitation of the wartime period as a usable part of Slovak history came in the spring of 1990 with the publication of an interview in *Literarny tyzdennik* with an exiled historian Frantisek Vnuk.[336] In it, Vnuk called for rehabilitation of the Slovak wartime state and its leaders and urged Slovak historians to accept historical research of Slovak émigré historians. The debate was joined by Milan S. Durica, whose already mentioned *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovakov*[337] generated an avalanche of critical responses from a number of prominent Slovak historians, artists, intellectuals, representatives of the Jewish religious community, the Lutheran Church as well as representative of the European Union after the book was made a required reading for elementary school

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[336] See for instance: Vnuk, F. e. (1967). <u>Dr. Jozef Tiso, President of the Slovak Republic</u>, Association of Australian Slovaks, Vnuk, F. e. (1991). <u>Mat svoj štát znamená život. Politická biografia Alexandra Macha</u>. Bratislava, Odkaz, Vnuk, F. e. (1993). <u>Neuveritelné sprisahanie, vojenské a politické akcie proti Slovenskej republike v roku 1944</u>. Trencín, Vydavatelstvo Ivana Štelcera. Also see Literarny Tyzdennik in the years 1990-92 for numerous articles by Vnuk and other émigrés.

[337] Translation: *The History of Slovakia and Slovaks.*

history courses in 1996. Criticisms against Durica's book included objections that it glorified the personality of Jozef Tiso, belittled the significance of Holocaust, misrepresented the significance of the Slovak National Uprising and incited hatred against Czechs and Hungarians.[338]

Other highly publicized efforts to revive the memory of the wartime Slovak and make it a useable part of Slovak national past include the controversial unveiling of a plaque of Jozef Tiso in Banovce nad Bebravou in 1990, followed by similar ceremonies in Zilina in 2000 and Bytca in 2010 and controversial media glorifications of Tiso's wartime regime as an economic paradise by the Slovak Catholic Cardinal Sokol. Slovak Catholic church has kept official silence on the issue of the Slovak wartime state for 60 years.[339]

Since the early 1990s, the number of supporters of Tiso and the Slovak wartime regime has steadily declined. Annual commemorations of Jozef Tiso's execution on April 18 1947 and the establishment of the Slovak state on March 14 1939 attract typically no more than 200 participants, mostly from the Slovak fringe nationalist party, Slovenska Pospolitost.[340] Similarly, public opinion polls indicate a downward trend in Tiso's popularity. According to the 2005 sociological research study undertaken by MVK, highly positive evaluations of president Tiso declined from about 8 percent in 1992 to about 4.8% in 2005. Most of Tiso's supporters are

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[338] See Abraham, S. (1997). "Fenomen Durica." Kritika&Kontext **2-3**. (1997). Historicky ustav SAV o prirucke M.S. Duricu Dejiny Slovenska a Slovakov. SME. SME-ch (1997). Duricova kniha nepatri do skol, tvrdi M. Ftacnik. SME.

[339] SME-moz (2005). Arcibiskup Sokol zehnal obdivovatelom Tisa. SME. Kern, M. (2007). Sokol chvalil Tisa, cirkev oficialne mlci. SME.

[340] See for instance TASR (2002). Vznik Slovenskeho statu si v Trnave pripomenulo asi sto mladych ludi. SME. TASR (2005). Spomienkove zhromazdenie na vojnovy slovensky stat bolo bez incidentov. SME.

retirees, workers and people with low education. Approximately half of the respondents believed president Tiso was responsible for the deportations of the Slovak Jews, yet only some of them approved of Tiso's execution. More than 20 percent of respondents thought Tiso was not responsible for the deportations.[341]

With the defeat of the democrats by SMER in the 2006 parliamentary elections, efforts to relativize the responsibility of the Slovak wartime regime for wartime crimes and rehabilitate it as a useable element of Slovak history have intensified again. Although Premier Fico (as well as his one coalition partner Vladimir Meciar) publically condemned the wartime fascist state, his coalition partner Jan Slota of SNS has been Tiso's outspoken defender, describing the Slovak wartime president as a "Slovak national martyr", "defender of the Slovak nation and Christianity from Bolshevism and Liberalism" and calling the 1939-45 period a bright era of the Slovak history.[342] Most recently, controversial appointment of an SNS nominee for the post of the head of the Slovak Institute of National Memory spurred another wave of public criticism. Twenty years after the collapse of communism arguments about the character and role of the Slovak wartime state and its leadership, as well as other aspects of the Slovak past thus continue. The battle over the meaning and character of Slovak identity is far from over.

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[341] Cited in Kernova, M. (2005). Obdivovatelov Tisa a jeho statu ubuda. <u>SME</u>.

[342] SME-sp (1997). SNS vyzyva na spoluuctenie si pamiatky Jozefa TisuIbid. See also: pamätná tabuľa Jozefovi Tisovi Another SNS parliamentarian, Jozef Rydlo, referred to Tiso as the greatest figure in the Slovak history. See Vagovic, M. (2007). Poslanec Rydlo: Tiso je najvacsi Slovak. <u>SME</u>.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final section I return to the main research puzzle of the divergence between the Czech and Slovak post-communist discourses and rituals of collective memory and to some broader theoretical issues raised in the Introduction.

Given the fact that Czechs and Slovaks lived together in a common state and were citizens of the same regimes for nearly seven decades, the difference between the post-communist discourses and rituals of collective memory in the two countries is indeed striking. I discussed three different aspects in which the Czech and the Slovak post-1993 narratives diverged: (1) de-communization, (2) attitude toward the Czechoslovak past, and (3) the overall style and content of the memory discourses employed in the two countries.

With regard to the first area, de-communization, the Czech republic was the first post-communist country to pursue a thorough de-communization policy via lustration and open access to communist Secret police files. Slovakia, on the other hand, never really implemented the lustration law, was much slower in opening public access to the STB files, and in general continues to exhibit a much greater tolerance toward the communist period, demonstrated not least in the relatively strong continuity of pre-November elites in the Slovak political life.

The divergence between the Czech and the Slovak post-1993 trajectories is also evident in the way the two nations approached their common, Czechoslovak, past. While the Czechs maintain continuity with interwar Czechoslovakia and its legitimizing mythology, the Slovak post-1993 nationalist elites rejected the Czechoslovak past and launched a wide-ranging, 19th century-like, nationalist project of constructing a new Slovak identity.

Finally, in terms of the overall style and content of the memory discourses that emerged in the two countries, the Czech post-communist debate has been noticeable by its

relative lack of grand historical themes[343] and instead focused on two different visions of the present – Vaclav Havel's morally-oriented discourse of civil society and the pragmatic, technocratic vision of Vaclav Klaus. The Slovak debate, on the other hand, has been heavily nation-focused. In short, it is as though these two countries had two very different needs – one to construct myths about the present and the other to construct myths about the past.

Why the divergence? I argued that the puzzle of the divergent attitudes between the Czechs and Slovaks toward their communist past can be found in the different communist regime types that existed in the Czech and Slovak republics in the 1970s and 1980s. As discussed in Chapter 4, there was a noticeable difference between the ways in which normalization proceeded in the two parts of the Czechoslovak joint state. Not only were the numbers of those purged from the Party much higher in the Czech lands than in Slovakia, normalization in Slovakia was also gentler in terms of its repression tactics. While the majority of the Czech reform activists from 1968 were purged from the Party and usually had no other choice but to become manual laborers and stokers, Slovak reformers from 1968 were more often demoted from their professional fields, rather than purged. Thus, even though Czechoslovakia as a whole represented a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime type, Slovakia can be more appropriately characterized as a mixture of bureaucratic-authoritarianism with some consensual and paternalistic features. This in turn translated into slightly different views and evaluations of the communist experience in the two republics, with Slovaks exhibiting a more benevolent attitude toward the continued presence of pre-November elites in the Slovak public life as well as a generally more positive view of the communist era while the Czechs opted for Lustration and more stringent measures to break with the communist past.

Concerning the gap between the Czech and Slovak post-1993 attitudes toward their common Czechoslovak past, the argument of the dissertation has been that seeds of the

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[343] With the exception of the Sudeten German issue and to a lesser extent the traditional split between the Catholic and Protestant versions of Czech identity.

different Czech and Slovak post-1993 choices can be located in the failure of the First Czechoslovak regime to create a common national narrative that would incorporate Czechoslovakia's diverse population and promote among them a sense of belonging to the new state. As discussed in Chapter 3, despite the rhetoric of Czecho-Slovak fraternity which permeated the official language of the First Republic, the national narrative constructed by Czechoslovakia's founders was distinctly Czech in substance and did not speak to the Slovak historical experience – not to mention Czechoslovakia's other minorities. As a result, despite sincere efforts by the Czechoslovak interwar leadership to guarantee minority protection to Czechoslovakia's minority populations and diffuse the existing religious tensions, the strongly Czech-centric language and imagery invented and promoted by the Czechoslovak Founding fathers could not but alienate the country's non-Czech speakers. From the perspective of Slovaks, who, for over thousand years, had been an integral part of the Hungarian state, official promotion of St. Vaclav and Jan Hus could hardly evoke feelings of belonging and national identification.   As for Czechoslovakia's Germans and Hungarians, they were afforded absolutely no place in the new narrative of the Czechoslovak identity. Eventually, national grievances which had been accumulating in interwar Czechoslovakia since its establishment contributed to Czechoslovakia's demise in 1938.

Following the collapse of communism and dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czech and Slovak political elites therefore found themselves in different positions. Since the majority of Czechs identified with Czechoslovakia as their national state, there was little reason to discard memories of interwar Czechoslovakia from the post-1993 Czech national discourse. After all, in a region noticeable by its lack of pre-communist democratic traditions, Czechoslovakia's interwar democratic period was a highly coveted piece of history.

Finally, the puzzle of the different salience of historical themes in the Czech and Slovak discourses (the present-focused Czech discourse vs. the past-focused Slovak

discourse) can be explained by the different needs experienced by the Czech and Slovak post-communist elites.   On the Czech side, as discussed in Chapter 5, the impetus for a re-evaluation of the Czech national character after 1993 was significantly weakened by the structural shift that took place in the Czech republic. Following the 1993 split, the Czech republic became one of the most homogeneous nation-states in Europe. In the absence of a significant internal "other" against whom to differentiate oneself, grand historical images and narratives virtually lost their reason d'etre in the post-1993 discourse. Instead, the dominant Czech debate in the 1990s became polarized between two different visions of the present–Vaclav Havel's moral discourse of civil society and the pragmatic neo-Liberal language of Vaclav Klaus.

In the post-1993 Slovakia, by contrast, reasons for a major revision of national identity did exist – and manifested themselves with full force. The Slovak post-1993 elite headed by Vladimir Meciar rejected the Czechoslovak past as un-useable for the new Slovak national project and therefore found itself in desperate need of new founding myths to legitimate Slovakia's new independence. As a result, the Slovak post 1993 public discourse has been heavily focused on historical and national themes, while the Czech discourse centered largely around non-historical themes.

The prominence of nationalist discourse in post-1993 Slovakia on the one hand and the relative absence of national themes in the Czech post-1993 discourse on the other can be also viewed as a legacy of Czechoslovak bureaucratic authoritarian communist regime which, by weakening pre-communist political identities, contributed to the emergence of the so-called catch-all parties. As discussed in Chapter 5, both Vaclav Klaus' ODS and Vladimir Meciar's HZDS were parties characteristic by their lack of identifiable links to pre-communist legacies or social cleavages. As Abby Innes suggested, political identities of ODS and HZDS, similar to many other post-communist actors, were constructed in response to immediate concerns and tasks of the transition. That Meciar's HZDS eventually turned

populist/nationalist and Klaus' ODS became a technocratic party, as mentioned, was primarily due to different levels of economic development and consequently different prospects of success of a radical economic transformation in the two parts of the federal Czechoslovakia – not to nationalist impulses. Since the costs associated with rapid economic reform were considerably higher in Slovakia due to the country's relatively lower level of economic development, Vladimir Meciar's HZDS opted for the populist/nationalist strategy of emphasizing Slovakia's economic vulnerability and calling for more gradualist economic policies that would better reflect Slovak conditions while Vaclav Klaus opted for rapid economic transformation.

In addition to analyzing the Czech and Slovak post-communist transformation, the dissertation has broader theoretical implications as well, speaking to several important debates in the fields of nationalism and memory studies. Understandably, it presents a strong critique of primordialist theories of national identity. But it also offers a critique of extreme constructivist theories of nationalism, specifically, their underlying assumption that identity construction knows no limits, that elites are practically free to construct or invent nations as they wish. As the discussion of the Czechoslovak communist practice of organized forgetting in Chapter 3 showed, despite extreme repressive methods employed by the Czechoslovak communist regime in its effort to achieve the grand socialist project of building a new socialist man, the project ended in a complete disaster. The Czechoslovak communist regime, despite its repressiveness and ideological rigidity, proved unable to fully control the space of public memory. While it was quite successful at erasing previous modes of identification, it was unable to instill a new version of history. Counter-narratives did emerge in socialist Czechoslovakia as soon as the most brutal form of Stalinist repression subsided.

By discussing the transformation of the Czech and Slovak national mythscapes, the dissertation also highlights the dynamic character of narratives, identities, and political cultures in general – a point that has been ignored by earlier, static, approaches to national

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identity construction, including such important works as Hobsbawm and Ranger's Invention of Tradition or Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities. By focusing on the dynamic transformations of the Czech and Slovak national mythscape, the dissertation shows that nations are not simply invented or imagined but are continuously constructed and reconstructed. They have histories of their own. The work of national imagination, in other words, is an ongoing project.

The dissertation also points out some serious limitations of instrumentalist theories of identity construction, specifically the assumption that political elites act based on clearly constituted identities and interests. My discussion of the Czech and Slovak post-communist ODS and HZDS illustrates limits to such arguments. Elites may not initially have a clear idea of what their identities and interests are as these may develop, as was the case of ODS and HZDS, in response to immediate challenges faced by actors. This highlights the sense-making aspect of narrative construction – as opposed to purely instrumental uses of the past.

Finally, and most broadly, the dissertation presents a culturalist critique of the dominant institutionalist literature on democratization and an argument on how to think of post-communist transitions outside of the strictly institutional framework. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's definition of political culture as an ongoing work of symbolic representation in which various actors struggle to legitimize themselves by maintaining or subverting the words and categories through which the reality is perceived and expressed,[344] the dissertation defines democratization as a dynamic process of meaning creation and highlights the special role of political myths in this process. Instead of a straightforward adoption of some ready-made institutions and processes, democratization is understood here as an activity of sensemaking – of searching for useable pasts and new legitimizing mythologies. This is not to argue that institutional analyses ought to be replaced by studies of political culture, rather,

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[344] Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and Symbolic Power. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

it is an argument on how , by looking at the less palpable, symbolic, aspects of politics, we might valuably enrich our understanding of democratic transitions and politics more generally and move beyond the highly popular but nonetheless conceptually inadequate "return of the past" paradigm of post-communist nationalism and investigate what pasts exactly are "returning," how, and why.

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