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THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND HISTORY WRITING: THE CASES OF CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

1. Introduction

Memory is never shaped in vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure

(James Young, in Ebenshade, 1995).

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the following the Velvet Divorce in 1992, the Czech Republic and Slovakia both had to come to terms with their communist past, in which a totalitarian regime (re)created a particular national identity to legitimize its existence. In particular, it sought to influence and mobilize the minds of its people to build popular support for their actions. As will be demonstrated in the following parts of the paper, political and educational elites shaped a distinct collective memory and thus, identity.

Within this context, this study considers the periods before and after the Velvet Revolution and the respective identities for these periods (earlier periods can be a topic of further research). In this regard, I will focus on the creation of distinct national identities through the rewriting of history as a legitimizing factor of identities. The main research question is related to how history is used and misused by official sources, specifically: *How did the political elite construct Czech, Slovak and Czechoslovak national identity to legitimize its actions?* I will focus on Czech, Slovak and Czechoslovak identities through analyzing the language and constitution within the respective political constructs.

The purpose of this research is neither to assess goodness or badness of the above-mentioned process, nor to criticize the governments' efforts in various historical periods. Rather, the goal of this study is to prove based on the Czech and Slovak cases the claim widely accepted in the academic scholarship, that the construction of national identity is tightly connected to a political (re-)interpretation of history and hence, influences the process of history writing.

2. Conceptual Part

2.1. Attempting to Define Identity: Identity & Conceptual Opacity

"Identities…are not things we think about, but things we think with"

Goff & Dunn, 2004, p. 1

As the above-mentioned quote implies, identity as a concept is a crucial element of human self-understanding and various aspects of life and therefore, has crucial consequences. However, trying to grasp the actual meaning or concrete definitions seems to be more difficult. Basic and generally accepted definitions of identity have been given by Deutsch (1957) as "sense of community" and Anderson (1992) as "imagined communities". What becomes clear from these definitions is the focus on community. Identity, therefore, implicitly relates to a uniting factor and it relates to a self-image, as the idea of *imagined* communities illustrates. However, going beyond these often simplistic and rather vague ideas about identity has proven to be difficult, not least because of a wide range of academic fields using identity and relatively specific applications of the concept within these fields.

Definitions, including explicit characteristics of identity have until recently been seldom and some authors have even gone as far as proclaiming a "definitional anarchy" (Abdalel et. al., 2006). As Abdalel and others

(2006) have suggested, "[despite] - or perhaps because of – the sprawl of different treatments of identity in the social sciences, the concept has remained too analytically loose to be as useful a tool as the literature's early promise had suggested". Brubaker and Cooper have even gone as far as advocating "that it is time to let go of the concept of identity altogether"(in Ibid., p. 1) due to its vague and obscuring character. However, this denial of the concept seems undue, since the last decade has witnessed a degree of conceptualizations being introduced to social sciences and the related fields.

2.2. Characteristics of Identity

Abdalel *et al.* (2006) developed a proposition for a more rigorous and workable definition of identity in the context of the "*identity as a variable conference"* in 2004. As the basic content of identities, they distinguish between content and contestation as basic elements of identity: "Content describes the meaning of a collective identity ... [whereas] contestation refers to the degree of agreement within a group over the content of the shared category" (Ibid.).

Another conceptual approach has been proposed by Goff & Dunn in their 2004 work "*Identity and Global Politics*" focusing on the elements to be found within the contents of identity. They have outlined four fundamental characteristics of identity: Alterity, multiplicity, fluidity and constructedness (p. 4). First, alterity refers to a relational character of identity. The idea of a negative integration - that is identity formation - against what we are not. In other words, the "double-edged character of national identity, namely its capacity of defining who is a member of the community but also who is a foreigner" (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 598). The result of this negative integration is the (often stereotypical) creation and view of "*the other*, that represents everything worse than and minor to 'us'; sometimes – albeit never inevitably – this has led to a definition of other as enemy" (Jukarainen, 2003, p. 219). This negative identification corresponds to identities' "need to be constantly threatened and defended in order to exist" (Ibid., p. 218*).* The idea of alterity is related to the second element, multiplicity. As we tend to identify and consequently see ourselves in contrast to the other, the focus of our identity switches according to the situational context at hand. Accordingly, in one situation one might emphasize its role as a mother, while in another case one identifies along the lines of her national or local identity. This multiplicity of identities acknowledges that there is not only one identity, but rather several that in combination influence and determine individual and group behavior. Departing from this idea of multiplicity, subsequently the question of predominance of identities over each other arises.

Third, the concept of fluidity relates to the fact that identities are not fixed, homogenous bounded, inflexible, nor easily defined. Therefore, the choice and content of identities may change temporarily or permanently. Otherwise, in Pierre Bourdieu's words: "the construction of collective identity is a process instead of a 'thing' and therefore changes constantly depending on the symbolico-material 'fields' of power" (In Jukarainen, 2003, p. 218). On the other hand, identities are consistent and show a high degree of duration.

Fourth, the last element described by Goff & Dunn is its constructedness. Identity in this sense is an artificial creation that is shaped by diverse societal actors. The concept of 'invention of tradition' describes this construction and the implications of different emphasis of certain events and places in the historic sphere. The so-called 'Lieux de Mémoire' (Nora, 2001), on the other hand, are considered the most important historic events and places for a nation, state or any other group. The concept of 'Lieux de Mémoire' shows that history itself is constructed, as certain events are emphasized, whereas others are neglected in (official) history writing. As we see, identity and history are intimately connected and hardly separable.

The national identity is arguably the probably strongest identity nowadays and serves as a prime example with regard to the historical use of alterity, multiplicity, fluidity and constructedness, as well as a comparatively low degree of contestation. Next section will approach the national identities and its context of the nation state by considering the role identity has played in it. Official documents, such as constitutions, statistics and political speech, are a key source of identity politics.

2.3. The Use of History in National Identities

Identity politics, or the 'affective dimension' (Laffan, 1996, p. 83), is a crucial element in the history of the modern state. In the form of „overarching but elusive" (Laffan, 1996, p. 84) nationalism, patriotism or any other form of "close attachment to one's own country" (Jukarainen, 2003, p. 219), national identity has acted and is still acting as legitimizing factor of the most successful political construct, the nation state. Anderson's (1992) famous work on nations as imagined communities illustrates this idea. However, looking at the other side of identity construction, one has to consider the actors involved. As Jukarainen (2003) points out, "nation construction and national identity formation have constituted the sphere of activity of a particular intellectual minority, a politically powerful elite" (p. 219). It is obvious that history writing requires historians, as an academic/educational elite, to reconstruct history impartially and in a scholarly and scientific manner without state interference (Karlsson, 2007, pp. 8-9). In former communist regimes in Eastern Europe, however, historians have served the state in advancing their ideological agenda by focusing their historical works on solely specific periods of history extending to antiquity and the Middle Ages. Thereby, history has the potential of becoming manipulated and being replaced by a political truth and being politicized (Karlsson, 2007, p. 9). In that sense, the writing of history often represents the accepted truth of past events for future generations. This involves the ideological use of history in which the grand narrative of history gains increased currency in the formation of national identities offering "millennial perspectives of ethnic consciousness and national independences" and is building upon a system of values that sustains legitimacy (Karlsson, 2007, p. 12). Hence, concentrating on specific periods in history or on the grand narrative has the function to mobilize and to influence. On the other hand, the non-use of history serves another legitimization function, namely, rationalizing unlawful activities or even at utterly ignoring entire moments of time in history and thus hindering it from accessing into collective memory of individuals (Karlsson, 2007, p. 13). Wingfield (2000) refers this process as a collectively organized remembering and forgetting (p. 246). Accordingly, a total sum of memories forms a social construct that is anchored within cognitive and emotional patterns that "can easily be retrieved, manipulated and mobilized on a collective level" (Karlsson, 2007, p. 10).

Constitutions are used as an important tool for promoting collective identity by elites. This idea is emphasized by McGoldrick (2000), pointing out that, "constitutions and international law are used to accommodate national identity or identities" (p. 13). Moreover, a definition of constitution can be helpful in better understanding this issue:

> "In classical terms constitutions are expressions of orders and values. They constitute a defining point of reference for the state, its people or peoples and its citizens. A constitution may formally locate sovereignty. It is often a reflection, faithful or otherwise, of national identity and of the national obsession with that concept. One of the first necessities of a new state is to adopt or approve its constitution by some internal legitimizing process" (p. 14).

Similarly, political speech is intensively used with reference to identity. It thus functions as a manifestation, but also as a shaping factor of identity: "Through discourse, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different societal groups and those who interact with them." In relation to that, Wodak *et al.* (2009) suggest several ways, in which speech is creating social realities, including the establishment and termination of groups and relations (p. 8). However, more importantly,

> "analysis of discursive construction of national identity... serve to uncover manipulative maneuvers in politics and the media, which aim at linguistic homogenization or discriminatory exclusion of human beings, and to heighten awareness of the rhetorical strategies which are used to impose certain political beliefs, values, and goals ... [and to] throw light on the largely contingent and imaginary character of nation and to sharpen awareness of dogmatic, essentialist and naturalizing conceptions of nation and national identity" (p. 9).

In sum, the function of history is to shape a historical consciousness that is worth being protected as a collective memory or collective national identity in which figures, periods and places connect the individual with the historic narrative. As we can see, "[t]he nation state developed not just as a boundary creating or maintaining device, but as a system of symbols and shared identity" (Laffan, 1996, p. 84). This shared identity is highly influenced by official speech. The following two parts will each analyze in how elites have employed the aforementioned tools in constitution and political speech in the historical process of identity construction in Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

3. Writing of History in Slovakia

3.1. Introduction

In this part of the paper, I will look through particular historical periods and will demonstrate that the construction of national identity indeed is firmly connected to a political (re) interpretation of history and hence influences the process of history writing. This was very popular and served as one of the basic tools for the political and intellectual elites of Slovakia to legitimize their actions and behavior, to raise the self-consciousness, self-identity of the Slovak population. I will observe how national identity has been constructed to legitimize the actions of the political elite in different time periods of Slovakia's history.

This section on the national identity formation of the Slovakian case is structured as follows: the turning point of the modern Slovak national identity formation was the end of communism in 1989. Accordingly, Slovakia gained its autonomy and recognition as an independent nation that led to formal political independence as a nation state in 1992. Hence, I divided the Slovakia's case into two – Before and After the Velvet Revolution – parts. The period before the Velvet Revolution is, in turn, structured into the following sub-periods. Firstly, 19th century until the end of the First World War is considered briefly, since it deals with the establishment of a particular Slovak identity, which is exemplified mainly through linguistic culture in negative integration against the strong Hungarian influence. Secondly, in the post-World-War-I-period until the beginning of communism, I will discuss some more vivid examples in order to strengthen my position. I will examine Czechoslovakism (the official doctrine of Czechoslovakia) with the central focus on its use in the constitution, official statistics, and scholarly works. Thirdly, the communist era will be reviewed concisely. In the second half – shortly after the Velvet Revolution – I will argue that the raising of the feelings of national identity shortly before the independence (before "Velvet Divorce") was artificially created by the Slovak government. And finally, I will focus on the manifestations of identity in independent Slovakia (after "Velvet Divorce").

3.2. Before the Velvet Revolution

Importance of Language & Attitudes in the Foundation of Slovak Identity

During this time period, codification of Slovak language (19th century) and Slovaks' attitude towards Hungarians are relevant examples. Both of them are tightly connected to the Magyarisation process that aimed to assimilate all non-Hungarian minorities of Kingdom of Hungary into one nation. The main reason for the codification of Slovak language was survival of Slovak culture from disappearance and from assimilation into Hungarian culture. As a consequence, the Slovaks developed a feeling of superiority over Magyars. Accordingly, the Slovak intellectuals codified the language and, thus, linguistically deviated Slovak from Hungarian. Slovak attitude towards Hungarians was artificially invented by elites in a process of negative integration *vis-à-vis* the Hungarians. Thus, such artificial linguistic and behavioral separations served to create a collective identity among the Slovaks under the Hungarian rule. Thus, already in the 19th century Slovak elites created a linguistic differentiation that can be understood as a synthetic form of identity creation.

Czechoslovakia from World War I until Communism

In order to unite the two different ethnic groups of Slovaks and Czechs and to govern the new country successfully, the political establishment of the newly formed state needed one unified ideology for one national identity. Accordingly, since the creation of Czechoslovakia, the government started an "aggressive" Czechoslovak rhetoric. Many attempts were made "in order to fit the conception of a Czechoslovak nation with two … tribes" (Bakke, 2004, p. 25). Hence, Slovak language can be regarded as an important element in the creation of a uniform national identity. These attempts can be found in official Czechoslovakian documents, including the constitution, official statistics and scholarly work, as exemplified in the following sections.

Constitution & Language

The 1920 Constitution of Czechoslovakia states "We, the Czechoslovak nation", indicating that leaders tried to legitimatize the creation of the new country on the highest legal level, in order to unite the Czech and Slovak people into a common nation. With regard to language, as such, the Czechoslovakists reckoned that one nation could not have two languages, that is why they often restricted the role of the Slovak language and, in turn, "emphasize[d] how the national unity had survived despite linguistic separation" (Bakke, 2004, p. 34). Other elites viewed Slovak as an artificially created language. According to them, it was a reaction to Magyarisation policies, and no substantive cultural difference was at its root. The Slovak nationalists strictly opposed such interpretation of history. They believed that "the codification of Slovak [language] was only the final step in a natural [national] development" (Bakke, 2004, p. 35).

Statistics & Academic Use

In 1921 (and later in 1930) population censuses, the term "Czechoslovak" for the first time appeared among "Czech" and "Slovak" in official Czechoslovakian statistics. These attempts imagining the Czechs and the Slovaks as one unified Czechoslovak nation were common in other official Czechoslovak statistical documents as well (Bakke, 2004, p. 27).

Scholars contributed to Czechoslovak national identity-building process. They pointed towards shared values and contacts between the two cultures throughout history. Furthermore, the Great Moravia was depicted as an ancestor of Czechoslovakia and as the cultural origin of a common statehood (Bakke, 2004, p. 29). Therefore, it can be seen that construction of history has served as a unifying factor between both nations.

Indeed, the interpretations mentioned before were used to support a formation of a shared Czechoslovakian identity. Consequently, the Czechoslovakism ideology was purely a political project and had two roles in the Czechoslovak drama: firstly, legitimizing the creation of the new nation-state; and secondly, making the positions of the Czechs and the Slovaks more steadfast against large German and Hungarian minorities. In sum, its function was to strengthen a Czechoslovak national identity.

Communism

The attempts of history re-writing for political reasons are very characteristic for communists in general, and Slovakia was no exception. Everything that was not suitable for communism was changed, re-written or re-interpreted either by force or voluntarily. Czechoslovakism and Czechoslovak identity were radically opposed, and, therefore, deleted from official statements and terminology. Since the communism times, "Czechoslovak" as a national category was deleted from all communist statistics. The 1960 constitution starts with "The people of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic" rather than "We, the Czechoslovak nation" as it was formulated in the 1920 Constitution of Czechoslovakia. This shift shows how different regimes have used official documents to influence people's identity and to legitimize their power.

> Another aspect is the communist oppression of "unwanted" scholars and intellectuals. One of the most illustrating examples is the case of Ľudovít Štúr, who contributed extensively to Slovak national identity-building. Due to unacceptability of his position to the communist regime, his works were restricted (Skobla, 2001, p. 184-185). However, as some authors believe, "ideological position of the [communist] regime towards Stur was rather ambivalent" (Bombik, 1995 in Skobla, 2001, p. 186) as he was tolerated in some occasions. Skobla (2001) concludes that this "may remind [us of] notorious propaganda practices – what happened to be uncomfortable for the regime was simply neglected" (p. 187). Hence, emphasizing certain scholars' works with certain narratives while prohibiting others is another proof of how the communist government was manipulating historical facts and using them for its own agenda.

3.3. Velvet Revolution & its Aftermath

Leading up to the "Velvet Divorce"

The striving for independence of Slovakia was not the only event of the secession process in the beginning of the 1990s. The dissolution of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself were at their peak at the time. Post-communist ideology- and identity-building process became a very widespread phenomenon in post-communist countries (Esbenshade, 1995). Slovakia was again no exception: from the feelings of cultural, ethnical or national distinctiveness to nationalistic movements to territorial separation from a larger state. In sum, a continuation of active promotion of national identity after independence has proven to be the major process with regard to identity politics. Keeping in mind the peaceful character of the transition, compromise was achieved by political establishment of the Czechs and the Slovaks, referred as a "Velvet Divorce". But it is interesting to examine how the Slovak national identity and feelings of distinctiveness from the Czechs was constructed in the process.

The socio-economic situation deteriorated after the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The government could mitigate the situation by promoting the nationalistic ideas. As Malová and Mego (2000) point out,

> "[if] the perception (real or imagined) of a forthcoming socio-economic crisis is strong enough among the people, politicians and political forces may then begin to use ideas of nationalism as a distraction. These feelings of nationalism can, in turn, be intensified if political competitors use them to gain more popular support. Political groups and politicians may exploit popular nationalistic feelings, especially when the socioeconomic situation is in crisis… [The] searching for scapegoats is a simple solution to distract attention from socioeconomic problems, especially in a multiethnic state" (p. 357-358).

Indeed, the Slovak government actively depicted the Czechs as a scapegoat for the deterioration of the economy and other social problems in Slovakia. It seems logical to suggest that the Slovak government tried to artificially raise a nationalistic mood, blaming the Czechs for creating economic problems, and underlined the distinction between the Czechs and the Slovaks to legitimatize a new Slovak authority. These attempts contributed to the creation of a sense of Slovak self-distinctiveness and collective identity.

After "Velvet Divorce"

The Slovak government's strategy did not change in the years of independence. However, this time it was not led by predominantly economic issues. Shortly after the "Velvet Divorce", Slovakia needed to strengthen its national identity. Indeed, the country was suffering from identity crisis that appeared after the end of communism, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the consequential evanescence of Czechoslovakism. Slovak identity was weak and diffused during last decades. This problem seemed even more serious in the presence of large minorities concentrated especially in the country's south that threatened the unity of the country's common identity. The easiest and most commonly used way for identity strengthening has been the attraction of Slovaks' minds on history and other events and things that glorified the Slovaks. Political elites in the 1990s strongly focused on history, ethnicity, symbols, etc. Indeed, as Malová and Mego (2000) argue,

> "certain sentiments and symbols help to solidify national identity. These often include myths that typically refer to territory or ancestry as the basis for the political community" (p. 365).

They started to promote and strengthen the national identity of the Slovaks by various ways, including the condemnation of former Czechoslovakia and its ideology (Malová & Mego, 2000, p. 358). During Czechoslovakian time, the Slovaks always felt themselves inferior to the Czechs and always claimed more autonomy. That is why it is not surprising that Czechoslovakism was not perceived as an ideal type identity by Slovakians.

Apart from this reinterpretation, reassessment of their own history and glorification of certain historical events became an essential part of construction of national identity. Printing the symbols recalling the Great Moravian time on the modern Slovak currency underlines this point. Malová and Mego (2000) argue that "holidays, awards, banknotes", as well as "public monuments, folk festivals, and commemorations of important historical dates", that took place in Slovakia after independence were the "typical celebrations" and "forms of [support]" of a newly created Slovak national identity (p. 366). At the same time, all the events or symbols or heritage that at any extent

reflected the Czechoslovakian time, were deleted from the new Slovak official and non-official symbols (p. 369).

Territory and religion also played a significant role in the identity construction process. For example, there are symbols of mountains in modern Slovakian flag meaning the three different peaks that were, according to the Slovakian narrative, historically situated on Slovak soil. Moreover, in the Slovak national anthem "Lightning over the Tatras", main focus, apart from national movements and awakening periods, is on territory. In addition, besides territorial elements, we can find religious signs on official symbols as well (e.g. a double cross on the emblem) which were not permitted during communism era and does, therefore, stand in sharp contrast to the old Czechoslovak symbolism.

The Constitution

The Constitution played an important symbolic role in shaping the identity in different historical periods. It greatly contributed to modern Slovak identity formation as well. We read in the preamble of the new Slovak Constitution, adopted on September 1, 1992:

> "We, the Slovak nation, mindful of the political and cultural heritage of our forebears, and of the centuries of experience from the struggle for national existence and our own statehood, in the sense of the spiritual heritage of Cyril and Methodius and the historical legacy of the Great Moravian Empire, proceeding from the natural right of nations to self-determination".

We see some important points here. Firstly, the emphasis on different ethnic groups was made to foster a distinct Slovakian identity that, in turn, helped to legitimize a Slovakian statehood, and an independent and sovereign Slovakia. Secondly, the use of the idea of a Slovak nation, (as opposed to the older "Czechoslovak nation") focuses on "spiritual heritage … and the historical legacy of the Great Moravia Empire" and permanent "struggle for national existence and our own statehood." Finally, the Slovakian situation shows how changing or reassessment of facts and focusing on particular events are used by the political establishment in identity construction process.

3.4. Conclusion

The above-mentioned examples have strengthened my argument that history (re)interpretation through national symbols, ideology, constitution and language have been actively promoted by the Slovak academic and political elites to construct a common identity. A self-distinctive and collective identity was shaped in the identity formation process in the 19th century. After World War I, Slovak identity was an integrated part of Czechoslovakism. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, history served as a means for Slovaks to remember their historic national identity through a grand narrative. Changing the historical facts and fitting them to the situation, changing symbols, traditions and official documents in order to legitimize regime and behavior, glorification of historical events, stressing or ignoring linguistic differences, etc. were commonly used strategies and tools of the political elites of Slovakia at all times.

4. Political Construction of National Identities in the Czech Republic

4.1. Introduction

The political construction of national identity through history writing in the Czech communist past has been decisively steered and controlled by the communist party system. The aim was to build popular support and legitimize the existence of the new political elite that was installed by the Soviet Union by a coup d'état in 1948. Through the use of history the political establishment sought to (re)create a system of values and a positive image of its self by socially organized forgetting (exclusion, suppression, and repression) and socially organized remembering (grand narrative, invention, symbols etc.). It thereby intended to shape a specific Czech consciousness or national identity by focusing on certain historical events, spaces, and actors.

With the end of communism following the Velvet Revolution (1989) and the Velvet Divorce (1992), the Czechs had to come to terms with their communist past and had to adapt to a new political reality. With the advent of

liberal democracy in the newly formed Czech Republic political actors continued to construct a national identity thereby politicizing it in a similar way as the political elite within the Communist regime. The following examples are demonstrative for this claim.

4.2. End of World War II – Fall of Iron Curtain

Grand Narrative & the Other

As accentuated by Karlsson (2007) "the ideological use of history is not on facts [...], but on the grand narrative", and focuses on political developments, which generate new grand narratives that form the basis for new national identities (p.12). Accordingly, Czech national identity is also built in contrast to "*the other"*, e.g. the Sudeten German minority in Czechoslovakia. At the end of WWII the communist political elite used feelings of resentment against the German ethnic group. They constructed a negative image of the Germans linking them to the Nazi occupation in 1938 (Brodsky, 2007, p. 13; Wingfield, 2000, p. 246), and hence constructed a reason for mass expulsions of Germans, thereby creating "a convincing popular narrative linking the 'acceptable' past with the reconstructed postwar state" (Wingfield, 2000, p. 246). Wingfield (2000) relates this method of political construction of national identity to the concepts of socially organized forgetting (exclusion, suppression and repression) and socially organized remembering (the deliberate invention, emphasis, and popularization of elements of consciousness). The author explains that "the major goal of governmental policy at all levels was to legitimize the new 'purer' postwar Czechoslovak nation-state" (p. 246).

Hence, the communist political elite's objective was to rationalize its policy of expulsions while, on the other hand, aimed at inventing or reinforcing the image of the other, the Sudeten Germans. While focusing on the idea of vilification of the Germans, this can also be seen as a strategy of legitimating the ambiguous role of the Communist regime within this period of time.

Nevertheless, the way the Communist elite sought to rationalize its repressive actions were soon interpreted differently, at least within Czech intellectual circles (Updike, 2009).

Constitution & Language

Constitutions and language are also relevant factors to be considered in the analysis of the political construction of Czech national identity. Indeed, the representation of the other was reinforced by the Communists by prohibiting the use of the expression Sudeten. The Constitutions of 1948 and 1960 incorporated this illustration. Firstly, by referring to the constitution of 1948 to the successful victory of the Czechs against their former feudal exploiters, the German Habsburg and then, secondly, in the constitution of 1960 that denied Germans the recognition as an ethnic Group in its own right (Wingfield, 2000, p. 256).

While language is employed in contrast to *the other*, it is also an important characteristic of Czech national identity, which has "been cultivated and developed, along with Czech historiography, ethnography, art, and literary criticism" (Vlachova & Rehakova, 2009, p. 255; Bibo, 1998). Under Nazi occupation in 1938, however, Czech language was replaced by German and when the Communists came into power in 1945 children were required to study Russian.

Symbols & Values

Values & Symbols constitute important objects of memories to which cognitive emotional patterns can be activated on a collective level and can hence be employed for socially organized remembering and for an artificial creation of national identity.

The political elite sought to construct a Czech national identity that integrated communist values as for instance the worker state for a planned economy, thereby emphasizing the importance of fraternal affiliation to the Soviet Union. In that respect, the Soviet socialist heroes, in particular Marx, Lenin and Stalin were symbols of the communist state. At the same time Czechs' traditions and heroes were kept alive, and the then present- time political actors heralded in order to build a collective historic narrative supporting and legitimizing the governing communist regime (Wingfield, 2000, p. 265).

Also, the political elite sought to create a positive relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks (ibid, p. 247). This was done in a symbolic manner by establishing new national holidays, inventing new public spaces and names, celebrating memorial ceremonies, and building monuments in order to implement a positive role of the Czechs and Slovaks during WWII into their memory and to emphasize the idea of a shared collective national identity (ibid, pp. 248-249). Respectively, the communist government built artefacts of memory that according to researchers in this field are "ideal targets for defacement, destruction, or removal in times of historical contestation" (ibid, p. 260).

The 1968 Velvet Spring & its Actors

The Prague Spring manifested Czechs' real perception and attitude towards the communist political elite. Feelings and emotions, which culminated in the 1968 Prague Spring, illustrated their resentment of the Communist party system, perceiving it as an oppressive power (ibid, p. 265). The Velvet Spring is also exemplary for the failure of the Communist regime to build a convincing popular support through identity politics. Accordingly, in 1989 "the government's complete loss of legitimacy and, most importantly, a benevolent international situation, ignited the Velvet Revolution" (Baer, 2008, p. 315).

The Communist regime, however, continued to exercise tight control on the Czech population and its intellectual elite with apparent consequences on history writing. Historians felt the impact of state control and as underlined by Rupnik (1981), "official historiography reverted to a highly ideological orthodoxy, an independent historiography", and subsequently "historians have become perhaps the single most persecuted category of intelligentsia" (p. 166). They were expelled from their research institutes or jailed. Herewith, the political elite wanted to ensure that the interpretation of the two decades preceding the Velvet Spring was directed towards their ends (ibid).

On the other hand, a parallel society emerged from the intelligentsia, a so-called parallel polis as suitably termed by the Czech philosopher Vaclav Belohradsky, in particular "imprisonment and trials, and were publicly shunned by the country's newspapers and media" (Baer, 2008, p. 308). Czech literature became an instrument of a "non-literary end, promoting or challenging official ideology" (Bilek, 2009). One prominent figure in that respect is the Czech writer Milan Kundera who in 1967 was campaigning for freedom of writers in order to preserve a distinct Czech national identity. As a consequence of his involvement in the Prague Spring, he lost his teaching position at the Prague Film Academy, and was excluded from the Communist party. Further, his books were outlawed due to Communist censorship. Finally, he immigrated to France in 1975 (Prague-Life, 2009).

Another important character in this period of time was Vaclav Havel. As other dissidents of the regime, a renowned philosopher and play writer has been imprisoned several times. He advocated for democratic values, a civil society and the idea of a new and free citizenship. He aimed at directing the Czechs towards an open and democratic society with free press and human rights (Rupnik, 2008, p. 5).

4.3. After the End of the Cold War

The fall of communism in 1989 initiated the peaceful transition from a totalitarian steered society to a liberal democracy with its innate values of freedom and democracy built on the civic principle. The latter constitutes an important element of Czech national identity formation by the political elite.

The Civic Principle & the Czech Constitution

After the fall of Communism in 1989, intellectuals, primarily consisting of former dissidents of the Communist regime arranged a democratic government in order to prepare the country for its path towards a free-market economy and free and democratic civil society. The most prominent figure among them was the Czechs' first President Vaclav Havel who promoted the civic principle (Bryant, 2000). The latter as argued by Kubis et al. (2005), soon became «one of the leitmotivs in the attempt to re-build the Czech national identity» (p. 148). "It, thus can be regarded as a vehicle to bring the Czechs back to Europe, as a European nation-state thereby fostering a political culture based on democratic principles" (ibid, p. 148). This idea is being represented in the new Czech constitution and underscores the image in which the "free and equal citizen provides the foundation of the state" (Nedelsky, 2003, p. 90). This concept is further supported in statements given by Czech Prime Minister (1992–1997) Vaclav Klaus and President

Vaclav Havel (1993–2003). While the former expressed that "the foundation of the state is the free citizen" (ibid, p. 94), the latter communicated this principle already previously in the Charter of 77 dissidents:

> "Calling for a return to meaningful citizenship, whereby the government's legitimacy derives from the consent of the entire citizenry and its power is limited by the civil rights of the new individual" (ibid, p. 93).

The civic idea can hence be regarded as a vital element in the political construction of Czech national identity. Another instrument was related to the *other* and continued to be represented by the Sudeten German as will be demonstrated in the following part.

The Civic Principle & the Germans

The Sudeten Germans that were vilified under the Communist regime, continue to be used by the Czech political elite to build a national identity in contrast to the other. The case of treating the Sudeten as the other has been revived by Vaclav Klaus in 1996 demonstrating a political continuity by staying away from employing the term Sudeten at all in his comments during the expulsion controversy that emerged in 1996 (Wingfield, 2000, p. 256). Vaclav Havel on the other hand was more cautious when planning the ratification of a friendship treaty with Germany in 1998. However, controversial inclusion of the Benes decrees in it sparked fierce reactions, in particular by the Communist Party blaming Havel of "excessive servility towards German pressure groups" (Nicole, 2005, p. 12). The German Sudeten issue was hence included into party politics of the Czech Republic and became a vital factor in preparing the country for the EU membership. The European Commission and the European Parliament criticized the attitude of the Czech political elite. The latter nevertheless misused this subject in confirming their determination to protect their national interests against outside, particularly from German interference, which hence stirred resentment between the Czech public and the German minority group. In 2002, the head of the ruling Communist Party exacerbated the issue in calling the Sudeten German "traitors and Hitler's fifth column".

In the political construction of Czech national identity, the concept of socially organized remembering and forgetting is the next instrument that provides for political consistency with the Czech Republic's past, as next section illustrates with the example of the Institute of the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ISTR).

The Institute of the Study of Totalitarian Regimes & Politicization of History

As formulated in the founding law act of the ISTR in 2007: «Those who do not know their past are condemned to repeat it» (ISTR, 2007). It is therefore the purpose of this organisation to examine and remember the consequences of the Communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes.

In recent years, however, the ISTR has increasingly been accused by historians of politicizing history. Several controversies were discussed in the Czech media, especially the cases of Milan Kundera and the Masin Brothers. The latter were blamed by the ISTR of having assassinated politicians from the former communist political elite. And the former charged by the ISTR of having been an informer of the Communist regime and of having revealed the existence of a western secret agent to the Communist police force in 1950 (Axisglobe, 2008; Konviser, 2008). Some historians at the ISTR have raised their concerns about the validity of these accusations and have submitted their notices by accusing the institution's activities of "politicising of history from the very beginning" (Axisglobe, 2008). Historians and intellectuals criticize the fact that these accusations are build on one single document written by the Czech Communist Police (IWG, 2008), and remind that the Czech intelligence service had a department of misinformation that was notorious for the 'artificial' construction of evidence. Therefore, even policy makers and civil society groups have their reservations with the ISTR because "personal information can be selectively used to discredit political opponents" (Dujisin, 2008). Accordingly, critics demand some restructuring of the ISTR, particularly because of its importance of socially organizing collective memory (Rosca, 2006).

In sum, it can be stressed that policy makers continue to influence the interpretation of historical events and to use history to serve political ends, and are hence unduly politicizing academic research.

Vaclav Klaus & the European Union

The Vaclav Klaus' speech of February 2009 in the European Parliament is important for the purpose of this study. In previous years, Vaclav Klaus proved to be the personification of the Czech Euroscepticism, and an advocator of a

neo-liberal agenda, which can partially explain his attitudes towards the European Union. Hanley (2004) argues that Czech identity serves "to legitimize the neo-liberal aspects of their program. Such reinterpretations of Czech identity and tradition usually stressed Czechs' supposed cultural affinity with neo-liberalism and the free-market" (p. 521). It can hence be seen as a strategy to mobilize the Czech electorate, or as Hanley explains it, as a "self- interested desire to preserve clientalistic networks threatened by accession" (ibid, p. 515).

It is no wonder, therefore, that Vaclav Klaus emphasized in his speech the necessity of removing counterproductive barriers in the economy, and to set up an economic system that promotes prosperity. He also accused the EU of disproportional intervention in the economy and supporting an economic system that is suppressing the market. Vaclav Klaus' statements had the function to mobilize the Czechs by addressing their feelings and fears, thereby mobilizing, and influencing them to support his neo-liberal agenda. Klaus did this also by focusing on their inner wishes, and longings for human freedom, prosperity and democracy. Therefore, he addressed their collective memories while linking Czechs' national identity to a historic narrative that can be traced back for many centuries - talking about the "historic centre of Czech statehood, from one of the important places where European thinking, European culture and European civilization has emerged and developed" (Klaus, 2009). Klaus further drew a borderline by pointing to the European Union's democratic deficit by stressing the large distance between Czech citizens and EU politics, the loss of democratic accountability, the decision-making of the unelected. In that respect he again concentrated on the collective memories of past fears that according to his rhetoric were re-emerging with an European Union that did not duly respect the will of its member states' citizens.

Klaus' rhetoric resembles his Euro-realism attitude towards the EU integration in 2001, when stressing the necessity to preserve an individual national identity by prioritizing Czech national interests. He is thus taking the construction of national identity in the field of party politics to advance a specific political agenda (Nicole, 2005. p. 18), and is therefore politicizing Czech national identity and history.

4.4. Conclusive points

The political creation of a distinct Czech national identity as has been revealed in the preceding analysis served the political elite to legitimize its political regime. Czech national identity has been shaped by (re)creating a historic narrative or a potential enemy in contrast to which identity is being formed. Moreover, preserving and creating new social identities, cultural values and symbols are political instruments that aim not only at mobilizing and influencing, but also at remembering and forgetting. Indeed, as argued by the French historian Ernest Renan, "Forgetfulness and even historical errors are essential factors of a nation" (Wingfield, 2000, p. 257). This process of political construction of identity eventually leads to a reinterpretation of historic facts and hence also rewriting of history. This has been true to the Czech Republic's communist past, and is similarly a common practice in contemporary Czech politics.

5. Conclusion

As demonstrated, the construction of national identity in the cases of the Czech Republic and Slovakia has been driven by political necessities to legitimize the actions and past mistakes of the respective regimes. The political and academic/educational elites reinterpreted history and influenced the writing of history by socially organized remembering and forgetting. In terms of remembering, a positive narrative of the evolution and origin of the nation-state was linked to the values and norms of the existing regime. Symbols and the invention of new public spaces and names supported this positive image. Constitutions were also an important element in the process of shaping a distinct national identity by legally determining a unifying language, and by setting out important principles and values.

Another vital aspect that has been included in constitution and speeches was the (re)creation of *the other*, in contrast to which a national identity was strengthened. In these processes, the political elite (re)interpreted history and influenced history writing.

The reinterpretation of history, however, was also carried out in a more negative manner by acts of exclusion, suppression, and repression against historians and members of the dissident intelligentsia.

Both in Czech and Slovak cases, I have found a grand narrative linked to specific ethnic groups. The German minority served as an identifying factor in the Czech Republic, whereas, the same role in Slovakia was attributed to the Hungarians in the early national identity formation process. The image of "*the other"* as a political tool has been consistently found throughout the cases and respective periods.

In both cases, language (both legal/constitutional and political) was a major expression of identity. Moreover, elites tended to link different periods via a grand narrative in order to adjust their political agenda.

Coming back to James Young's words from the introduction, I have outlined the motives of memory, being primarily used by various political elites in the formation of a national identity. It indeed seems true that collective identity (and hence, memory) is never shaped in a vacuum, but is build upon political legitimization efforts.

Demonstrating how the political elites constructed respective national identities to legitimize their actions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Czechoslovakia, it is logical to conclude the construction of national identity is indeed tightly connected to a political (re-)interpretation of history and the process of history writing.

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