“The Meaning of Czech History” – a neverending post-colonial story?
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The debate on “the meaning of Czech history”, which started with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s 1895 book *The Czech Question,* but which did not break out properly until 1910-1913, has been added to by a number of key Czech intellectuals over more than a hundred years, and is still considered to be one of the “symbolic centres” (to use the term of Miloš Havelka) of the debates on Czech identity.[1] At the same time, it was already seen at that time by the young generation (the very generation that was to become decisive for the intellectual climate of the First Republic) as problematic, obscure and full of intellectual errors on both sides.[2] This division remained present throughout the debate and after – the most significant authors became involved in it, but at the same time it provoked a reserved distance. It became a symbol of self-reflection and obscurity, but at the same time also a massive and continually growing historical document.

After 1989 the dispute was perceived as something of an antiquarian matter, of interest mostly to academic researchers and the political fringe. The dispute and its various continuings was preserved in an extensive and careful edition of some of the primary texts by the historian and sociologist Miloš Havelka. The first part of the dispute, in particular, was also covered several times and recently placed in the central and eastern European context by Balacz Trenscenyi et al.[3] The following paper will be an attempt at an interpretation and close reading of selected key authors of the dispute from the point of view of questions freely relating to post-colonial theory. Its ambition is to reconstruct the writings of intellectuals as discursive sources for the self-understanding of the Czechs, and to ask what the dispute may tell us about starting points that may influence our current thinking on national identity. It will therefore be a reading that will go close (possibly too close) to the texts, and which will try to create an interpretational dialogue, but at the same time it will do so with the awareness of a considerable distance. It will thus not be a historical reconstruction, but an attempt at dialogue with texts that – often mediated in various ways – still affect our present thought.[4]

Motivation and background questions

[1] Cf. Havelka, Miloš: *Dějiny a smysl*, Praha: NLN 2002. Cf. also Havelka, Miloš: A Hundred Years of the „Czech Question“ and The Czech Question a Hundred Years On, *Czech Sociological Review*, III, (1/1995), pp. 7-19.

[2] Cf. Kučera, Martin: *Pekař proti Masarykovi*, Praha: Ústav TGM, 1995.

[3] Cf. Havelka, Miloš: *Dějiny a smysl. Akcenty a posuny české otázky 1895–1989*, Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Havelka, Miloš (ed.): *Spor o smysl českých dějin l895 - l938*. Praha: Torst 1995; Havelka, Miloš: *Výklady a kritika.* Praha: FHS UK 2015, pp. 113-141; *History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Volume I: Negotiating Modernity in the “Long Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[4] The central position of the first five authors in the Czech discourse is indubitable. As far as Jan Tesař is concerned, his position is doubtful, given his role as a fringe author who after emigrating in 1980 refused most contact with the Czech environment, together with work in academic institutions (apart from making a copy of his archives for the University of Paris-Nanterre and providing the originals to the Moravian Land Museum). From the *enfant terrible* that he represented for the historical community in the 1960s (cf. Sommer, Vítězslav: *Angažované dějepisectví: Stranická historiografie mezi stalinismem a reformním komunismem*, 1950–1970. Praha: NLN – FF UK, Praha 2011) he has become more of a “cursed poet” of the discipline, with a fate untypical of a Czech historian. His resistance to the occupation and the subsequent hardline regime caused him to be imprisoned in 1969-70, 1971-76 and 1979-80, and in 1980 he emigrated. Abroad, he distanced himself from other Czech emigrés ad worked with Polish emigrés and the French far left (the Lambertistes). After the revolution he refused to come back to Prague, and decided, by living between Paris and Brezová pod Bradlom, to demonstrate distance from the Czechs and support for Slovakia, whose creation he believed was the result of the failure of Czechoslovakia caused by Czech arrogance. In 1999 Jan Křen was still able to write of Tesař that he was an “almost forgotten” author (Křen, Jan: Historik v pohybu, Praha: Karolinum 2012, p. 120). Afer the first edition of the Munich Complex (2000), however, he became part of the discussion and his insights have a certain influence. He has also inspired film workings of Czech history (the historical drama serie *The Czech Century* /2013/ and the comedy film *Lost in Munich* /2015/) probably more than the work of any other contemporary author devoted to contemporary history.

In trying to reconstruct the debate on the "meaning of Czech history" I am doing so with contemporary motivation. Its most contemporary and banal version asks why Czech society, in its concrete attitudes to Muslim refugees, for example, but also towards the European Union, is so similar to Polish and Hungarian society, and yet this similarity has such different political results. In the Czech Republic, for example, no one relevant has as yet declared a programme of non-liberal democracy, nor any other positive alternative project to liberal democracy. Instead, Czech nationalism is formulated defensively, although this does not make it any the less aggressive. And how should we explain the fact that even distinguished historians are taking part in the rise of Islamophobia, declinism and conspiratorial thinking?[5]

On a deeper level the question may be posed differently again: In all (and maybe not only European) national identities we seem to be able to see both a universalist and particularis/ethnicist pole. But how should we understand a situation where at the centre of national mythology there are also figures that are believed to – or genuinely do – represent total value universalism, to the extent that it sometimes seems to border on a messianic complex, while at the same time there exists in it an extensive and unreflected layer of nationalism and racism that according to some surveys is one of the largest in Europe?[6] How should we understand the last quarter-century of Czech history, which at first featured the practically consensus slogan "return to Europe", only for the Czech Republic to become, straight after EU entrance, one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the EU.[7]

A description of Czech nationalism was offered twenty years ago by Ladislav Holý. [8] Holý showed (specifically in the context of the breakup of Czechoslovakia) that Czech nationalism often displays

[5] The distinguished Czech historical functionary professor Jaroslav Pánek, for many years the chair of the Association of Historians of the Czech Republic, made a speech at the Islamophobic event "Platform of Deputies and Senators for the Preservation of European Culture" in November 2016, suggesting hypothesis that Merkel could invite in refugees in order to cover up an affair involving the Volkswagen company. Cf. http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/zpravy/kauzy/Apokalypsa-a-spirala-nekonecneho-vrazdeni-Vedec-prinesl-prevratne-vysvetleni-proc-Merkelova-pozvala-migranty-a-velmi-vazne-promluvil-o-tom-co-k-nam-prijde-464174 and Jaroslav Pánek, Evropská migrační krize a její historické kořeny, *Historia Scholastica* 2/2016, pp. 57-70. Seemingly the most successful history books of recent years are the collections edited by Charles University prorector and historian Martin Kovář and Egyptologist Miroslav Bárta on the "collapses and regenerations of civilisations and cultures", whose variously-inflected contributions are given an unambiguously alarmist and declinist dimension by the introductory chapters and the media appearances of the authors that frame them. Cf. Hudeček, Ondřej: Kolapsy a regenerace, review, *Dějiny - teorie - kritika* Vol. 11, no. 1 (2014), pp. 147-153, Homolka, Jakub: Něco překrásného se končí. Kolapsy v přírodě a společnosti, *Dějiny - teorie - kritika*, Vol. 11, no. 1 pp. 154-160; Císař, Ondřej: Kolapsy z jedné i z druhé kapsy, https://www.academia.edu/30717196/Kolapsy_z_jedn%C3%A9_i_druh%C3%A9_kapsy. One of the most significant Islamophobic columnists is the author of popular historical novels Vlastimil Vondruška, who frequently appears in the media as a historian. He did, indeed, study history, and until 1989 worked at the National Museum as the director of its historical section. Bažant, Vojtěch – Šorm, Martin: Rozhněvaný bílý dějepisec. Vlastimil Vondruška jako zručný řemeslník a populista, *Dějiny a současnost* 1/2017, pp. 51-52. Some of these references makes visible that there is also strong critical discourse confronting these historical or parahistorical discourses.

[6] Cf. for example http://theconversation.com/this-map-shows-what-white-europeans-associate-with-race-and-it-makes-for-uncomfortable-reading-76661.

[7] Cf. Mansfeldová, Zdena - Guasti, Petra (eds.): *Euroskepticismus a percepce evropského integračního procesu v České republice*. Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR 2012.

[8] Holy, L. (1996) *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. I consider Holý's to be the best account of the subject of Czech national identity, its quality remaining unaffected by his occasional interpretational and factual mistakes and not entirely consummate mastery of the historical debates, which are not the main subject of the book. In some passages the author is considerably indebted to the courageous and inspirational analyses of Petr Pithart, and at times these "second hand" parts can result in almost grotesque mistakes such as the labelling of Josef Pekař as a representative of "consciously non-nationalist historiography" (Holy 1996). Although Pekař was a great historian, and some of his interpretations of Czech history were deliberately formulated in the face of the predominant national historical mythology, he was at the same time, as we will see, a markedly conservative nationalist (and also an antisemite), who, against Masaryk's attempt to formulate the "idea" of the Czech nation in universalist and humanist terms, defended the thesis that the meaning of national history is the nation itself, which has existed since the 10th century (cf. Havránek, Jan: Pekařův nacionalismus. In: *Po cestách naléhavosti myšlení*. Praha: Filozofický ústav: pp. 159-167; Kučera, Martin: *Rakouský občan Josef Pekař: Kapitola z kulturně politických dějin*, Praha: Karolinum 2005, Strobach, Vít: Tělo, židovství, bolševismus a český nacionalismus (1918-1920), *Střed* 2 (2010), pp. 23-53). It is possible to say that Pekař represented an alternative to the dominant current of Czech national history as it was put forward in the 20th century, but Holý's book itself is the best proof that some Pekař's basic theses became the part of "undercurrent" of the Czech national consciousness, despite the fact that on a political level Pekař's opponent chalked up a formal win – see below.

itself in its very denial. It ascribes the nationalist label to others, as a token of backwardness (to the Slovaks in particular, in the context of Holý's research, but we might also add the Poles, Hungarians, the Balkan nations and so on) while identifying itself with universalist ideas, progressiveness and the West. It perceives nationalism, and above all some of its accompanying phenomena (national chauvinism, antisemitism), as essentially backwardness. Under this surface layer of self-denying nationalism, Holý nevertheless identifies the egalitarian, plebeian nationalism of the "little Czech", for whom an idea of the cultural or historical greatness of the Czech nation serves (in a considerably vague manner) as compensation and totem. While many Czech ethnographers have seen Holý as being too critical, some foreign reviewers have believed that Holý's description of this bottom layer of Czech nationalism is too kind: the small Czech, they say, is not displayed only in a mixture of good-naturedness and tavern coarseness, as the image of Švejk might connote, but also in a tendency to ethnicist violence. The truth about him was not told by the non-violent demonstrations of the Velvet Revolution, but in the racist attacks of skinhead gangs that appeared shortly thereafter.[9]

Holý's perspective – with Mills Kelly's critical corrections – will be one of my starting points. The other will be post-colonial theory, or rather some of its motifs, and also the question of why it has so far tended to avoid thematising the Czech experience.[10] The key selection of texts on post-colonial theory in relation to post-socialist Europe, *Post-Colonial Europe*, starts in geographic terms on the Czecho-Slovak border.[11] Even more eloquent is the image of the Czechs in what is probably the most important eastern European adaptation of post-colonial theory, Todorova's Balkanism. Commenting on the debate between Havel and Brodsky, after she points to the *"patronising manner"* and *"typical provincial way"* in which Havel polemicises with the Russian poet Brodsky, she helps herself out of her disgust with a verdict on the whole Czech nation: *"Maybe the issue does not deserve more than the verdict about the Czechs who, 'like other nations at the fringes of the West, were particularly susceptible to the siren song of this elitist snobbery,' convenient presumption of the unbridgeable cultural gap between West and East"*.[12] An apposite characterisation of Czech elitist snobbery is quoted – from an article on Utraquist intellectuals in the 16th century![13] Certainly, Czechs deserve almost any amount of criticism for their provincial self-fascination, and it is especially clear if we remember the atmosphere of the 1990s and the ideological function of central European rhetoric: we belong to you, to the West, unlike Russia and the Balkans…[14] But still – can such an anti-essentialist perspective as Todorova's use characteristics from the 16th century for a characterisation of the 20th century? Yes, we are stupid and provincial, but does she really think that our stupidity

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[9] Kelly, T. M. (1996) Review of Holy, Ladislav, The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. December, 1996, on-line: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=747. Cf. Daniel, Ondřej: *Násilím proti "novému biedermeieru": Subkultury a většinová společnost pozdního státního socialismu a postsocialismu*, Praha: Pistorius – Olšanská 2017.

[10] With several inconsistent exceptions. Cf. Sušová-Salminen, Veronika: Rethinking the Idea of Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective, in: Alenius, Kari - Fält, Olavi K. (eds.) Vieraan Rajalla, *Studia Historica Septentrionalia* 64, Rovaniemi 2012, pp. 191- 209. Sušová-Salminen, Veronika: Damnation of the Centre? Ambivalence and Cultural Diversity in the Notion of Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, in Alenius, Kari - Lehtola, Veli-Pekka (eds.): *Transcultural Encounters, Studia Historica Septentrionalia* 75, Rovaniemi 2015; Horký, Ondřej and Tomáš Profant (eds.): *Mimo Sever a Jih*. Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů 2016. Kratochvíl, Petr: Strukturální problémy české sociální vědy: O hybridním charakteru oboru mezinárodních vztahů, *Mezinárodní vztahy*, Vol. 51 no. 1, pp. 17-29; The debate on post-colonial theory in Poland is much more developed and interesting, cf. Thompson, Ewa: *Imperial Knowledge. Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Westport: Greenwood Press 2000; Thompson, Ewa: It is Colonialism After All: Some Epistemological Remarks, *Teksty Drugie* 1, pp. 67-81; Zarycki, Tomas: *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge 2014, Snochowska-Gonzales, Claudia: Post-colonial Poland – On an Unavoidable Misuse, *East European Politics & Societies* Vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 708-723.

[11] Pucherova, Dobrota – Gafrik, Robert: *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*, Leiden – Boston: Brill – Rodopi 2015; with quite marginal exception of one chapter on both Slovak and Czech travelogues of China during 1950ies.

[12] Todorova, Maria: *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, p. 147.

[13] David, Zdeněk, David, Bohemian Utraquism in the Sixteenth Century, *Communio Viatorum*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1993, cf. Todorova, Maria, op. cit., 2009, p. 223.

[14] Cf. Neumann, Iver B.: *Uses of the Other. The „East" in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999, pp. 143-160.

and provinciality has such a transhistorical dimension? Why do they hate us? And why do they hate us in such a weird way?

The opening questions asked in this paper are freely connected to themes and papers concerning post-colonial theory, but they are not formulated within its framework:

1. What relationship can be seen towards empires – firstly, toward the Russian and German imperia, and the related pan-nationalisms (pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism), secondly towards the Habsburg or Austro-Hungarian empire, and finally towards imperia to the west of the German border (French, British, America)?
2. What was their relationship towards the western knowledge/power nexus that has been a key Other for post-colonial theory analysis, and which we will characterise here as a matrix of mutually and partially-overlapping concepts of enlightenment/West/universalism/modernisation? How can we look at their answer from the perspective of Clifford Geertz's dichotomy, constructed for the nationalisms of de-colonialising nations (mostly after the Second World War): a dichotomy between epochalism and essentialism?[15] How did they relate to the non-western imperia (in particular to the Russian, or Soviet)?[16]
3. How, in this relationship, did they characterise their own nations and the surrounding CEE nations? Was there "nesting orientalism"[17] or auto-orientalisation?

These questions serve to orientate the analysis, but they cannot all be examined fully. They will be posed to six key participants in the dispute, plus two figures who prefigured it intellectually. The first group consists of a sociologist, a politician – Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850-1937), who led the anti-Habsburg revolution during World War and was later the first Czechoslovak president, the historian Josef Pekař (1870-1937), the musicologist, later Communist ideologue and politician Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878-1962), the philosopher Jan Patočka (1907-1977), the writer Milan Kundera (1926) and the historian Jan Tesař (1933). Alongside them, two other figures will be consulted: the historian and political leader František Palacký (1798-1876), who to a certain extent stood at the beginnings of the dispute, and Hubert Gordon Schauer (1862-1892), who gave the "Czech question" its most provocative formulation.

This approach inevitably has three problems: (1) the intellectual, moral and aesthetic problem of "jumping from peak to peak" and the "intellectual celebrities history", (2) the acceptance, reproduction and evocation of continuity despite total changes of context and (3) ideocentrism in a situation where there are no doubt far more influential explanations that may be put forward in answer to the question that motivated me to carry out this research.

These problems are the intellectual negative externalities of a conscious choice done by me as an author. The advantage of this choice, however, is the possibility of a differentiated view and a narrowed focus on the central authors, who at the same time had a considerable influence on others (another focus would probably not be possible if we wish to capture a similar level of both influence and breadth). The paper does not aspire to provide a complete explanation of the ambivalence of the Czech national identity – there are certainly more fundamental factors. However, the existence of discursive sources in the work and concepts of the great thinkers, which are reproduced in various ways and which "trickle down" into other spheres of social ideology, is, I believe, one of the sources that help us to analyze and describe this ambivalence. A reconstruction of a debate across 120 years (from the publication of the Masaryk´s *Czech Question*) or even 180 years (from the publication of the first part of Palacký's *History*) would be absurd, although it is sometimes articulated by the authors. The aim of this paper is more to provide a genealogy, one that accentuates the differences,

[15] Cf. Geertz, Clifford: *Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books 1973, pp. 234-254. Essentialism describes efforts to invent national identity based on autonomous tradition, epochalism modernizing nationalism. Geertz´s privileged examples are Gándhí for essentialism and Nehrú for epochalism.

[16] Cf. Thompson, Ewa: op. cit. 2000; Morozov, Viacheslav: *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*, Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

[17] Bakić-Hayden, Milica: Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia, *Slavic Review* Vol. 54 (1995), no. 4, pp. 917–931.

contingencies and hiatuses, but which nevertheless allows us, without fear of making a reconstruction that is cruelly presentist, to exploit some of the *"advantage… of history for life"* (in words of Nietzsche´s famous essay).

Prologue: Troubles with Palacký

If it is often said of the Czechs that they have been "made sick by their history", then this is certainly a formula that could be used of many other nations, especially in central and eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the position of the historian František Palacký (1798-1876) is undoubtedly central: he was the author of the first modern academic elaboration of Czech history, one to which Czech historians and culture are constantly returning, and he was also a political leader of key importance, labelled entirely in earnest the "father of the nation". His monumental *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* (1836-1867) remains, despite numerous later corrections, a fundamental source of Czech historical awareness, and his political texts have become key documents in Czech political thought. In the following five points I shall try to reconstruct, purely schematically, the basic problems that have arisen around his work:

- Although the Czech nation was predominantly Catholic (Protestantism not being legalised until the toleration patent of 1781), Palacký, a Protestant and a liberal, reconstructed Czech history in such a way that its apogee is in the Hussite revolution. This implied a relatively definite standpoint to the subsequent Protestant legacy and and to the forced re-Catholicisation as a period of decline and violence. The religious picture that actually existed in the 19th century then necessarily appeared to be the result of a cruel violation of the Czech soul in the 17th century. It created particularly resonant environment (together with close alliance of Catholic church and Habsburg state).
- Palacký's most quoted idea comes from the introduction to his history and is most often interpreted to mean that he is describing the sense of Czech history as "contact and conflict" between Czechs and Germans. However, the full wording of the relevant passage is as follows: *"The principal matter and the basic feature of all Bohemian-Moravian history are therefore, as we have seen, continuous contact and conflict between the Slav, Roman and German characters. But because the Roman character does not touch the Czechs directly but almost solely through Germandom, it can also be said that Czech history is in general based mainly on conflict with Germandom, in other words, on the Czechs' acceptance or rejection of German manners and regimen."* [18] To Palacký, Rome represents a certain type of civilisational perfection connected with centralisation – nevertheless, this unity contained in itself an element of degeneration.[19] "Germandom" brought a certain type of plurality, but one connected with violence, willfullness and a tendency to dominance. "Slavdom", on the other hand, is defined by Palacký in the spirit of Herderesque scientific prejudices as "*moderate",* and as its main characteristic he gives "*freedom and equality",* although these do not avoid "*obstinacy and stubbornness"*.[20] The alleged Slavonic democratism thus has a tendency to disintegration and anarchy, to a degeneration that is the mirror-image opposite of that which was embodied by Rome – its key manifestation is not centralisation, but, on the contrary, an absence of "*concordance"*.[21] If Slavdom is to maintain its distinctive character and not to give way either to its own disintegrative tendencies or to other nations, it has to take on Germanic elements of discipline, order and statehood. Pagan Slavonic prehistory, as the only period when the Germanic element did not yet have an influence, is for Palacký, as Činátl shows, a "*carefree childhood"* as he nostalgically describes it.[22] If, in Činátl's words, it is a

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[18] Palacký, František: *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě. Díl první. Od prvověkosti až do roku 1253*, Praha: L. Mazáč 1939, p. 19.
[19] Ibid, p. 18.
[20] Ibid, p. 19.
[21] Ibid. Cf. also the debate on the Slavonic element in Palacký in Havelka, Miloš: *Dějiny a smysl*, Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2001, pp. 37-42.
[22] Činátl, Kamil: Kamil: Palackého Dějiny a historická paměť národa. *Dějiny – teorie – kritika*, 1/2009, pp. 7-35, here p. 12.

"*retrospective utopia",* it is one precisely in its impossibility and unsustainability. The path to adulthood is that of "*contact and conflict*" with others, already adult, one of adopting adulthood without suppressing one's own distinctiveness. Just as the Czech lands are the geographical centre of Europe, the Czech synthesis of Germandom and Slavdom, as put forward by Palacký, is a sensible centre-ground compared to the Germanisation that was the fate of the Polabian Slavs, and the weak use – or lack of use – made of Germano-Roman civilisational impulses by the Poles and Russians. This synthesis, however, was a historical ideal, and the situation of the best epochs, not a constant state. Equilibrium can easily tip over into either extreme: Slavonic infantile anarchy or Germanic peremptory violence. The Germans, it was necessary to underline given the contemporary debates with German liberals, had not taught the Slavs freedom and equality – these were characteristics of the Slavs.[23] However, they represented in this concept the mediators of civilisational assets that had allowed them to preserve and cultivate freedom and equality. The key fruits of western civilisation were received by the Czechs via the German environment, and thus in a specifically German form. This naturally led the Germans to the false universalism of teachers who hand out general truths as their own – and to the political abuse of this role. In the words of Palacký in his role as political thinker, it led to "*thousand-year selfish attempts by the Germans to spread their rule over the Slavs, firstly in the guise of the Christian faith, then in the guise of teaching and civilisation in general"*.[24] It was a creative act of the Czech Slavs in this context not to reject the western substance altogether, alongside the teacher's willful (des)interpretation (and practical domininion), not to reject western values alongside German power, but to adopt the universalist core of those values in their own way, in a new fashion.

- Palacký as a politician refused, in 1848, an invitation to the Frankfurt Parliament. In the letter that he wrote giving his reasons, he said that Czechs were not Germans, and above all he stressed the significance of Austria as an independent entity between Germany and Russia, a bulwark against the Russian *"universal monarchy that is an incalculable and unutterable evil, a calamity without measure and end, which I, a Slav body and soul, would therefore in the interest of humanity mourn no less, even though it would call itself primarily a Slav one"*.[25] Austroslavism, in other words loyalty on the part of Austrian Slav to the Habsburg monarchy as a form of protection against both pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism (*"if the Austrian Empire had not already existed for a long time, then one would have to hurry in the interest of Europe and the interest of humanity to create it."*)[26] was not anchored only in the logic of balance. It also expected a national settlement within the Habsburg monarchy itself, some form of recognition of Czech statehood.[27] In 1867, however, events took an opposite turn. In reaction to this dualism, Palacký started to play the Russian card. "*Calamity without measure and end*" was the only threat that Czech politicians had at their disposal, and as a result it took on a somewhat more attractive appearance.[28]
- Palacký as a historian contributed significantly to the argumentation surrounding "historical state rights". The arguments for the Czech national programme in 1848, and above all from 1861, made reference to the mediaeval and early modern independence of the Czech state, interpreted as a legally-binding reality.[29] In particular after the content of the word Czechs started to be interpreted in an ethno-nationalist way, this argument meant the de facto an irrelevance of the will of several million Czech Germans (about a third of the population),

[23] Cf. Rak, Jiří: *Bývali Čechové*, Praha: Nakladatelství HH 1994, pp. 103-107.
[24] Palacký, František: *Idea státu Rakouského*, Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého 2002, p. 34.
[25] http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/1848/palacky_letter.html, translation slightly changed.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Russian diplomats even reported home that the Czechs wanted a great and powerful Czech kingdom as part of the Austrian state. Doubek, Vratislav: *Česká politika a Rusko, 1848-1914*, Praha: Academia 2004.
[28] Cf. Ibid.
[29] This argument gained its classic form in the book of Josef Kalousek *České státní právo* (1871).

regardless of the fact that it implicitly contradicted the idea of natural rights and the right of self-determination.

Masaryk I (1886): nihilist?[30]

Masaryk came to Prague from Vienna as an adjunct professor at the newly-founded Czech university in 1882. He had already been habilitated before that with a thesis on the subject of suicide (1881), in which he argued that the number of suicides was a result of the crisis of modernity and the loss of society's religious base.[31] He founded the scientific revue *Atheneum* and in 1886 launched in it (together with the linguist Jan Gebauer and the historian Jaroslav Goll) an academic campaign against the *Manuscripts of Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora* (RKZ, a forgery of the 1810s, the Czech equivalent of *Ossian*). These had thus far been considered literary relics from the 10th and 13th centuries, thought even by the critical Palacký to be a reliable historical source. This struggle brought to Masaryk displeasure from a large part of the patriotic elite, but in the end his view prevailed. However, it seems that some of Masaryk's academic allies found it problematical (or at least they claimed so afterwards) that he was politicising a specialist issue. They were embarrassed that the destruction of myths, which they considered to be a necessary evil, something in which they took part with regret, was something that Masaryk seemed to enjoy, although he himself played a lesser specialist role in the fight against the manuscripts.[32] Masaryk turned on the forgeries with enlightened pathos and enthusiasm, hoping that the suppression of the lie would have a therapeutic effect not only on science but on the national community as a whole.

In 1886 the revue *Čas* was born in the circle of Masaryk's friends and supporters. The very first number contained a scandal: an introductory article by the young writer Hubert G. Schauer (1862-1892), *"Our two questions"*, in which he criticised almost a century of Czech nationalist efforts as conceptionless. *"Without an ideal, without an awareness of **moral calling**, there can be no nation,"* wrote Schauer, and continued with the question: "*So then, what is our task in the history of mankind?"*[33]

Schauer outlined the prospects for the Czech nation clearly and harshly: Did five million Czechs possess a sufficiently strong national culture to be able to protect themselves in the event that Austria was weakened, if they were "*completely surrounded and washed over by a German sea*", and if the hopes of Czech patriots that "*Russia will not allow that!"* came to nothing, or if *the "de-nationalisation"* or *"re-nationalisation"* occurred from the Russian side, as in the case of the Polish?[34]

After imagining an "*unequal fight between the Czechs and Germandom, a fight to the knife*", he adds, using a seemingly alienating figure of speech: "*The day might come when a – let us say, a weakling – might ask the question: Is this nationhood, doubtful in its existence, truly worth our devotion to it of all the strength of our spirit, which could otherwise be devoted to positive work, scientific advancement and so on? Is it worth my squandering this strength on an effort that has so far been entirely negative? What if the nation were to cease to be, regardless of these strivings? Ought we not – he would continue his rumination – rather to cleave to the intensive and extensive spiritual life of a large nation, and do more both for humanity and ourselves…?"*[35] He then asks the same question, this time as himself: "*if our national existence truly is worth the effort, if its cultural value is so huge?"*[36] Could the supporters of Czech nationalism rely on the fact that "*if the people conserve their own language, they will also be conserving their own intellectual world, that the*

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[30] About nihilist moment in early Masaryk writes Roman Szporluk in his *The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk*, New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press 1981.

[31] Cf. Bradatan, Cristina: About Some 19th-Century Theories of Suicide Interpreting Suicide in an East European Country, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 48 (2007), no. 5, pp. 417–432.

[32] At least it seems from some indices and suggestions. Cf. Pekař, Josef: K článku prof. Jindřicha Vančury, in Havelka, Miloš (ed.): *Spor o smysl českých dějin l895 - l938*. Praha: Torst 1995, p. 157; cf. Pithart, Petr: *Dějiny a politika*, Praha: Prostor 1991.

[33] H. G.: Naše dvě otázky, *Čas* 20. 12. 1886, Vol. I, no. 1, pp. 1-4, here p. 2.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., p. 3.

[36] Ibid.

alienation of the language would represent true ethical damage, that they would with it be preserving a type that in the pantheon of humankind takes a place that is solid, valid and independent?"[37]

The editors accompanied Schauer's article with a note that indicated partial distance and also partial legimisation and a call to action; Schauer's essay had been printed as a an impulse for discussion, and also as the expression of part of the young generation: "*The article is not the expression of the thoughts of a single person, but of a considerable number of the young generation*." The rest of the note expressed, in particular, agreement with the absence of illusions regarding Russia; besides other things, it forecast the possible disappearance of the "Little Russians", in other words the Ukrainians.[38]

The article caused a scandal. Masaryk distanced himself from Schauer[39] and in his writings immediately afterwards (*The Czech Question* and *Our Present Crisis*) did not mention his name once. Nevertheless, the Czech public long took him as the source of Schauer's inspiration, and it was said that he had asked similar questions himself in private conversation.[40] Either way, in *The Czech Question,* published in 1895 and an attempt to reinterpret the Czech national revival, he repeatedly returns to figures who had posed the question of the disappearance of the nation and the futility of revivalist attempts (in his version Dobrovský, who wrote in German). A motif remained, as it were, in the subtext, one that Camus would use many decades later in the *Myth of Sisyphus*. The only dignified alternatives are either suicide or a life lived to the full on the basis of a free decision.

Masaryk II (1895): creator – and national ideologue

However, it seems that for Masaryk the idea of self-destruction was a mere initial provocation, however much it was a fundamental provocation. He himself was closer to Palacký's answer to Dobrovský's doubts, an answer that he cites in the *Czech Question: "However, if we all behave in this way, then our nation will have to die af spiritual hunger; I, at least, if I were, for example, a Gypsy by origin, and the last of my line, should consider it my duty to do absolutely everything to ensure that there at least remained an honourable memory of my nation in the history of mankind."*[41]

The four books that Masaryk then published on Czech politics, with a gap of several years, are full of paradoxes. The most fundamental one is Masaryk's oft-repeated antithesis of *"excessive historicism"* and *"realism"*, the latter being the label that Masaryk uses for his own position. It is, however, doubtful to what extent Masaryk actually was a "realist". His realism has the significance of a believed and desired opposite to romanticism.[42] Masaryk was a Platonic idealist who believed that history showed a *"certain plan of Providence"*.[43] He might possibly also be described as a "realist", in the sense of the mediaeval dispute between real existence and the earthly presence of perfect ideas. It was to these - to the idea of what Czechs, Slavs… or any other people *really* were - that contemporary, real facts ought to point. As such, they were more the indicator of an essence, and at the same time a signpost to possibilities of self-perfection and self-overcoming. In *Our Present Crisis* Masaryk states relatively clearly that "*historical empiricism provides us with no salvation…*[we have

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., p. 4. The imminent demise of the Ukrainians is, in general, a Czech expectation, cf. Kundera a hundred years later in an interview with Roth: *"After the Russian invasion of 1968, every Czech was confronted with the thought that his nation could be quietly erased from Europe, just as over the past five decades 40 million Ukrainians have been quietly vanishing from the world without the world paying any heed."*

[39] Many years later, when president, he claimed that he did not know about the article, that the article was simply *"impossible"*, and that he had given the editor, Herben, a talking-to about it. Of the article, he states here: "I think they put it in because they did not have enough contributions" (!). Čapek, Karel: Hovory s TGM, http://www.nase.sesity.net/elektronicka-knihovna/Hovory-s-TGM.pdf, p. 91. Considering the fact that it was the title text of the first issue, we can conclude that so many years after he could invent some more thrustworthy lie about it.

[40] Bráf, Albín: *Paměti I*, Praha: Vesmír 1922, pp. 15-27.

[41] Masaryk, T. G.: *Česká otázka, Naše nynější krize, Jan Hus*, Praha: Státní nakladatelství 1924, section 11.

[42] Cf. Doubek, Vratislav: Politický realismus a ideál nové politiky ve střední Evropě, Historie - Otázky - Problémy, 1/2014, pp. 22-31, on-line: http://ucd.ff.cuni.cz/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Doubek.pdf.

[43] Masaryk, op. cit., 1924, op. cit., p.c7.

to] *understand the past according to the fullness that is present… to capture, in the present and the past, empirically given, the meaning of our life and our calling."*[44]

What is a paradox, above all, is Masaryk's performative self-contradiction. While he continually criticises the "historicism" of the Czech national revival, his answer to the question of *what is to be done* comes in four books, and three of them are historical (*The Czech Question* and *Karel Havlíček* look at the national question, *Jan Hus* even at mediaeval history). He himself says in the introduction to the *Czech Question* that this approach is a "***concession** to our woeful literary conditions. I would like to take an entirely objective approach to the Czech question, with no historical introduction at all. However, I know very well how used we have become in this matter to the historical crutch, and so I use it too."*[45] This justification is hard to believe, however. The reason for this is that it is in history that Masaryk seeks and finds the truth regarding the Czech essence: in Hussitism and in the church of the Czech Brethren, which grew up in the 15th century and whose most distinguished representative was Comenius. Humanism, an emphasis on morality, self-discipline, the reconciliation of intellectual and moral reason: this, according to Masaryk, is at the core of the Czech identity and also the meaning of Czech history and contemporary Czech efforts. Following Herder's example, the word he uses for this collection of values is *"humanity"*.

In the internally-contradictory formulations of the *Czech Question* Masaryk suggests what he explicitly denies: although he denies that there is a special relationship between any nation and "humanity", in the case of the Czechs he indicates such a relationship – indeed, in the introductory passages, where he comes to terms with Herder's influence on the Czech national revival by stating that it was "*only a historical payback for a loan",* because the "*German, English and French enlightenment was only a continuation in the spirit of the main ideas of the Czech reformation"*.[46] It is because of this privileged relationship with humanity, and because of their folk nature, that the Czechs are also very open to the "social question", which he sees as a moral question (Masaryk himself was a fellow-traveller of the Social Democrats, emphasising the moral justification of their demands. At the same time he criticised the materialism of Marx and Engels, devoting 800 pages of his *Social Question*, 1898, to a polemic with them). Between the lines we can also see a more practical reason why the Czech nation is predisposed to solve social questions: as a small nation, it cannot allow itself a marked and brutal split between the workers and the bourgeoisie…[47]

We may find more such tensions in the *Czech Question* between "realism" in the sense of a realistic description, and "realism" in the sense of radical Platonism. Masaryk is not anti-German; indeed, he shows that the Germans are closest to the Slavs, and that German rule is based on cultural superiority (above all when he compares it with Hungarian dominance, which, he says, relies only on violence).[48] He reconstructs the nation as an idea and a task, but he understands it ethnically. He rejects Landespatriotismus, and quotes contemptuously the pronouncement of the Czech-German nobleman Thun in 1845, with a note that it cannot even be translated into Czech: *"Ich weder ein Čeche noch ein Deutscher, sondern nur ein Böhme."*[49]

In his criticism of historicism, Masaryk rejects the idea of the nation as an age-old continuous unit, and points to the relative youth of modern nations. At the same time, however, he traces the essence of the Czech nation to the 15th-16th century, if not earlier. "*A nation that experienced reformation and counter-reformation"*[50] is, for Masaryk, a guarantee of all sorts of things, but above all of authenticity as the value that he appreciates the most. He takes on, to a considerable extent, the "Slav" perspective, including the stereotype of the peace-loving nature of the Slavs (although in other places he takes issue with this stereotype and reacts to literature that depicted old Slavs as warriors), but he makes two significant changes: 1) in the tradition of Havlíček, and going against

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[44] Ibid., p. 267.
[45] Ibid., p. 8.
[46] Ibid., s. 12.
[47] Cf. Křesťan, Jiří: *Pojetí české otázky v díle Zdeňka Nejedlého*, Praha: Státní ústřední archiv 1996.
[48] Ibid., p. 68.
[49] Ibid., p, 110.
[50] Ibid.

pan-Slavism, he proposes to emphasise the individuality of Slav nations, believing neither in the general characteristics of the Slavs, nor in pan-Slavism as a political movement. Kollár's characterisation of the Slavs he describes as fairly accurate – but as a picture of the Slovaks; 2) if the Slavs have a historical problem with statehood and the ability to rule themselves, it is their historical task to learn it.

Masaryk joins his idea of the nation with an ambitious idea of politics, which he calls, with unbefitting modesty, "small work". In fact this concept means the penetration of politics (or national essentialism) into every area of life: morals, culture, education. If "*a political programme has to be based on a cultural one"*[51] then it also means the politicisation of culture (and science) and its assessment from the point of view of national qualities. Sometimes he uses as an argument the relative degree of development: "*unfortunately we are not yet so far on, here it is not yet possible, unfortunately?, for work to be divided in such a way, here the* ***leading*** *political party must at the same time be the organ and guardian of cultural work."*[52] The question mark after the word "unfortunately" may be interpreted to mean that the author to a certain extent sees this backwardness as a chance of avoiding the erroneous path of over-specialisation. Masaryk, as a campaigner for the autonomy of academic life and the colleague of many literary modernists, here becomes the intellectual architect of a national community where intellectual and cultural impulses are threatened with assessment on the basis of some sort of essentialised Czechness.

Pekař (1912) or the defence of (national) history

While Masaryk's *Czech Question* caused a certain response after its publication (namely Kaizl´s polemical book *Czech Ideas*), the academic historians (chief among them being the positive Jaroslav Goll) who had parted company with Masaryk at around the time of the book's publication were not provoked by it into a major reaction. "The dispute over the meaning of Czech history" did not become a "dispute", featuring notable participants on each side, until 1910, the year in which Masaryk celebrated his sixtieth birthday, and his supporter, the gymnasium professor Jindřich Vančura, wrote a celebratory and polemical essay on the occasion, *"What Czech historiography owes to Masaryk"*.[53] In it he said, among other things, that "*the philosopher Masaryk has outranked specialist historians with his programme of specialist historical work and his unified opinion on the development of our history from the 15th century to the most recent times"*.[54] This provoked a reaction by Goll's most prominent pupil, Jan Pekař, and a vigorous polemic ensued. In Pekař Masaryk had acquired a fundamental opponent, who went on, in *Masaryk's Czech Philosophy* (1912) to provide his most cogent summary of his objections to Masaryk. Above all he accused him of an "*unembarrassed attempt… to violate the reality of historical development with his aprioristic doctrine, to transform history, regardless of the objective truth, into a biddable handmaid…"*[55]

Above all, Pekař defends historiography against Masaryk as an approach founded on the radical difference and non-transferability of individual epochs. He somewhat overemphasises his point that the historical figures out of whom Masaryk wanted to create a unified tradition would actually have not understood each other, or might have even (in the case of relations between the Hussites and Palacký) burned each other at the stake, and thus creates a rather awkward polemic. However, its goal is to clearly stake out the boundaries of epochs where Masaryk wanted to see continuity of development and succession (and so capriciously that according to Pekař he should have called his book "*My Relatives in Czech History")*.[56] What is more, he wanted to show that Masaryk was entirely erroneous in his perception of the developmental trajectory: the "Czech reformation" that, according to Masaryk, had seen the Czechs anticipate Europe by a hundred years on the path to the modern era, was in fact, according to Pekař, still an entirely medieval movement that in the long term ended

[51] Ibid., section 75
[52] Ibid., *Naše nynější krize*, p. 278
[53] Vančura, Jindřich: Čím se Masaryk zavděčil českému dějepisu, in Havelka, Miloš (ed.), op. cit., 1995, pp. 125-148.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Pekař, Josef: *Masarykova česká filosofie*, in Havelka, Miloš (ed.), op. cit., 1995, pp. 265-302, here p. 295.
[56] Ibid., p. 292.

up holding back the Czech lands' progression towards the non-religious humanism brought by the Italian Renaissance. This criticism had literary and political parallels in the work of the nationalist poet and politician Viktor Dyk, who both in his drama *The Envoy* and in his political journalism criticised the legacy of the brotherly humanism that was so adored by Masaryk but which had succumbed to the more ferocious and insensible Italian Catholic culture of the noble cavaliers. Dyk saw in it a direct parallel for his own times.[57]

Benedict Anderson, in Chapter 11 of his *Imagined Communities*, points out that modern positivist historiography grew up at the same time as modern nations and nationalisms, and that for all their criticism they need to assume the nation as a lasting entity and a historical person.[58] It is as if the emphasis on difference and the non-transferability of historical epochs at the same time required a common denominator in the form of an ages-old nation. Pekař was an exemplary case here: he takes issue with Masaryk's statement that the national idea came from the end of the 18th century. While Pekař agrees that the national idea certainly took on new forms at this time, it was otherwise "*as old as our history"* (so from the 10th century), he says, adding that "*it is a fact as natural and undoubted as awareness of the physical and moral unity of a family or tribe"* and is "*the guiding idea of the Czech efforts", "ever-present in our history", "the only idea in which the dead, regardless of period, are sovereign over the living. If you think away our national history, you take away their souls…"*[59] The same author who postulates the radical difference and non-transferability of individual epochs actually requires, as a pre-condition for this non-transferability, a radical homogeneity, an idea of a shared "natural" feeling across ten decades.

Pekař also points to the moral pitfalls of Masaryk's idea that the meaning of Czech history is humanity – humanity, Pekař says, belongs to all of mankind, so how can it be the meaning of the history of a particular nation? He cites the following sentences from the *Czech Question*: "*Morality – humanity – must be the goal of every individual and nation. It is is not peculiar to the national ethic."*[60] And he adds: *"Do you know who wrote that? Professor T.G. Masaryk in the Czech Question, page 69, in the same book that he gave us the **Czech** humanitarian idea…"*[61] In making this allusion he anticipates Schmitt's criticism of false universalism.[62] Against Masaryk's "humanity" and the idea that enmity can be overcome by love, which some of his supporters ascribed to Masaryk, Pekař sets Nietzschean objections from a position of human naturalness, and shows, with references to polemical passages in *The Czech Question*, that even Masaryk "*loves, because he hates"*.[63]

Pekař aptly accuses Masaryk of a discrepancy between his criticism of "historicism" and his constant search for the essence of today in the past, just as he accuses him of using "realism" to refer to a romantic concept of history.[64] Pekař says that Masaryk's concept of the nation is also romantic, although for another reason: his intellectualism causes him to make unrealistic, titanic (titanism was Masaryk's favourite concept for criticism of romanticism, the Russian novel, Marxism, anarchism and of modern man in general)[65] demands on intellectual work: "*What are we to experience? The intellectual development started by our reformation? The true reach of the ideas of our nation-builders? On the basis of what? On the basis of Masaryk's erroneous interpretation?... It seems that Masaryk wants every Czech to beat his own path through the truth of "Czech ideas" and "world ideas". I can see that this is no easy religion that Masaryk puts before his supporters. It is… a religion only for university professors."*[66]

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[57] Cf. Tomeš, Josef: *Viktor Dyk a T. G. Masaryk*. Dvojí reflexe češství, Praha: NLN 2014.
[58] Building on Hayden White´s *Metahistory*. Cf. Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso 1991, pp 192-197.
[59] Pekař, op. cit., pp. 281-282.
[60] Pekař cites these sentences out of order on p. 275.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Cf. Schmitt, Carl: *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007.
[63] Pekař, op. cit., p. 297.
[64] Cf. Ibid., p. 294.
[65] Cf. Masaryk, Tomáš G.: *Moderní člověk a náboženství. Otisk článků z Naší doby 1896-1898*, Praha: Jan Laichter 1934.
[66] Pekař, op. cit., p. 278.

Nejedlý I (1913) or synthesis

Most of the writings that form part of this period dispute were marked by being overly polemical. However, one that stands out in its moderation and ability to reconcile opposites was a pamphlet by the young musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý, *The Dispute over the Meaning of Czech History* (1913). According to some malicious interpretations, the judicious nature of Nejedlý's formulations was down to the fact that although he was closer to Masaryk, he needed the benevolence of Goll and his pupils in order to be habilitated.[67] However, his compromise does not come over as an expedient one, and it seems that it does not even need such explanations.

Nejedlý tries to find a path out of a situation where "*Masaryk supported his programme on historical reasons, but critical historiography cannot recognise these reasons as correct."*[68] He defends historians' right to criticise, but not their "*right to decide, with regard to the moral postulate that the philosopher sets up the ideal postulate for the nation"*.[69] In doing this he also defended Masaryk against the criticism that Pekař had refuted his idea of the nation (or that he even could refute it), while also defending Goll and his pupils against the idea that Masaryk's ideological excursions into history were meant to (or that he could) correct their specialist work. (He even compared the realists' attacks on historians to the nationalists' attacks on Masaryk and others during the period of the battles over the Manuscripts.) Above all, however, he takes the debate to a place where, to start with, neither side had wanted to have it: in the direction of the neo-romantic criticism of positivism and to the right of philosophical intuition to speculate about history where the sources were insufficient.

This position might appear to be a (not entirely Masarykian) defence of Masaryk's methods. On the contrary, however, its content suggests to a considerable extent that Goll and Pekař are in the right: "*The national awareness, as Pekař rightly says, never disappeared"*[70] Nejedlý says of the 17th-18th century, and just as in the case of Hussitism, he sees religion not as a content, but as a "form" or "surface".[71] To Nejedlý, the Hussite movement is a "***national movement,*** *not a religious one."*[72] Unlike Pekař, however, he celebrates this movement as a revolutionary display by the nation, not as the cause of historical delay. Nejedlý also puts an emphasis on the Czech Renaissance – unlike Pekař, he does not accuse the Hussites of delaying its arrival. What he takes issue with is an interpretation of Hussitism that is based in religion, so that it veiled the significance of the Renaissance.[73] Nevertheless, Nejedlý is a neo-romantic, and his hero is "our people" – as one of the arguments against the religious conception of Czech history he gives folk songs, which he describes as "*divinely godless…" "nowhere in them will you find a deep religious note"*.[74]

Masaryk III (1914) or westerniser and state builder

Until the early 1910s, Masaryk was a loyal Austrian citizen. However, backwardness of the Habsburg empire, Balkan politics (Masaryk had campaigned against the Zagreb trial featuring 53 politicians who had allegedly committed high treason, and before the war he tried to bring about understanding between Austro-Hungary and Serbia) and the threat of pan-Germanism brought him closer to the radical anti-Austrian wing of Czech politics.[75] Masaryk and the authors around him started to emphasise not only the "small work" whose goal was to raise up the nation, but also the backwardness of Austrian conditions – Herben described Austria as the "European China".[76]

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[67] Cf. Křesťan, Zdeněk: *Zdeněk Nejedlý. Politik a vědec v osamění*, Praha-Litomyšl: Paseka – Národní archiv 2013.
[68] Nejedlý, Zdeněk, *Spor o smysl českých dějin*, in: Havelka, Miloš (ed.), op. cit., 1995, pp. 321-360, here p. 324.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., p. 352.
[71] Ibid., pp. 336, 337.
[72] Ibid., p. 337.
[73] Ibid., p. 344.
[74] Ibid., p. 359.
[75] Tomeš, op. cit.
[76] Herben, Jan: *Masarykova sekta a Gollova škola*, in Havelka (ed.), op. cit., 1995, pp. 164-234.

The First World War was the turning point in a decision that Masaryk would later describe in several books, above all his memoir-based *World Revolution* (1925) and propaganda pamphlet *New Europe* (1917-8/1920). Masaryk did not see as an alternative the critical loyalty chosen by his historical oponents Goll and Pekař, who still held to the idea of Austria Hungary as a bulwark against Germany and Russia, and who hoped that through a combination of loyalty and moderate pressure the Czechs would gain from the Habsburgs what had hitherto been the goal of Czech politics: state rights and a national settlement.[77] Nor, however, did Masaryk see as an alternative critical Russophilia and the expectation that the victory of "Slav brothers" would bring rectification, which was the position of a number of rebellious Czechs. He had no illusions about Russia, either with regard to its ability to defeat Austria-Hungary and Germany (or at least he stated later), or with regard to the alternative that tsarism would mean. Masaryk knew Russia, but he himself was a clear westerniser. "*If I had to say which culture I considered to be the highest, I would say: the Anglo-American. The English have come closest overall to the ideals of humanity."*[78] On the other hand, "*the German is a strange mixture of the teacher and the mercenary – first he will give you a lecture about the salvation of the soul, and then a punch in the eye (or maybe the other way round)."*[79] Still, *"I cannot manage to love Prussia, but I try to be fair towards it. If there is something I truly hate, it is that Austrianism, that decadent aristocratism chasing after a tip, that false and abject Habsburgism, that non-national and yet chauvinist mixture of people that is official Vienna,"*[80] he said (in a propaganda pamphlet for soldiers, which he nevertheless also published after the war as a summary of his programme) about the state to which only a few years earlier he had wanted to be a loyal citizen.

Just as he judged individual nations from the point of view of their ideals and humanity, he also judged the ideals of the warring parties. He saw the war as a grand social development process, a struggle between "democracy" (the February Revolution and the fall of tsarism had been part of the logic of the thing) and the states that he somewhat strikingly labels "theocracies" (a somewhat problematic title for a monarchy, chosen because of its reference to the archaic principle of the rulers' legitimacy, that they governent "by the grace of God"). It was these states that, by unleashing war, had definitively shown how incongruous they were: "*The crowned drones of the central powers usually find time for all sorts of ceremonial sillinesses, so why did Wilhelm, Franz Josef and Nicholas not meet with their chancellors for a face-to-face consultation before making such a far-reaching decision?"*[81] The war, as a result of this, could not just be about stopping aggression – it had to introduce new ideas, above all democracy and the right of nations to self-determination, and in the long term to a European democratic federation. Its precondition was the *"moral re-education of nations,"* because democracy itself was for Masaryk above all a *"moral principle"*.[82]

"The dispute over the meaning of Czech history", or "the Czech question" was something that Masaryk thus chose to solve through practical intervention: through energic activity in the foreign resistance, the formulation of a programme, the organisation of military units out of Czech and Slovak deserters and the creation of an exile government. Masaryk met with surprising and astounding success, which catapulted him into the role of the unassailable leader of the Czech nation and at the same time the president of the Czechoslovak state, although the Czech nation accounted for only 46% of the Czechoslovak population. However, alongside its spectacular success, his project had two fundamental problems:

Firstly, as E.H. Carr and Jan Patočka have both pointed out,[83] the Czechs acquired a *different relationship to the First World War* than that of a large part of the western public, for whom the war

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[77] Cf. Kučera, op. cit.,2005, for criticism Havelka, op. cit., 2015.
[78] Masaryk, Tomáš G.: *Nová Evropa. Stanovisko slovanské*, Praha: Dubský, p. 147
[79] Ibid., p. 144.
[80] Ibid., p. 148.
[81] 198
[82] Ibid., p. 223.
[83] Carr, E.H.: *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, London, Macmillan 1946; Patočka, Jan: Co jsou Češi, in Patočka, Jan: *Češi II*, Praha: Oikomenh 2006, pp. 253-324, here p. 318.

was above all a catastrophe that needed to be stopped as soon as possible. Certainly, Masaryk understood the catastrophic dimension of the war – it was not he who had unleashed the war, and he tried to prevent it – but at the same time it was difficult for him to hide the fact that for him and his nation it was an opportunity, and what would be a true catastrophe (although it would have saved millions of lives) was if it ended before the total defeat of the central powers. He took part energetically in intrigues against such a possibility, at a time when Emperor Charles was trying to negotiate a separate peace. When Masaryk writes in *World Revolution: "For us it will be advantageous if the war lasts a long time, because we will be able to develop revolutionary propaganda"*[84] it is a somewhat cold calculation in the context of the horror of war and given the extent of his moralism in other matters. The very fact that the war was an opportunity for the Czechs is possibly also an explanation of the attempt to ideologise and moralise it as much as possible, to describe it as a struggle between the light and the darkness.

Secondly, the war would fulfil the dream of a Czech state – possibly too much so. Attachment to the western ideals of democracy in 1918 was connected with the fact that they were in keeping with the *Czechs' national interest*: in the words of Petr Pithart, from the role of the "*darling of the Entente"* and the "*unlikely situation of the moment – a central Europe without a strong Germany and Russia!"* Czech politicians "*managed to gain for us not only everything that could be, but probably also something more"*.[85] So that the Czechs (c. 6 million) could ensure predominance in the new state of 13 million people, they declared themselves to be, together with the 2 million Slovaks, one nation with "two branches". The Germans, of whom there were 3 million, became a national minority. "*With regard to the Germans in our lands, our programme has long been known: the territory inhabited by the Germans is our territory and will remain ours. We built our state, we maintained it, we built it up again. (…) I repeat: we created our state. This is the way in which to define the legal status of our Germans, who originally came to this country as emigrés and colonists,*" Masaryk, by now president and founder of the state, said in his Message to the National Assembly of 22 December 1918.[86] He forgot to add that the first ancestors of the Germans of the time had come as "colonists" in the 13th century...

The maintenance of the German parts of the country (which, because of their industry and borders, were seemingly of key importance for the viability of the state) as part of Czechoslovakia was in keeping with the interest of the Second World War victors in weakening Germany, but it was against the proclaimed ideology of the "right of nations to self-determination" that had been at the core of the legitimacy of Czechoslovakia itself. So that Masaryk could maintain his construction, he was forced, together with the right of nations to self-determination, to work with the doctrine of historical state rights, a doctrine he had previously not recognised. He himself writes in his *World Revolution* that he had surprised his French friends with this considerably at the start of the war.[87]

One of Masaryk's most original philosophical successors, the philosopher Emanuel Rád, subjected this approach to criticism. In his book *The War Between the Czechs and the Germans* (1928) he rejected Czech anti-Germanism and the shunting of the Germans into the role of a mere minority, which may have had its rights guaranteed, but which held second-class status in a state that it had not wanted. Rádl felt that such an approach paradoxically represented the German form of nationalism; he thought the Czechs should draw inspiration from the Anglo-American or French concept of the nation and create a Czechoslovak civic nation that would be just as inclusive of the Germans as of the Czechs and Slovaks. Drawing an analogy with the separation of church and state, he called for "*separation of the state from nationality"*.[88] He took nationality as a temporary category that nevertheless at that time had to be accepted and dealt with in as just a way as possible. Masaryk did not accept this successor and his opinions; indeed, Rádl criticised him (drawing an analogy with

[84] Masaryk, Tomáš G.: *Světová revoluce*, Praha: Čin 1926, p. 31.
[85] Pithart, Petr: *Osmašedesátý*, Praha: Rozmluvy 1990, p. 100.
[86] http://public.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/040schuz/s040005.htm
[87] Masaryk, op. cit, 1926.
[88] Rádl, Emanuel: *Válka Čechů s Němci*, Praha: Melantrich, 1993, p. 161.

Hus) of not being capable of finding theoretical solutions to fundamental problems. Rather than finding solutions, he devoted himself to preaching and charismatic moral activism, Rádl claimed.[89]
. . .

Both these problems (the differing evaluation of the First World War and the problem of Czech dominance in a multi-nation state) returned to haunt Czech society during the Munich crisis, which became a national trauma for two reasons: the Czechoslovak allies, Britain and France, unexpectedly supported Hitler's Germans, and the Czechoslovaks themselves accepted the Munich diktat without defending themselves. Munich became another "symbolic centre" in the debates over Czech history, and a key argument in a number of debates: from the eastern orientation of Czechoslovkia after 1945, the inability to stand up to occupation after 1968, the debate over NATO entrance, the war against Serbia and the situating of an American radar base on Czech soil. For the Communists (and not only for them), Munich became an argument for an eastern orientation, while for the anti-communists its image merged with the image of the Yalta conference. To the Atlanticists the "lesson from Munich" was an argument for humanitarian intervention, while their opponents pointed to Munich to show that state sovereignty could not be violated in the name of any minority.[90]

Nejedlý II (1946) or stalinist synthesis

Shortly after the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, the Soviets secretly smuggled Professor Nejedlý into exile in a diplomatic vehicle. As an emigré in Moscow he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – he was given membership backdated to 1929, but he had been a fellow-traveller of the Communist Party and a "salon Bolshevik" fairly openly since the early 1920s.[91] Not even as a member of the Communist Party, however, did he become a complete Marxist, despite numerous attempts and declarations in the opposite direction. He became one of the most distinctive ideologues of the new party, the person who most markedly joined communist ideology with the national identity.

As the most distinguished Czech literary critic in the 1920s, F. X. Šalda, had already noted, Nejedlý was too much of a neo-Romantic, focused on the figure of the "hero", to be a real Marxist. His youthful love for Wagner had continued to influence him even after he had found his place on the communist left. As Nejedlý grew closer to the political left and became a collectivist, his hero became a collectivist or collective hero: nevertheless, his Hussites, nation builders and revolutionaries, as well as the "people" he described, had similar moral characteristics to the neo-romantic heroes.[92] Nejedlý's main works were biographies, but in keeping with his collectivism and emphasis on economic and social determinants he so burdened them that they generally did not get beyond the first volumes and the youthful years of their heroes (Smetana and Masaryk end in the 1880s, Lenin with the year 1905). Sometimes his approach gained grotesque contours – according to the (not entirely trustworthy) "memoirs" of President Novotný, it was this approach of Nejedlý's that was responsible for the bizarre statue of Stalin, the statue group popularly known as the "meat queue". When the decision regarding the construction of a monument to Stalin was being taken, Nejedlý successfully argued that it should involve further figures, since although Stalin was the greatest son of the Soviet people, not only his greatness should be adored…[93]

One of the chief missions of Stalinism was to connect the totalitarian version of socialism with nationalism; according to Kopeček's comparison, Czech national communism appears to have been the most successful in this synthesis.[94] A role in this seems to have been played by the fact that one of the leading ideologues of the synthesis did not have a Marxist background. In this, Nejedlý differed

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Slačálek, Ondřej: Boj o národ, Mezinárodní vztahy 4/2010, pp. 50-70.

[91] Cf. Křesťan, op. cit., 2013.

[92] Cf. Křesťan, op. cit., 1996.

[93] Novotný's memoirs were published long after ex-president´s death by controversial writer who allegedly made long interviews with him. Cf. Černý, Rudolf: *Antonín Novotný – vzpomínky prezidenta*, Praha: BVD 2008.

[94] Kopeček, Michal: Čeští komunističtí intelektuálové a „národní cesta k socialismu". Zdeněk Nejedlý a Karel Kosík, 1945–1968, *Soudobé dějiny* 2/2016, pp. 77-117.

from the interwar communists who had previously tried to do the same thing, such as Konrad, Šverma and Kalandra, and also from the Slovak attempt at an analogous intellectual operation proposed by Laco Novoměstský.[95] The canonical version of this synthesis between Czech nationalism and the Communist concept of socialism, almost caricature-like in its literalness and thus also frequently ridiculed, is a lecture delivered on 18 February 1946, *"The Communists as inheritors of the great traditions of the Czech nation"*.[96]

Nejedlý here takes to their extreme the volkisch motifs that were already present in Czech debates, and which were connected with the interpretation of the consequences of 1620. "*In the 17th and 18th centuries we were a nation without a nobility and without a bourgeoisie. The people who remained were the farmers and the plebeian layer in the cities. Only these are the Czech nation,"* Nejedlý describes with satisfaction a situation that put the Czech nation in a particularly favourable light from the point of view of its ideology.[97] It was "*this people of ours*" that became the bearer of the revival inspired by the French revolution, and which was also "*the first to understand, and on a mass level, the great Slav idea,"* when it welcomed the Russian anti-Napoleonic soldiers (although Nejedlý does not spell out the „Slav idea" itself in great detail).[98] The logical conclusion, according to Nejedlý, is that it was "*always the plebeian layers who were the proper nation",* and which were the criteria of everything else (above all the attitudes of the intelligentsia) and the source of "*the truly remarkable unity of our national development*" from Hussitism until the present day.[99] The people did not fall apart into classes, rather, they were always changing into new subjects – at one point it they would be the peasantry, at another predominantly the working class… but for Nejedlý this was not half as important as it would have been for an orthodox Marxist.

In this concept, the people also acts as sole moral arbiter, a somewhat tautological one: "*The Czech national morality can be summed up in the sentence: what is good is what helps the people, and what is bad is what goes against the people".*[100] This concept is complemented by an emphasis on authenticity as a natural virtue: in the Czech lands, an ambivalent figure of the type of Konrad Wallenrod could not become a hero (or, closer to the time of speaking, Nazi collaborators who were at the same time resistance fighters). In addition to the love with which he encompasses his heroes, he also has at his disposal hate, which is also a type of authenticity – and if he is taking aim at enemies of the people, it is a "holy" hatred.[101]

The people have healthy instincts, but are generally too passive material, and need a hero to become activised. In the past the most marked such heroes were the Hussites, specifically Jan Hus and Jan Žižka. Now such a collective hero was the Communist Party: "*We Czech communists… are the newest phase of this development of the nation."*[102] The Communists are the inheritors of tradition, drawing their intuition directly from "*the depths of the people"*,[103] and these are accentuated exactly where an orthodox Marxist would probably have underlined a scientific world opinion.

Nejedlý's descriptions of the Czech nation as an entity characterised by "*democratism, progressiveness, revolutionariness"*[104] is so essentialist that at one point the author has to distance himself from racism and stress that the essence of the nation that he is describing is the result "merely" of tradition and historical determination, nothing more. (In reality it is questionable to what extent we should read, or not read, the pan-Slavism that was so present during that period as a form of racism, and this is a question we must leave open for the time being. It is interesting that in this lecture the theme of alliance with the Soviet Union and pan-Slavism appears much less than in other

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Nejedlý, Zdeněk: Komunisté, dědici velikých tradic českého národa, in: Nejedlý, Zdeněk: *Komunisté, dědici velikých tradic českého národa. Výbor statí*, Praha: Práce 1978, pp. 13-86.

[97] Ibid., p. 20.

[98] Ibid., p. 26.

[99] Ibid., pp. 34-5.

[100] Ibid, p. 75.

[101] Ibid., p. 76-8.

[102] Ibid., p. ??.

[103] Ibid., p. 37.

[104] Ibid., p. 42.

communist writings, although it is understood. The main emphasis is on showing that the Communists are in keeping with the Czech national tradition, and a greater emphasis on the Soviet Union would get in the way of this. It is remarkable that, as Nejedlý's biographer Křesťan points out, despite his prominent position, Nejedlý almost found himself in serious problems during his period of exile in the USSR during the Second World War, because of his ill-judged formulations that gave the impression the Czechs were more developed and culturally advanced than other Slav nations.[105])

Michal Kopeček is right to a certain extent when he says that Nejedlý remained *"structurally faithful"* to Palacký and Masaryk's concept of Czech history.[106] Above all, however, the Nejedlý of 1946 was structurally faithful to the Nejedlý of 1913, who in the dispute over the meaning of Czech history said that the nationalist historians were largely right. As we have seen, he chose Pekař's "nation" over Masaryk's "religion" and "humanity". However, he renames the nation, or, rather, narrows it to the "people". Nejedlý's concept of the Czech nation shares part of Palacký's and Masaryk's architecture, but at the same time it refuses to put the Czech Brethren in a single line with the Hussites or the revival, finding them too passive and unrevolutionary.[107] Although Nejedlý criticises the right-wing Pekař and does not share his view of the west or of the Renaissance, he nevertheless seems to have taken on more his view than that of Masaryk: he just renames and narrows the "nation" to the "people". It is also significant that for him the key writer, who had allegedly expressed his theory of history, was the neo-romantic Alois Jirásek (1851-1930): his historical novels were published by the Communists during the 1950s in a mass edition with an afterword by Nejedlý, as one of the main operations to "root" his efforts in Czech nationalism. And yet Jirásek was a senator for the right-wing nationalist National Democracy, the organisational heirs of the National Liberal Young Czechs of the 19th century. Communist nationalism had gained the national democratic, Young Czech undercurrent.

Milan Kundera (1968/1984) or the non-self evident nation[108]

The Writers' Congress of 1967 is often seen as a harbinger, or the actual intellectual start of the "Prague Spring of 1968". In his opening speech to the congress, Kundera returned to the "Czech question", namely to Schauer. While, according to Kundera, *"most nations look upon their own existence as a self-evident destiny conferred by God, or by Nature, since time immemorial"*, the complicated nature of Czech history *"gives us the strength to resist any such illusion,"* he said. [109] It had led to the idea that Czechs had to deserve their existence by making a unique contribution to humanity.

In the speech in question, Kundera talked about this contribution in very vague terms, above all as artistic work. A year later, after the occupation, he wrote the article The Czech Destiny, in which he articulated his enthusiasm from the Czechoslovak spring: it was then, according to Kundera, that the Czechs had made a political contribution. The inspirational "experiment" in "*socialism without the omnipotence of the secret police, with the freedom of the written and spoken word, with public opinion that is listened to, and politics which is based on it, with modern culture… with people who have lost their fear."*[110] The second inspiration provided by the Czech nation was the non-violent opposition to occupation. The article provoked a polemic: Václav Havel accused Kundera of spreading illusions. The things with which, according to Kundera, the Czechs had inspired the world, were, Havel said, normal states of affairs in western countries, and it was bizarre to see in their partial achievement something exceptional and inspirational for others. The resistance of the first week after the occupation was imposing but it did not last, being soon overtaken by the capitulation of

[105] Cf. Křesťan, op. cit., 2013.
[106] Kopeček, op. cit., 2016.
[107] Nejedlý, op. cit., 1946/1978, p. ??.
[108] In this section I use passage of my article Post-Colonial Hypothesis, pp. 36-38.
[109] http://www.pwf.cz/rubriky/projects/1968/milan-kundera-speech-made-at-the-fourth-congress-of-the-czechoslovak-writers_897.html
[110] https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2011/SOC403/um/Cesky_udel.pdf

most of society.[111] Kundera himself wrote in the end that he had meant his article as encouragement to a wilting public, and although he did not distance himself explicitly from his opinions, he moved away from them.

In another article fifteen years later, Kundera among other things generalises his remarks about "non-self-evident nations", applying them not just to Czechs but to central Europe. Other than that, however, he can be said to have taken on Havel's perspective to a considerable extent.

If in 1968 Milan Kundera was still defending a third way that was neither Western capitalism nor Eastern socialism, by 1984 he was formulating a concept of Central Europe that was interesting above all that it did not represent any sort of "centre". Central Europe is simply the West (in the sense of culture) that has been forcibly separated from the West as a political community. Its current situation, when it is indeed a centre, is the result of kidnapping and violation. If it differs from the West in something, it is that it represents Western values more thoroughly: historically, it is even an "arch-Europe" in which, compared with the imperial vastness of Russia, the principle of *"the greatest variety within the smallest space"* prevailed.[112]

Kundera's relationship to the West can be labelled using a paradoxical term: critical servility. Not only the West, but actual love for the West was, in Kundera's eyes, key to the very existence and definition of Central Europe: "If to live means to exist in the eyes of those we love, then Central Europe no longer exists," because the West does not register its existence.[113] In addition to love, this figure reveals a total dependency: without the accepting gaze of the West, there can be no Central Europe. If Western Europe knows nothing of Central Europe, if it does not see it (as part of itself), then its existence becomes meaningless.

Kundera continues in a frequent figure traced by Central European and above all Czech intellectuals: for him, culture replaces politics. Even nations that do not belong politically to the West can claim their proper place as part of it, because European unity is according to them cultural. Kundera´s criticism of the West consists of a search for the causes of misunderstanding between the West and Central Europe. Central Europe is for him a place where "culture" (connected with high art) has not yet been steamrollered by "civilization" (understood as overly-large technocratic apparatuses and mind-numbing entertainment) because the triumph of civilisation here takes the form of the violent invasion by the Soviets, while in the West essentially the same civilization, coming predominantly from the US, is accepted voluntarily. Central Europe is thus more Western than the West itself, and is able to adopt superior stances in order to condemn the West. Out of the accepting gaze of the West as a precondition for Central Europe there grows a radical criticism of the West, which does not see Central Europe because it has lost itself.

Todorova has rightly pointed out that Kundera's definition of Central Europe is confusing, because his Central Europe has no borders.[114] Key to his definition is the Polish experience, but at the same time he defines Central Europe by means of the Habsburg heritage, which did not concern a decisive part of Poland at all. Of even greater concern to Todorova seems to have been the fact that in his concept, Kundera implicitly divides Yugoslavia eight years before this division took place in real life. Nevertheless, fundamental to this division was that Kundera's concept implicitly held it impossible for Europe to be enriched by non-Western impulses. Even the great Russian novels, while certainly great and representing cultural values, are above all very intensely foreign. Central Europe in Kundera's concept turns its back on the non-West, but its criticism of the West is immanent – it issues from full acceptance of the "original" Western values. Kundera thinks through some Western impulses, and above all confronts them with the experiences of "small nations", in Kundera´s definition nations that might at any time disappear. To find themselves in the same situation as "small nations" thus defined, is, Kundera believes, the possible future fate of all European nations

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Kundera, Milan: The Tragedy of Central Europe, *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 31, no. 7, April 26, 1984, http://www.bisla.sk/english/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Kundera_tragedy_of_Central_Europe.pdf, p. 3.

[113] Ibid., p. 11.

[114] Todorova, Maria, op. cit., pp. 140-160.

and, indeed, the whole of Europe. This is one reason why their experiences are of key importance to the West.

In reality it is highly doubtful whether not only Poles but also Hungarians would be willing to think of themselves as "small nations", even in Kundera's definition. The intellectual doubts of H. G. Schauer as to whether it would not have been better if the Czech nation had voluntarily disappeared and had taken on the more developed culture of a larger nation (evidently the German one), has nothing in common with the words of the Polish national anthem "Poland Is Not Yet Lost" and the combination of existential anxiety and combativeness that it expresses. Hungarian and Polish nationalism is much more imbued with the legacy of Catholicism and the aristocracy, is much more conservative, combative and explicit. It really does not express itself in its own denial (unlike Czech nationalism as characterised by Holý). For the Poles and the Hungarians, culture also does not supplement politics, or definitely not to the same degree as for the Czechs, in whose case *"culture and politics permeate each other. Culture is the politics of a small nation, culture proves its own existence and makes itself known."*[115] As in the case of many of his other narratives surrounding Central Europe, in this case, too, Kundera used the label "Central Europe" as an amplifier for the experience of his own nation (and his own socio-cultural group within that).

Kundera's distinction between "culture" and "civilisation" differs from the way in which the Germans had seen this opposition in reaction to the civilisation that displayed itself as the symbolic violence of Enlightenment reason, and subsequently the violence of Napoleon's occupying armies.[116] It has no relationship to the "people" – it is not accompanied by an idea of the people's deep wisdom. Kundera's "culture", which he uses to define Central Europe, is very French, defined by an admiration for the Enlightenment, the art of the novel and classical music. In Kundera´s Central Europe, unlike in the West, however, this "culture" may be thought of as innocent, as the antithesis of soulless, mass, technological civilisation, which he believes is becoming predominant in both blocs of the Cold War (in the east being connected with forced Sovietisation, in the West with gradual and voluntary Americanisation). In the West the same culture could hardly be thought of in the same way. The "culture" for which Kundera is nostalgic is in reality connected with the development of civilisation and modernisation, and it is hard to think of Enlightenment brilliance as disconnected from the rationalism that forms the basis of technical and industrial civilisation. If Central Europe needed the accepting gaze of the West as a condition of its existence, it was able to offer the West in exchange a view that disconnected its "culture" from its "civilisation", its role as an emancipator from its role as an oppressor. It offered it a view that suggested to it its own innocence.

Kundera is not a conservative – he is a former communist and a liberal atheist, he has very relaxed opinions regarding social ties and the relations between the sexes (although at the same time these contain male dominance and sexism). However, he, too, notices that in Central European revolts there is *"something conservative, almost anachronistic: they desperately try to renew the past, the past of culture".*[117] The sceptical and critical culture that produced an ironic distance from itself and was a source of universalism here becomes a source of particular identity, from which it is hard to imagine distance.

This approach of identification with the West and at the same time disdainful criticism of it for having ceased to be itself is, however, much more compatible with a conservative than a liberal approach. Meanwhile Kundera, who separated himself from both Czech and Central European debate to such an extend that he refuses even to agree with reedition of his essay about Central Europe, does not develop this tension, his former opponent Václav Havel followed his way. As well as Kundera, Havel too shared image of the Central Europe asi clearly Western, he too criticized civilization (as alienated rule of dehumanizaced apparatuses) and he, too, perceived Western Europe as quite far away of its original identity. But the key difference layed in evaluation of US: According to Kundera, unacceptable civilization is in principle americanization and we have to defend nostalgia of

[115] Kroutvor, Josef: *Potíže s dějinami*, Praha 1990, p. 54.
[116] Cf. Elias, Norbert, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. I. The History of Manners*, Oxford: Blackwell 1969.
[117] Kundera, op. cit., 1984, p. 11.

traditional (and modern) European culture. Havel is the opposite: americanophil, who see way of trap of cynical realism of the „Old World“ by idealist political action. Thus he contrasted relative youth and idealism of the new world (expressed according to Havel by military intervations against rogue regimes) against decline, „Munich style“, „appeasement“ of Western Europe.

Patočka (approximately 1973), or largeness and a nation of "liberated servants"

The philosopher Jan Patočka is known in the debates on Czech identity above all for his return to Bolzano and the concept of *Landespatriotismus*. In some of his writings, above all the letters to his friend that were eventually published under the title *What are the Czechs* (written in 1966-7, finalised, according to some evidence, in 1973, and published in 1981) he does, however, try to provide an overall philosophy of the Czech nation, which may thus be considered an alternative approach to the debate on the meaning of Czech history.

The basic dichotomy is Patočka's antithesis of largeness and smallness: however, neither smallness or largeness are measured in numbers of inhabitants ("*you would hesitate to describe the Dutch, and above all the Jews, as a small nation"*).[118] Largeness is partly cultural and partly historical: it is measured partly in the significance of cultural achievements for humanity and partly, in the spirit of Hegel and Nietzsche's dichotomy of the master and the slave, by a determination to risk or sacrifice one's life for freedom.

This largeness nevertheless also has a social substrate. Patočka emphasises, somewhat drastically, the frequently-discussed sociological difference between the Czechs and all their neighbours, with the exception of the Slovaks: the absence of aristocratic elites. He evaluates the "plebeian" nature of the Czech nation differently than Nejedlý: "*a social unit whose core is the rural population and the petite bourgeoisie is not a suitable unit for the education of leading men who decide, take on risks and fight, especially when in doing so they can count on moral success at best."*[119] The Czechs do not have this layer, and if a person like this grows up from below (which according to Patočka was Masaryk's case) "*he remains isolated and without successors"*.[120] The Czechs are for the most part *"a society of liberated servants",* who, moreover, "*did not liberate themselves – for that a revolutionary act would have been needed. They were **liberated** on the decision of the ruler…"*[121]

Moreover, the long-term consequence of the Hussite revolution was, according to Patočka, Czech devoutness: whether Czech Brethren or baroque, both types stood in contrast to the main trend in Europe, which was emancipation, embodied in enlightenment and the progressive pathos that followed on from this. The Czechs also had insufficient understanding for the enlightened absolutism of Joseph II, who had liberated them. Finally, they had even less understanding for the real price of freedom, which lay in effort, willingness to take risks and, in extreme situations, to make sacrifices.

Although Czech society during the 19th century advanced considerably, and the "liberated servants" became both petite and haute bourgeoisie, something was missing. "Liberated servants" lack an understanding both of deeper philosophy and of significant cultural achievements – this, according to Patočka, explains the pettiness and provinciality of Czech culture, limited by the fact that it is an "*educative culture, for the people, it turns to this society and not at all towards "man" or "humankind"."* Everything in it "*turns around worldly things, around the attempt to hang on and to gain a little more of a place in the sun."*[122] (Which is, incidentally, a controversial interpretation and controversial assessment of Czech culture.)

Social difference between *"the only society truly built from the ground up"*,[123] not only in central Europe, but possibly in the whole of Europe, and its neighbours was, according to Patočka, the cause of Czechoslovakia's isolation among its neighbours. An even more pressing problem, however, was the narrow-mindedness, the "*nationalist interpretation"* of the newly-acquired state, which "*violated*

[118] Patočka, Jan: op. cit., 2006, p. 255.
[119] Ibid., p. 259.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., p. 303.
[122] Ibid., p. 310.
[123] Ibid., p. 318.

both the domestic Germans and the Slovaks in the name of a concept that from their point of view condemned them to a servile status in foreign interests"[124] Broad-mindedness goes with largeness, and the Czechs were not capable of it.

For Patočka, Czech smallness is symbolised by Masaryk's colleague and successor Edvard Beneš (1884-1948), a key participant in Masaryk's resistance during the First World War, Masaryk's foreign minister and "crown prince"during the whole of the period 1918-1935,[125] and then Czechoslovak president in 1935-8, the leader of the exile government and resistance and once again president in the years 1945-8, responsible for the treaty with Stalin, the transfer of the Sudeten Germans and also for giving way to Communist pressure during the Communist takeover of 1948.

In Patočka's eyes, Beneš embodies two major errors: "*the continuation of an unrevised language nationalism"* and, secondly, an unwillingness to consider rigorous defence "*in the extreme"* during the Munich crisis. He became, for Patočka, the symbol of Czech ethnic nationalism and its smallness, of the problem that Czech society "*only rarely, and as if by accident, produces leading personalities capable of bearing radical risks and the burden of huge responsibility, responsibility for life and death, especially if it is the life and death of millions"*.[126] Masaryk was just such a chance occurrence, but was nevertheless spared from having to decide on war and peace. He entered the war after it had broken out. "*Beneš was, compared to that, a weak man… an ambitious, verbose average… good as a secretary, no more. And it fell to such a man to take a decision regarding the future moral profile of the Czech nation – he **had** to decide, and he chose smallness… The moral backbone of society, ready to fight, was thus broken by him not just for the moment in question, but for long afterwards, for the whole war and the period after it."*[127] A unique opportunity, when, by resisting Hitler against the will of the whole of Europe, they could have changed from Hegelian slaves into lords, even at the cost of their own lives, was squandered. "*Probably definitively, because in the future world the small will have fewer and fewer opportunities to act, and thus maybe to do something big in the field of history."*[128] This was about a personal "*failure of an average man and a weak politician"*, "*society for the most part was ready for sacrifice,*" says Patočka from the position of someone who "*experienced it also (back then with horror)"*.[129]

Tesař (1989/2016) or the "pseudo" nation

The historian of the resistance, later a participant in the socialist opposition to the ocupation, a political prisoner and then an emigré, Jan Tesař was a fierce critic of Patočka. In an essay that he originally wrote as a letter to several friends (in spring 1989) and published eleven years after it was written, he provides a passionate criticism of Czechness, a passionate debate on smallness and inability to defend oneself, but also a similarly passionate defence of Beneš.

Although Tesař attacks Patočka fairly harshly, they do share a number of starting-points: both the question of smallness and the question of the ability to defend oneself. In reality they also have a similar idea regarding freedom as the consequence of the ability to take on oneself the risk of death, although Tesař articulates it without reference to Hegel and Nietzsche. However, Tesař sees Patočka as a representative of the tradition that poses historical questions without an understanding of basic historical facts; instead, it uses the compensatory historical myth that Czech society has created. In reality, according to Tesař:

1. during the Munich crisis it was not possible for Czechoslovakia to defend itself, and the real problem was that the country had for six years *neglected the material and moral preparation for its defence*;

[124] Ibid., p. 319.

[125] In 1920 Masaryk even successfully pushed for a reduction in the minimum age for the presidential office to 35, so that Beneš could stand if Masaryk were to become ill. Cf. Klimek, Antonín: *Boj o Hrad I. Hrad a pětka*, Praha: Panevropa 1996.

[126] Ibid., pp. 321-2.

[127] Ibid., pp. 322, 318, 322, 321.

[128] Ibid., p. 322.

[129] Ibid., p. 321.

2. there was *no real will for defence*, with a majority being held in Czechoslovakia by parties that had tried to achieve an agreement with Hitler; the "week-long happening" in which large demonstrations were held calling for the defence of the republic had no basis either in the will of the people to prepare for war, or in the will of the majority to put up thoroughgoing resistance and destroy weapons that could have later been used by Nazi Germany (here Tesař compares the Czech lands with Vichy, and they do not come out of the comparison well) etc.; Czechoslovakia, whose historical memory accuses Britain and France of appeasement, was also an appeasement power, as was shown after the anschluss of Austria and the Evian Conference;
3. both these facts draw attention firstly to the *weakness of the Czechoslovak democracy* (which in Tesař's concept was essentially a corruption-filled competition between incompetent party clans, moderated by Masaryk and Beneš' enlightened absolutism) and secondly to problems with the political traditions and abilities of the Czech nation.

The most fundamental problem is pointed to by the fact that although Czech historiography described the facts in a generally clear way, discussion continued to revolve around a myth with a compensatory function. Accordign to Tesař, this says something about the key characteristic of Czech culture – that is is "pseudo" and "quasi". "*The (modern) Czech nation was conceived on the stage of the Biedermayer theatre… Its national life is not primarily authentic, the nation acts itself out on the stage, and this is the beginning of all the quasis.*"[130] The usual Czech self-concept contains a picture of the inter-war Czechoslovakia as the "only democracy in central Europe", which suggests superiority to other Central and Eastern European countries (and an ignorance of their situation). As put forward by Tesař, it was indeed derivativeness, the imitation of a protector, "*the installation of a regime that on the surface was entirely French,*"[131] which was not the result of being more advanced, but of a "*servility, cultivated by history, towards a foreign protector". "Whereas our neighbours, from the Estonians to the Bulgarians* (!)[132] *each went their own distinct way, which was hard, and more than once bloody, but it was not* ***quasi.***"[133] For Tesař, a real paradigm of largeness may be found in the Poles, for their will to be independent (in this he is clearly inspired by Solidarność and a comparison of the limited Czech intellectual dissent with this social movement).[134]

Patočka's book is one of many pieces of evidence for Tesař that the basis of Czech culture is a failure to understand itself, and an entirely distorted self-concept. "*From the start of the road, Czech society was won over to the ambitious goal of being a nation, then to being a nation that was spiritually distinctive, then to being a nation that was a nation state, by a fundamental concealment of the size of this task, the level of necessary effort and the risks. At each stage it happened again. And at the same time, the nation thus created was encouraged in Jesuit fashion with praise regarding how excellent it was, and above all how persistent and determined.*"[135]

The result is that the concern which should have been the collective affair of the whole nation is transferred on one hand on to just a few individuals within the state, and on the other hand on to the powers who then end up in the role of protectors. In terms of individuals, Tesař sees their representative as being Beneš: he describes him as someone who, in the face of the limitations of Czech society and "*Masaryk's senility*"[136] had promoted preparations for war soon enough ahead, as a statesman who, right up to Munich, consistently defended the Sudeten German democrats and the Czechoslovak Jews (and who was more consistent than Masaryk in speaking against the Czech attempt to dominate over the Germans in Czechoslovakia) and finally as the author of a plan that, despite everything, had led in unfavourable conditions to the post-war renewal of Czech statehood.

[130] Tesař, Jan: *Mnichovský komplex*, Praha: Prostor 2014, p. 123.
[131] Ibid., p. 86.
[132] The concept of neighbourhood here clearly includes other nations with a similar destiny, not just neighbourhood in the literal sense of the word.
[133] Ibid.
[134] It is clearly visible from his exile journal *Dialogy*.
[135] Ibid., p. 120.
[136] Ibid., p. 80.

Instead of learning from its own mistakes, Czech society had made Beneš the main culprit for its mistakes, had placed them on him so that it did not have to come to terms with them. "*The whole of modern Czech culture…* [is] *formed by amazingly self-sacrificing individuals, who here replace the long-term work of whole social groups. The people look on inactively, they work them to death – and then they are capable, in a single stroke, of taking on their work, taking the credit for it (it is the work of the "people"), taking it as their own alibi – and then to curse the same people for the shortcomings of this work."*[137] What during the period of the National Revival was true of culture, then became true of politics: Beneš became a scapegoat and at the same time the symbol of the failure of Czechoslovak politics of the 20th century.

As far as the great powers are concerned, Tesař identifies derivativeness and abasement, as well as mimeticness. Tesař compares this type of dependency with the Poles and their sovereignism and sovereignty. The behaviour of the Czechoslovaks is not just undignified, but also calculating: "*It is a calculation not only that the French will die for our interests (which in itself is ugly), but even that our defence will work out cheaper, that they will pay it for us."*[138] Tesař's diagnosis is of a calculating short-sightedness, which in the end also concerns the period after the war. Tesař's last work is the monumental edition of *The Czech Gypsy Rhapsody* (2016), which shows the Czech resistance via the commented memories of a Gypsy partisan. Its conclusion is that, despite the undoubted heroism of individuals (some officers, part of the protestant niveau and communist movement) were not able to provide the determination to fight an adequate reflection in the partisan movement. This was discovered above all by people with exceptional stories such as the Gypsy escapee from the concentration camp for Roma at Lety, administered by the protectorate Czechs. The Czechs were not capable even of creating what the Poles or the Yugoslavs did, or even to help the Slovaks effectively in their partisanship and uprising. In the words of the hero of the Polish resistance fighter Nowak-Jezioranski, *"jak zajac pod krzakiem czekaja, až wojne vygraja za nich inni" (Like a hare under a bush, they wait until the war is won for them by others)*.[139]

It is this fact that, according to Tesař, falsifies the Czech myth, taken on by Patočka, of the *"nation that wanted to fight"*, and which was prevented from doing so by the "little man" Beneš. Instead of thoroughgoing self-criticism of society and its long-term features, it provides a scapegoat. Moreover, such an approach implies too great a role on behalf of the leader – "*is this meant to be democratic culture?"*[140]), and instead of long-term effort a mood that lasted for a week. In the given situation of Munich in 1938, all that was now possible was a sacrifice without any sort of political or moral sense. Patočka offers only "*death in the name of a symbolic gesture"*[141] (which for Tesař is also morally unacceptable, it is for him simply *„murder"*) and thus legitimises passivity at a time when activity made sense.

For Tesař, however, it made sense for his present, as well. As we have seen, Patočka sees Beneš as a man who wasted an opportunity to carry out a great act, "*probably definitively, because in the future world the small will have fewer and fewer opportunities to act"*.[142] According to Tesař, he thus merely demonstrates his lack of understanding of what is in fact precisely the opposite development, with the small having more and more opportunities to affect the large. This is exactly what happened after the occupation in 1968: the Czechs and Slovaks could have put up resistance in many various ways, but they let themselves be demoralised. "*This unique historical opportunity (which required only a minimum of victims, but, oh dear, a certain amount of invention!) was buried by the Czechs and Slovaks as the result of a destructive, demobilising,* ***nihilistic*** *philosophy that was also Patočka's, and as the result of the stupidity and laziness of the dissidents, gasping densely for a Leader at time when Allah had set before each of them the task of acting freely and on their own responsibility."*[143] A

[137] Ibid., p. 118.
[138] Ibid., p. 84.
[139] Tesař, Jan: *Česká cikánská rapsodie III*, Praha: Triáda 2016, p. 60.
[140] Tesař, Jan: op. cit., 2014, p. 130.
[141] Ibid., p. 133.
[142] See above.
[143] Ibid., pp. 132-133.

situation that in Tesař's eyes the Poles and Afghans managed to make use of brilliantly was wasted by the Czechs, partly because of their inability to think politically and to see opportunities. Patočka is an extreme example of the replacement of political action by gesture and moralising. "*Opposition activity is bad, because the opposition philosophy is bad. Czech history is bad, because Czech philosophy is bad.*"[144]

Conclusion

Lloyd George wrote in 1939 that the Czechs had received *"exceptionally favourable treatment from the Allies… the result was the recognition of the multilingual and incoherent state of Czechoslovakia and the integration of thousands of hundreds of thousands of protesting Hungarians and millions of angry Germans into the state"*.[145] When in 1948 the Soviet communists formulated a criticism of the Czechoslovak ones and their attempt to take their "own path to socialism", they reflect in it, as well as attitudes that we find largely sympathetic today (moderation in the "peasant question", "social democratic" approaches) also a chauvinism towards the Germans and Hungarians.[146] What feelings today are articulated by the sympathisers with Czechoslovak, later Czech, integration into western structures after 1989 can, of course, only be guessed. Of course, the views from outside are not some kind of "revealed truth", but still, it tells something.

It seems as if it has been a constant in Czech history of the 20th century that a solution to the "Czech question" at decisive moments has been taken to be a thoroughgoing identification with some sort of universalist ideology – and an attempt to promote, by means of this identification and as advantageously as possible, Czech national interests, whether these be democracy and the right of nations to self-determination, the Stalinist version of state socialism or (neo)liberal democracy. At moments when this universalist ideology and the given interests do not overlap, the reaction has been first an attempt at camouflage, and then shock and nationalist turn (as in the years 1938 and 1968).

From the point of view of the Geertzian terms of our questions, it thus seems that the main problem of Masaryk's and Nejedlý's concept of the "Czech question" consisted in a radical and unreflected combination of "essentialism" and "epochalism": it identified some sort of national essence of the Czech national identity with an actual universalist ideology. It is understandable that such an identification must seem provincial, at least when viewed from the outside. Todorova was right when she described the fundamentals of the Czech identity in just such a way, even though she appears to have got carried away in searching for their roots.

The dispute between Masaryk and Pekař is usually described so as to suggest that Masaryk was right as a philosopher (as he then showed with his political activity), while Pekař was right as a historian.[147] It is slightly absurd from today's point of view to judge who was "right", but even so, I shall propose an opposite and quite paradoxical conclusion: Masaryk was right in two key points *as a historian.* Firstly, he was right when he stressed the connection between religious plurality and the modern era; the modern era was rooted not just in the Renaissance, but also in Protestantism.[148] He was also right when, in opposition to Pekař's idea of the thousand years of the existing "nation", he stressed (albeit inconsistently and incoherently) the newness or modernity of the nation. Pekař, however, was right (although he argued from doubtful premises) *as a political theorist* when, criticising Masaryk's universalism, he indicated that values which are universal and belong to the whole of humanity can hardly be the foundation of the *identity* of a single concrete nation.

Most of the authors we have discussed have an ambivalent relationship to the West. They identify with it and, indeed, compete to see whether they can implement its values more consistently than the West itself. It is at the moment of disappointment that the "Slav" alternative comes into play.

[144] Ibid., p. 131.
[145] Quoted in Heimann, Mary: *Czechoslovakia. The State that Failed*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2009, p. 47.
[146] Dokument: O některých chybách v činnosti Komunistické strany Československa, *Soudobé dějiny* 1-2/2016, pp. 54-76.
[147] Cf. Kučera, Martin: Pekař proti Masarykovi, Praha: Ústav TGM, 1995.
[148] Cf. Bělohradský, Václav: Dvě poznámky k jednomu dokumentu, *Svědectví* 75 (1985), pp. 817-826.

The relationship to universalist ideology is always at the same time the relationship to the power or powers that are meant to guarantee it. Thus we can call it in paradoxical way as “instrumentalist universalism”. It pretends that the powers themselves are the bearers of this universalism, or it berates them for being insufficient bearers of it. In some cases it trumps the powers; the Czech version of universalist ideology may be small and local, but it may thus also lay claim to being “purer”. In this way some authors (Kundera, Havel) of a certain type orientalise the West.[149] A certain type of orientalisation of one’s own society is then hidden in variants of the concept of “smallness” and the emphasis on the Czechs being a small nation. This figure seems to resonate most of all with Patočka. He combines an interpretation of largeness based on risk, indeed self-sacrifice, or on cultural achievements of a world level, with an image of Czechs as essentially predestined socially to smallness, indeed inferiority. The opposite, as it were, of this approach is Nejedlý’s fetishism of the “people”, which sees the “plebeian” nature of the Czech nation as an essentially positive characteristic and as the provider of hope. Patočka and Nejedlý are certainly not alike in the extent to which ideological considerations deformed their writing style. However, they are alike in their binary vision and essentialist understanding of the social structure on an elite/plebeian scale. They merely use opposing evaluation marks. Nejedlý in his approach is negotiating legitimacy for Czech Stalinism. He is successful, but at the cost of the undercurrent of his synthesis becoming an unreformed and unreflected heritage. Patočka, in his approach, tries to formulate a critical perspective. He is successful, but at the cost of some highly sweeping elitist statements that border on classism.

On the continuum bounded by these two extremes we find Masaryk, Kundera and Tesař. They do not talk so much about smallness in the social sense, about the Czech nation as a nation of “smal people”, but more about “smallness” as a destiny, a fate, in comparison with other nations. For all of them such a situation is an opportunity that must be used – basically to mobilise forces for their own distinct inputs into the discussion. This proposed distinctiveness, however, is limited by the very universalism that these authors promote. In the case of Masaryk and Kundera it leads to megalomania: the Czech nation receives unrealistic tasks so that it may prove itself up to its world mission, but under the weight of these unrealistic tasks it collapses and becomes demoralised. In the case of Tesař the megalomania is turned inwards: the first precondition for overcoming “smallness” in the negative sense is to stop misleading oneself and to ask questions truthfully and harshfully. However, the question remains as to whether such a proposal, implicating the premise of the rational society capable to live without myth, is realistic.

[149] Cf. Barša, Pavel: Evropa Evropanům, in Hlaváček, Petr: *České vize Evropy*, Praha: Academia 2014, p. 107-112.