

Hana Červinková

PLAYING SOLDIERS IN BOHEMIA

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF NATO MEMBERSHIP



Prague Studies in Sociocultural Anthropology 4

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of NATO Membership**

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PREFACE

This book is an ethnographic rendering of a phase in the Czech post-socialist modernity when the military, the state and society were reorganizing their relationships according to the rules of a new rationality. Except for Chapter Five, which draws on my earlier research, this book is based on observations and interviews which I completed during my sixteen months of dissertation fieldwork (February 2001 – June 2002) in the military bases and other sites in the Czech Republic. I view my fieldwork as an intense personal and anthropological experience filled with ambiguities and paradoxes that stem from the grotesqueness which accompanied the transformation of power relations and identities in the post-socialist period. My ambition was to communicate some of the unique atmosphere that pervaded the transitional moment with respect to the military – an institution and area of research that have been largely neglected by the scholars of post-socialism.

This study is not a critical analysis of the post-socialist military or the civil-military relations in the Czech Republic. I conceptualize the individual ethnographic chapters of this book as free-standing scenes, each of which attempts to address a particular idea that I found dominant in my observations related to the military. But rather than writing the ethnography of the military or its relationship to society, I use the military as an observation point from which I examine the often intangible, but recurrent themes of Czech national identity and post-socialist transformation. I hope that the details of the small stories, which I present here, will address larger cultural and social issues (Geertz 1973: 23) and enable readers to use my work to analyze similar phenomena in other (not only) post-socialist societies.

Wrocław, January 16, 2005

Hana Červinková

INTRODUCTION – PROFESSIONALIZING THE WAR MACHINE: THE PARADOXES OF MILITARY POWER IN THE POST-SOCIALIST STATE

As for the war machine in itself, it seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 352)

Beneath the omissions, illusions and lies that make us believe in the necessities of nature or the functional requirements of order, we are bound to reencounter war: it is the cipher of peace. It continuously divides the entire social body; it places each of us in one camp or the other. And it is not enough to find this war again as an explanatory principle; we must reactivate it, make it leave the mute, larval forms in which it goes about its business almost without our being aware of it, and lead it to a decisive battle that we must prepare for if we intend to be victorious. (Foucault 1997: 61)

I.

The large-size photo that falls out of the morning newspaper as I open it on my way to work shows a detail of the Czech insignia on a rusting green metal background of military machinery (Illustration 1). The rust is advancing into the center of the ensign and a warning note at the bottom of the page reads, “Time to do something“ („Čas něco udělat“). On the other side of the flyer there are several captions set to the same background of rusting metal (Illustration 2). The first piece of text asks: “What do we feel when hearing the name of the Czech Armed Forces? Self-confidence? Strength? Or even pride?” Clearly the questions are rhetorical, because without providing an answer first, the next note says: “But that is how it should be. But that would mean to have a military always able to protect

and to help where help is needed. Professional armed forces – less a people’s military, but a more humane one (Profesionální armádu – méně lidovou a více lidskou).” The concluding caption provides an explanation and information regarding the authorship of the surprising addition to the daily: “What are we doing to make this happen? Everything. No facials, but a strict diet. A change in thinking, modernization. No ordering around¹, but a lot of work. And the deadline? The year 2006. The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic.” Signed – “The Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, www.army.cz.”

In the next flyer that appears in the paper a few days later, the message is the same, but the photo is different (Illustration 3). It shows a military sapper in high-tech protective gear searching for mines on a desolate soccer field located in some remote war-torn place. A large caption at the bottom of the page reads: “We are not playing at being soldiers (Nehrajem si na vojáky).” The other side contains a “short guide to coping with the military reform,” whose goals are: “A healthy, professional military. A military of full readiness, a military able to be in the right place at the right time. A military that is slim, modern and thinking. A military without rust. A military full of good and competent soldiers.” Signed “Jaroslav Tvrdík, the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic.”

These newspaper inserts, together with other propaganda materials such as the small recruitment brochure targeted at youth, “Tomorrow Belongs to the Professionals,”² or the more comprehensive handbook, “The Reform of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic,”³ appeared as a part of a rigorous campaign promoting defense reform launched by the Czech Ministry of Defense in 2001. The campaign, which coincided with the period of my fieldwork on the air force bases of the Czech Armed Forces (February 2001 – June 2002), initiated great upheavals in military matters, which were further intensified by international consequences of the September 11th attacks in the United States and the ensuing war on terrorism. At this time,

¹ (žádná buzerace)

² Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2002c.

³ Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2001.

the Czech state made a serious attempt, for the first time in its post-socialist history, to consolidate its own authority with that of its military institution. This book is an ethnographic rendering of this particular moment in the fledgling post-socialist modernity, when the strange space of power, which always exists between the state and its institution of legitimate violence, is being filled and organized according to the rules of a new rationality. Professionalization starts as the technology of this process, through which not only the military, but the larger apparatus of power that Deleuze and Guattari call *the war machine* (idem) changes its position vis-à-vis the state and society.

Essential to the ethnographic observations that constitute this book is the setting of post-socialist transition in which the grotesque drama under consideration takes place. Rather than an ordered transference of systems and institutions, the period in question appears to me as the rather blurred stage which anthropologists call 'liminality' (Van Gennep 1909; Turner 1966). Customarily applied to mark a person or a group in the middle period of the rites of passage (e.g., a neophyte during the puberty initiation rituals that bring him or her into adulthood), liminal entities are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law..." (Turner 1966: 95). Suspended in a stage of a 'post' and a 'pre', liminal entities are ambiguous and potentially disruptive, escaping classification and possessing of an openness that challenges harmony, hierarchy and structure. Similar to an individual during the rites of passage, the post-socialist state embodies a liminal phase when both an unsettlement of old norms that ruled society and politics under socialism and the simultaneous institutionalization of new standards take place (Buchowski 2001). During this time, even the military, normally an institution covered by a mask of secrecy, is disturbingly exposed while the state is still forming the protective shield constituted by the subversions of language and the rationalizing technology of power⁴.

⁴ In my view of secrecy as essential to state power I draw especially on the works of Phillip Abrams, Michel Foucault and Elias Canetti. In his, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," for example, Abrams says that the ability of the state to elude the perceptive faculties of citizens as well as scholars, lies

The atrocity of the soldiers' task in war, Elaine Scarry convincingly argues, is fundamentally insupportable for thought and therefore inexpressible in language (Scarry 1985). The irrationality of military combat whose content is nothing more than the reciprocal injuring and out-injuring of the opponent, must therefore be justified by governments through lies and subversions of language, through which wars become 'peacemaking operations' and the killing of civilians 'collateral damage'. But under the surface of the rationalizing technical language of military experts and governments, which do not speak of humans but of weapons, we find something else. Anthropologist Carol Cohn (1987:717), based on her research of the language of defense intellectuals, identifies this underlying set of rather irrational qualities as

currents of homoerotic excitement, heterosexual domination, the drive toward competency and mastery, the pleasures of membership in an elite and privileged group, the ultimate importance and meaning of membership in the priesthood, and the thrilling power of becoming Death, shatterer of worlds.

In the liminal phase of state formation, when the state's power is not yet consolidated enough to allow its actions and discourse to assume the image of detached and objective rationality, the actual content of military work – that of exerting violence in the service of the state against other human beings who are citizens of other states – can still make itself felt as an essential paradox.

in the nature of its power, whose integral element is to "withhold information, deny observation and dictate the terms of knowledge" (Abrams 1988: 62). Michel Foucault claims that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault 1978: 86). And Elias Canetti (1960) says that "Secrecy lies at the very core of power." Especially relevant to the military power, which relies on technical secrets is Canetti's definition of the concentration of a secret as a "ratio between the number of those it concerns and the number of those who possess it. From this definition," he adds, "it can easily be seen that modern technical secrets are the most concentrated and dangerous that have ever existed. They concern everyone, but only a tiny number of people have real knowledge of them and their actual use depends on a handful of men" (idem, p. 296).

What follows is an examination of a military and a state in 'transition', made possible by the very liminality of the historic time in which I carried out my fieldwork. It would be difficult for an anthropologist, moreover a civilian and a woman, to be allowed to spend sixteen months on military bases, interviewing officers about their work and their relationship to the state, were it not for the special kind of chaos characteristic for transitory situations. The banality of the world of power that I found was reminiscent of the "obscene, vulgar and grotesque" that Achille Mbembe (1992), building on the theory of carnival of Mikhail Bakhtin, identifies as typical attributes of power in post-colonial regimes⁵. Bakhtin locates the grotesque with its fundamental attributes of "exaggeration, hyperbolism and excessiveness" in the "non-official cultures" and the plebeian classes who use them to resist power through laughter (Bakhtin 1984: 301). Mbembe, on the other hand, argues that the comic modes of the burlesque and the grotesque are "intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed" (Mbembe 1992: 1-2). He considers it a mistake on Bakhtin's part to attribute the production of the comic modes to the dominated. Instead, he says, the post-colonial situation teaches us that the relationship between the powerful and the powerless is not a "relationship of resistance or of collaboration, but it is rather best characterized as a promiscuous relationship: a convivial tension between the commandement and its 'targets' (idem, p. 5). It is this "logic of familiarity and domesticity," Mbembe argues, which accounts for the ability of the state to "institutionalize its world of meanings as a 'socio-historical world,' and to make that world fully real, turning it into a part of people's common sense not only by instilling it in the minds of its cibles (or 'target population'), but also in the imaginary of an époque" (idem, p. 2). This logic of conviviality signals that the grotesque is just as characteristic of the powerless as it is of the powerful. It is particularly strongly revealed at the times of heightened intensity of state formation.

⁵ I thank Harry West for bringing Mbembe's work to my attention.

The similarity between the post-colony and post-socialism comes into sharp view when one studies post-socialist militaries, which are experiencing a transition from being members of the Warsaw Pact to being members of their former arch enemy, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. As members of the Warsaw Pact, the national militaries were under direct control of the Moscow command. They were the tools of the colonial Soviet empire that trained them for the pacification of local populations as well as for potential attack against the capitalist West⁶. The lack of national command among satellite member militaries and their full dependence on the Moscow directive was glaringly revealed during the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The subsequent ‘friendly’ military occupation by the Soviets (1968–1991) whose content was the disciplining of the Czechs and Slovaks, holds great resemblance to the experience of other countries that we normally label as the ‘colony’. My study of the post-socialist military suggests that it might be useful to theorize the liminal period of transition from socialism to democracy in the former Soviet bloc as a post-colonial situation,⁷ characterized as it is by “a distinctive art of improvisation, by a tendency to excess and disproportion as well as by distinctive ways in which identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation” (Mbembe 1992: 2). The observations contained in this book address the excesses produced by the post-socialist moment, in which the war machine is being called forth as one of the main actors of state-building. In the course of this process, professionalization as a new technology of state power charms us with the power of futuristic possibilities. At the same time, however, the very ultramodern and objective promises of professionalization collide not only with the tenacious re-

⁶ For a general overview of the structure of command of the Warsaw Pact, see Jeffrey Simon (1985). For the specific character of the relationship between the Soviet and the Czechoslovak Armed Forces and their command, see Condoleezza Rice’s book *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948-1983: Uncertain Allegiance* (1984).

⁷ Michael Burawoy (1999: 310) suggests this in his afterword to an edited book of post-socialist ethnographies and foreshadows a trend among native intellectuals in East and Central Europe who might abandon transitory and turn to something more akin to postcolonial theory. See also Katherine Verdery (2002).

mains of the recent socialist past, but also with the professionalization's appeal to the distinctly unmodern and irrational impulses through which the state and the war machine attempt to inscribe themselves in people's bodies and culture. Overall, the professionalization campaign is a strange mixture in which the invocations of pride in defending the freedom of the family and nation combine with the promises of training in super-rational arts of computerized warfare, both of which will enable the country's entry into the brotherhood of modern (i.e., militarily advanced) Western states.

Michel Foucault claims that war became the permanent basis of the mechanisms of power at the beginning of the 17th century as the historico-political discourse replaced the philosophico-juridical discourse organized around the problem of sovereignty and law (Foucault 1997: 61). The historico-political discourse is a basis of a different rationality, he says, which no longer attempts to "rediscover, beneath the visible brutality of bodies and passions, a fundamental, abiding rationality, linked by nature to the just and the good" (idem, p. 62). On the contrary, according to the new rationality, which does not aim at universal truth, what is meant "to serve as a principal decipherment is the confusion of violence, passions, enmities, revenges [and] the web of petty circumstances that decide defeats and victories" (ibid.). At the end, according to Foucault (ibid.),

the dark, elliptical god of battles must illuminate the long days of order, labor, and peace. Fury must account for harmonies. Thus, at the beginning of history and law one will posit a series of brute facts (physical vigor, force, character traits), a series of chance happenings (defeats, victories, successes or failures of conspiracy, rebellions or alliances). And only above this tangle will a growing rationality take shape, that of calculations and strategies – a rationality that, as one rises and it develops, becomes increasingly fragile, more and more spiteful, more closely tied to illusion, to fancy, to mystification.

In this discourse, Foucault says, truth functions not as a universal ideal, but as a weapon for a partisan victory.

Pointing to the fragility of the modern rationality based on the war principle, Foucault admits that its power is not self-evident, but it must be continuously reasserted: “[I]t is not enough to find this war again as an explanatory principle;” he says, “we must reactivate it, make it leave the mute, larval forms in which it goes about its business almost without our being aware of it, and lead it to a decisive battle that we must prepare for if we intend to be victorious (idem, p. 60).

In this book I focus on the paradoxes and ruptures which accompany the consolidation of the new rationality of violence in the post-socialist Czech Republic. Chief among the characteristics of this process is its grotesqueness, which arises as the fantasy of professionalization collides with post-socialist reality. The grotesque lies in the mixture of the comic effect and the dizzying knowledge of the seriousness of the process under way. After a short break following the end of the Cold War, the war machine is now again permeating our lives and structuring our thought. Its logic, which consists in learning to out-injure the enemy in the most efficient way on behalf of such a peculiar idea as the State, may now still appear grotesque. In the meantime, however, this logic, largely unnoticed because covered by the cloak of secrecy composed of the rationalizing strategies of modern power, is becoming an inevitable part of our lives.

II.

The beginning of the military reform in the Czech Republic, which introduced professionalization as the new organizing technology of state power, coincided with the appointment of Jaroslav Tvrdík⁸ to the post of the Czech Minister of Defense in May 2001. This young politician, who had left the military as a lieutenant colonel only five months earlier to start his political career, set out on the unpaved path of post-socialist military-

⁸ After the Parliament had not approved the military budget, Tvrdík resigned from his post as a minister and shortly thereafter assumed the lucrative post as the President of the state-owned Czech Airlines.

public relations to make himself and the defense sector the darlings of media coverage and attention. In the country where the status of the armed forces had not had high priority since the end of the Cold War in 1989, Tvrdík relied for the success of his campaign on his own high-intensity comportment and theatrical talent which he used to promote things military on the national agenda. The minister's fervor was strong during his speeches to the Czech parliament when he was advocating budget-related promotions for his sector or vouching for support for the Czech Republic's military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Equally enthusiastic and persuasive, however, was his manner when he attended discussion programs or offered interviews in the media about the urgency of the military reform. He distinguished himself as the first, and thus far, the only leader of the military sector who agreed to attend the popular television program called, *Kotel (Cauldron)*, screened on a commercial TV channel. Confined on a little stage located at the bottom of a cylindrically shaped auditorium filled with a fractious audience, he successfully defended his military reform before a moderator who usually prides herself on being able to 'light a fire under politicians'. Unlike his predecessors in the position of minister of defense since 1989, who appeared to the public only sporadically at military anniversaries or to explain military scandals, Tvrdík resolutely claimed his spot in the limelight. His hard work bore fruit – the visibility and popularity of the new minister and his sector, which had been since 1989 a rather overlooked state department, rapidly grew⁹.

An essential element of Tvrdík's reform is his clear identification of the reform period as a transitory stage that divides the new order he is establishing from the socialist order of the past.

⁹ See summary of articles on the website of a public opinion survey agency STEM that show increasing levels of public support for and trust in the Czech military - www.stem.cz. See also Ivan Gabal et.al. „The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic: Changing Czech Views of Security, Military & Defence.“ Just before the Czech Republic joined NATO, the membership in the Alliance was supported by less than a half of the Czech population. For a summary of the predicaments of this pre-accession moment, see Spurný (1998).

In his campaign, the existing Czech military is revealed as an institution suffering from technological and organizational obsolescence and disorder, generally unfit for the armed conflicts of the 21st century. In his flyer announcing the reform, the Czech military's outdatedness is symbolized by the rust consuming the metal of military technology. This technology comes from the times when the Czechoslovak military was a colonial subsidiary of the Soviet Army, the traitor of the Czech and Slovak people: from the perspective of real needs of state defense an impotent ogre whose might was completely controlled by a foreign master. The political situation, which created the conditions for the existence of this military order, is no longer in place. The proverbial rust, however, still thrives on the existing Soviet technology, which has not yet been replaced by modern Western-made machines – the tools and symbols of a new military order.

Tvrđík's negative evaluation of the state of the national military closely corresponded with the view of the Czech public, which regarded the overall capability of the country's armed forces skeptically (Simon 1985). The Minister's criticism also pleasingly conformed with the view of NATO officials and that of the circle of international and domestic military experts who have been criticizing the Czech state for the slow pace of military reforms since the end of the socialist era in 1989¹⁰. According to their view, while other areas of the Czech state have undergone transformation, the defense sector has remained largely unchanged by the political upheavals in the country, resembling, in terms of personnel expertise, technology apparatus and general organizational structure, the Soviet-type force from the period of the Cold War. Unlike his predecessors, who defended the sector against inquisitive looks from outside, Tvrđík opened the institution to criticism and solicited both domestic and international support for his reform, which announced professionalization as the new organizing technology of military power.

¹⁰ See, for example, Źantovský (1999), Gabal (2001, 2002), Spurný (2001, 2002), Simon (1999), Źedivý (1999), Ulrich (1999, 2002), Cottey, Edmuds and Forster (2002).

Inside of the military, professionalization promises to abolish the very unpopular law of compulsory male conscription and create a small, mobile and effective volunteer force, able to be 'at the right place at the right time'. The new military will consist of professional practitioners in the art of military violence who, equipped with the top-level technology, will be deployable in international and domestic operations of utmost difficulty. Professionalization as a quantitative reduction of forces and technology promises a qualitative improvement of professional conditions for the practitioners – better pay, a better working environment, better technology, superior technical and linguistic skills, contact with the world, a clear career ladder for advancement and improved care for family members.

Despite many unpopular decisions that Tvrdík carried out in the military sector and which led to severe reductions of the number of military personnel and units, he enjoyed great popularity from within the military¹¹. During my interviews with officers of the Czech Air Force, my informants often talked about Tvrdík passionately as “the first minister who understands and loves the military”¹² or “the first leader who, while tough on us, is serious about changing things for the better”¹³. Feared and loved, Tvrdík was the archetypical leader of an army whose power relies on the members' passion for authority and their restriction of intellect for the sake of obedience. His campaign for military professionalization – an establishment of a hyper-modern, internationally deployable military – relied on the desire of old-fashioned human impulses to be governed by unrestricted force and perpetrate violence in its service. Observing the enthusiastic reception of Tvrdík's campaign, I had many occasions to appreciate Freud's acute insight into the uncanny qualities of military psychology, which as he says, “may ... with justice be traced back to the fact of their origin in the primal horde” (Freud 1959: 59–60). It was on the strange

¹¹ In his views of the reform, Tvrdík frequently clashed with other leaders of his sector. For a summary of his conflict with the Chief of the General Staff, see Vrána (2002).

¹² Interview with a Major of the Czech Armed Forces, September 2001.

¹³ Interview with a Captain of the Czech Armed Forces, August 2001.

mixture of extreme technological rationality and fundamental human irrationality that the appeal of Tvrdík's campaign rested – calling at the same time on soldiers' use of reason and their emotional dedication to the military family and the nation. In keeping with the exaggerated mode of his action and his dedication to the military family, Tvrdík's resignation from his post was a protest of the government's cuts in the military budget, which would not allow him to "keep the promises he had given to his people" (Gazdík and Slonková 2003).

There is no doubt that Tvrdík owed the success of his campaign to his acute insight into the functioning of the war machine. In his vigorous efforts, the politician exhibited an understanding of its fundamental principle – the war machine was not an integral part of the state, but a tenuous liaison, whose loyalty had to be bought and whose power harnessed. Not a 'thing' limited to the military institution, but a larger principle of a new rationality whose establishment would require the dispersion of new rules of governance of the space of power between the institution of legitimate violence and the socio-political sphere. Therefore, it is not only the military and its technology that the corrosion in our flyer threatens with disappearance. As we can see, the rust is approaching the center of the Czech insignia – and so what is really endangered by military obsolescence are the Czech state and nation themselves. The 'decorroding' treatment which is military reform, therefore, will not only bring order and modernity to the military sector, but it will also repair damage incurred by the state and the nation as a result of the Czech military's weakness. Even more than on the military itself, therefore, the critical eye of the then new defense minister as well as that of the security specialists focused on the need to transform the existing relationship between the military and the socio-political sphere.

'Civil-military relations', as this fuzzy space between the military, political and public sphere is called, is always an area defined by threatening ambiguity, and filled with mutual distrust as

¹⁴ The classics of civil-military relations literature include especially: Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military*

well as courtship¹⁴. The state fundamentally relies on the military for its foundation and continued protection, but it can never trust it completely. The military is therefore controlled by the state in concrete ways that are set to limit the capriciousness of the military's power, without limiting its potential to use violence with the utmost efficiency for the out-injuring of the enemy.

The scholars who have written about the place of the military as a state institution of legitimate violence mostly agree on the ambiguous nature of its location and allegiance. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987: 352), for example, place the war machine somewhere between the executive and legislative branches of the state, but even so, they say "in every respect, the war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus". They compare the difference between the state and the war machine to the difference between the game of chess and the game of Go: "Chess codes and decodes space, whereas Go proceeds altogether differently, territorializing or deterritorializing it (make the outside a territory in space; consolidate that territory by the construction of a second, adjacent territory; deterritorialize the enemy by shattering his territory from within; deterritorialize oneself by renouncing, by going elsewhere...). Another justice, another movement, another space-time" (idem, p. 353). The war machine, external as it is to the state apparatus, can find only momentary embodiment in the military institution:

"The State has no war machine of its own; it can only appropriate one in the form of a military institution, one that will continually cause it problems. This explains the mistrust States have toward their military institutions, in that the military institution inherits an extrinsic war machine" (idem, p. 352).

Relations; Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*; Bengt Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power*; Harold Lasswell, "The Garrison State"; Stanislaw Andrzejewski, *Military Organization and Society*; Michael Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment*; Charles Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation". A very comprehensive selection of these writings is included in Giuseppe Caforio, *The Sociology of the Military*. For details see bibliography.

The anxious relationship between the state and the military institution in general, seems to draw on the problem of the legitimacy of violence that the military embodies. Through authority, Max Weber says, or through the appropriation of crime, as Charles Tilly proposes, the state harnesses violence into its legal system (Tilly 1985: 170; Weber 1946: 78). Perhaps more explicitly than other authors, Walter Benjamin ties violence directly to legality. In the opening sentence of his essay, "Critique of Violence", he says: "[T]he task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice" (Benjamin 1978: 132). The legal system, he says, "tries to erect, in all areas where individual ends could be usefully pursued by violence, legal ends that can only be realized by legal power", establishing thus the law's monopoly on violence vis-à-vis individuals (idem, p. 135). What is most important, however, is that the goal of the law's monopoly on violence is not to attain the alleged legal ends, but to preserve the law itself (idem, pp. 135–136). In the end, all violence is either law-making or law-preserving (idem, p.142). Within the military institution, the fundamentally arbitrary and self-serving nature of both law-preserving and law-making violence comes into sharp view. The law-preserving character of violence, among other things, is demonstrated in the rule of the involuntary general conscription through which male citizens are by force subordinated to law. And during wars, the law sanctions the predatory violence of the individual, which is, in fact, violence used for natural ends by the sanctioners and can therefore in a crisis come into conflict with legal ends (idem, p. 138). Using the example of a peace ceremony, which is required of the victor to sanction his victory in war, Benjamin claims that such a priori sanctioning is necessary because it consists in recognizing the new conditions as a new law. And it is this law-making character of violence which is at the inception of all states and which forever threatens them with the possibility of a coming into being of a new law. It is this threatening character of violence embedded in every legal system that explains the uneasy relationship of the states toward their militaries.

Jacques Derrida, expounding on Benjamin's essay, calls for an unceasing practice of deconstruction of practices related to law and justice, tied as they are to violence. Through legal code, the modern state claims to ensure the security of its citizens by suppressing the violence of the state of nature in which everyone has unlimited prerogative of power. But, this violence of individuals in the state of nature is not abolished but rather reorganized and resituated in the state. While the modern state founds its authority on the rule of law, this law only serves to mask the violence which was there at the moment of state's foundation and which continues to preserve its existence. Such violence of the law is full of internal contradictions, which manifest themselves especially in moments of rupture and conflict. Focusing on the moment, when new law and a new state are being founded, Derrida offers an interesting insight into the nature of violence in law and the process of its concealment: "All revolutionary situations, all revolutionary discourses, on the left or on the right justify the recourse to violence by alleging the founding, in progress or to come, of a new law".

This moment when new law is being founded is a terrifying moment, which interrupts the existing law in order to found another. There is "in law, an instance of non-law" (Derrida 1992: 36). Because these moments in their very violence are 'uninterpretable, they produce an effect that Derrida calls 'mystique'. An effective critique of violence is so difficult just because, according to Derrida, these moments and their violence become concealed and forgotten as law assumes [once again] its mystically impartial and divine character.

I view the liminal moment of post-socialist transition as such an instance of non-law in law – a moment which interrupts the existing law to found another. In its liminal character, this moment is that of conflict and rupture, in which the contradictory aspects of power are revealed in their grotesqueness. Before they become concealed, the effects of this transitory disorder show themselves particularly strongly with respect to the military – an institution which embodies the law-making and law-preserving character of violence. Perhaps also due to the non-violent transition of power from the socialist to the democratic

systems in former Czechoslovakia, the emerging democratic Czech state has experienced difficulties in establishing the historico-political discourse which would credit a particular moment of collective violence for its coming into being. The resulting momentary absence of a clearly defined strategy toward the military institution created a space for a rather open reconstitution of the location of violence within the new law. The military reform, announced by Minister Tvrdík twelve years after the socialist system ceased to exist, is an attempt to fill this open space with a legitimizing discourse and practices that would help consolidation of the new political system. The chief technology of this legitimation process is military professionalization, through which the state attempts to harness the war machine and establish the divine character of the new law.

III.

The dramatic change in the governance of the space of power between the military and the sociopolitical sphere in the post-socialist Czech Republic is a process, which in the world of military social science is called 'democratization' (Ulrich 1999, 2002; Forster et al. 2001; Simon 1995). 'Democratization of civil-military relations' denotes a rather structured progress from one form of state's control over the military to another – from the communist, or Soviet type of control to a democratic one. While both systems strive to achieve the state of maximum harmony between the military, the political and the public spheres, they use very different strategies of building the military's prowess while keeping the institution under control.

In the democratic system, the military's control is insured by its separation from the political sphere, which contains it through constitutional and legislative provisions. Such separation from politics presumably starts at the very top – the Supreme Commander of the state's military being a civilian – and ends with the prohibition of political involvement for individual military practitioners. In the democratic system, moreover, a network of civilian specialists, intellectuals and advisors ensures

that matters of defense and security are on the political and social agenda and that the public acknowledges and absorbs them¹⁵. In the communist system, the communist party on all levels, including the politicization of individual officers, directly controls the military. Civilian involvement is not necessary under the communist system, where the military is completely identified with the party, which rules the state and which supposedly also embodies civil society. This ensures the military its status and legitimation, public support being irrelevant to its power and standing. But far from a structured transference of systems, the Czech military reform whose proceedings I observed during my fieldwork, was a rather chaotic and paradoxical process of the displacement of the war machine. The general direction of this move is away from the core of the state where the war machine was under socialism tied to the political power of the communist party, to a location outside of the realm of the state's political power. In the process of military professionalization, the military service of young men as a civic responsibility becomes replaced by a monetized working relationship between the state and volunteer mercenaries; volunteer officers who all used to be members of the communist party and political allies of the state become depoliticized or replaced by young generations of post-socialist professionals; old Russian technology is substituted by Western-made weapons; and the knowledge of English, not Russian, becomes the most desirable skill in the Czech military.

The displacement of the war machine thus results in a multitude of sub-displacements, which all mark the death of past objects and relationships. But as with every act of petrification – the death of the object, which comes to be consumed – results in the excess of a spirit whose essence “just as the scream of the one who is killed,” in Bataille’s words, “is the supreme affirmation of life” (Bataille 1992: 40). And so as the post-socialist

¹⁵ “Additional critical components [of democratic civil-military relations] are a vibrant national security community, whose members are variously ready to shape the debate, competent enough to man the state’s national security structures, and accountable to society at-large through balanced civil-military relations” (Ulrich 2002: 421).

Czech state attempts to organize this excess, it produces other kinds of unintended surplus. This tendency, which Achille Mbembe identifies as the defining characteristic of post-colonial regimes, is equally characteristic of post-socialism. This is because both types of regimes share their liminal character; while the old system is no longer in place, its ghosts remain and hold sway, while the new structures are yet to be instituted. The observation, which links the individual ethnographic vignettes of this book, is that military professionalization as the rationalizing tool of modernity in the post-socialist state relies for its effect on the simultaneous evocation of distant and recent ghosts of history. The resulting effect is more often than not that of grotesqueness, which, horrifying and amusing at the same time, is the essential characteristic of moment in post-socialist modernity when the place of legal violence in the state is being defined.

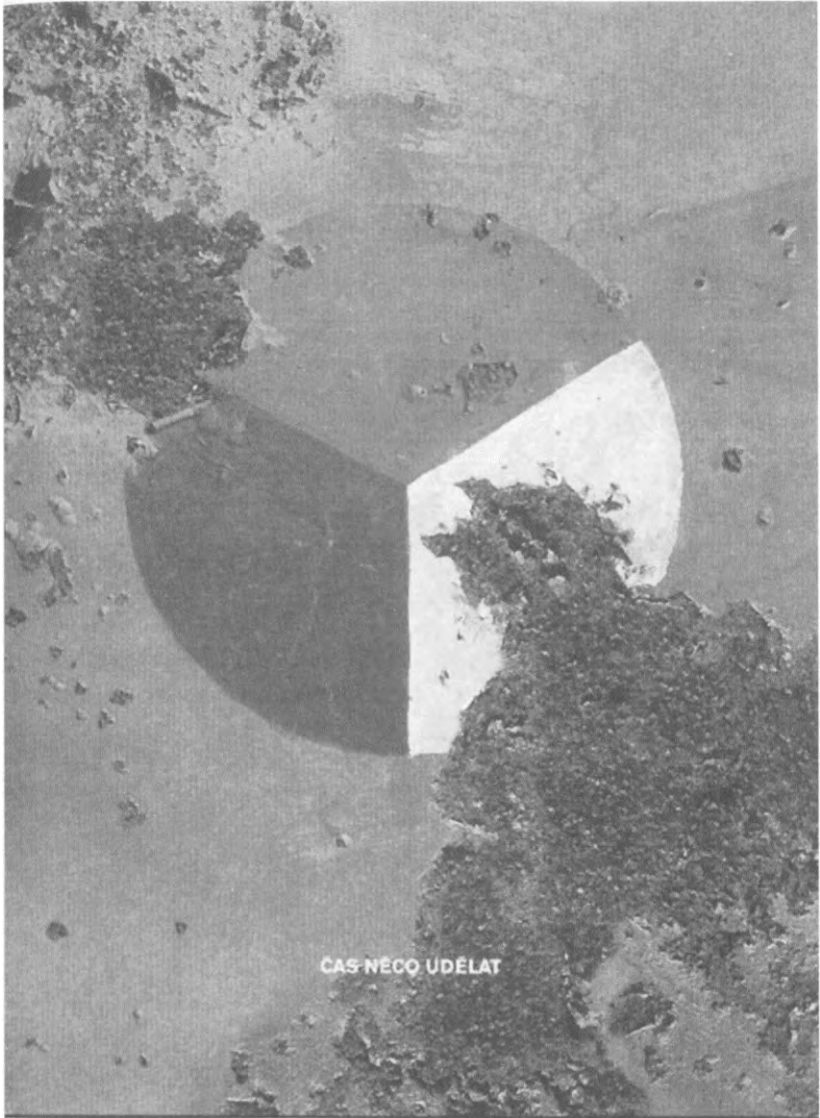


Illustration 1: “Čas něco udělat.” (“Time to do something”).
The first flyer announcing the Czech military reform. Source: Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, 2001.

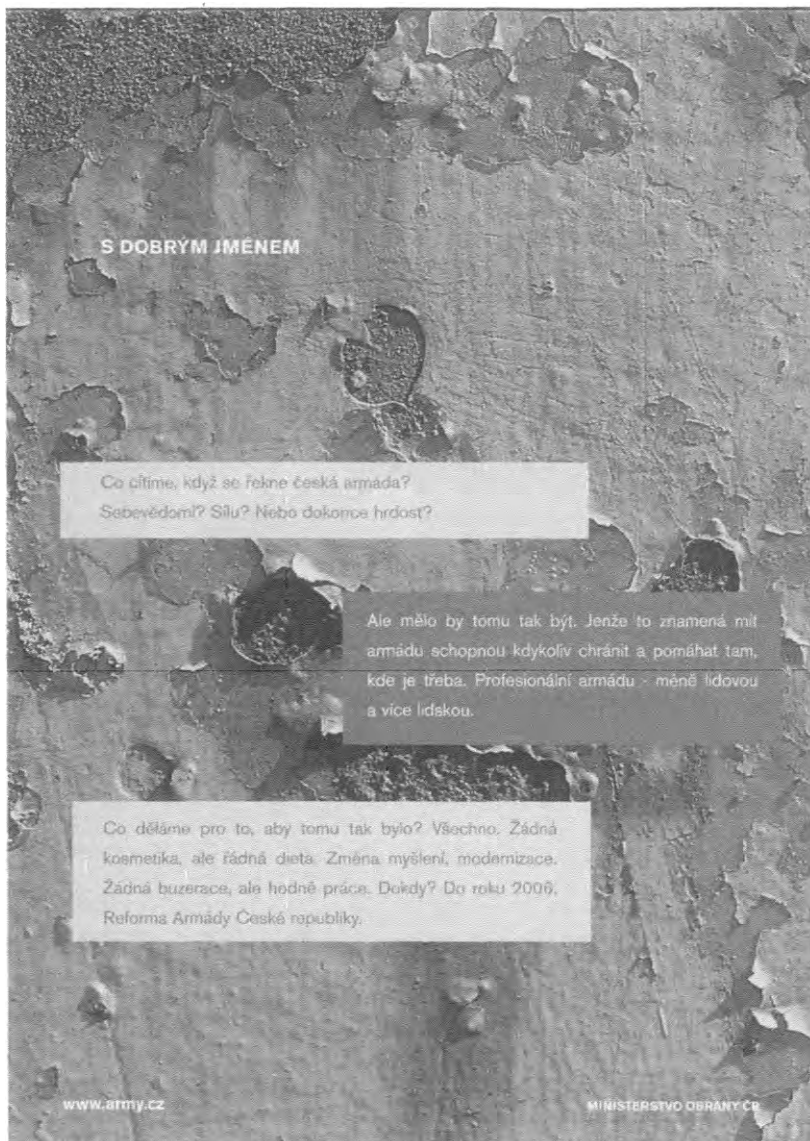


Illustration 2: *The other side of the flyer “Čas něco udělat.”*

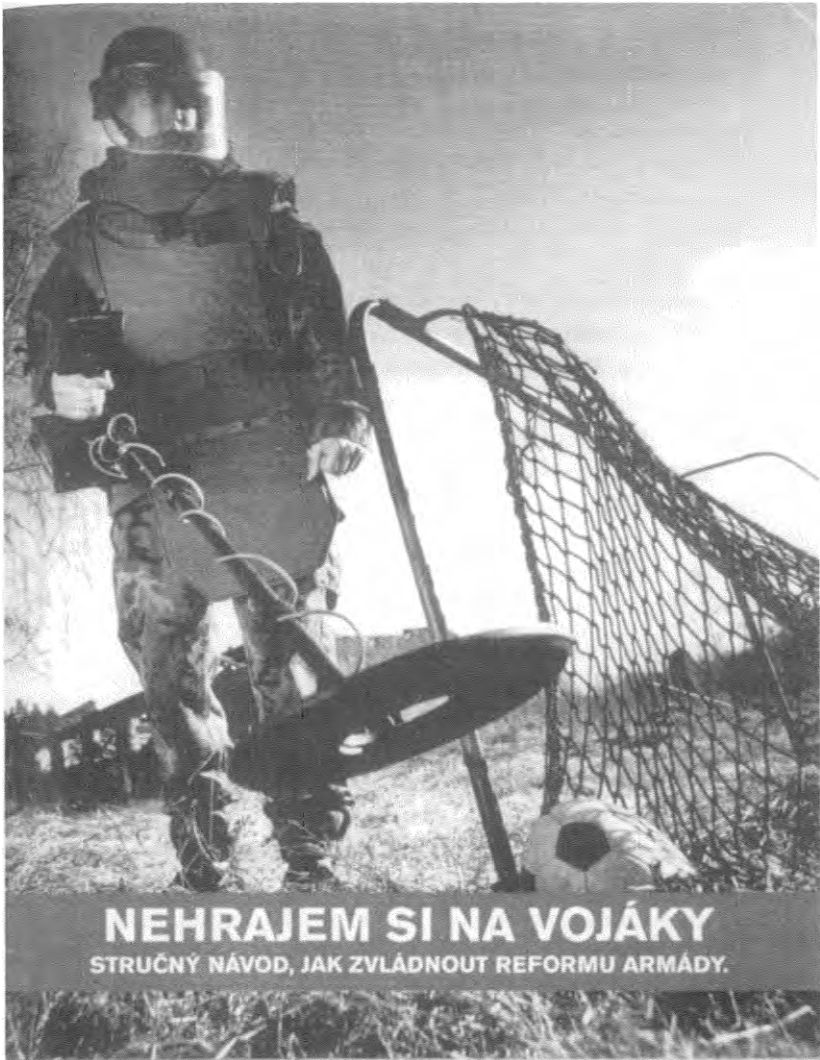


Illustration 3: „Nehrajem si na vojáky“ (We're not playing at being soldiers"). The second flyer announcing the Czech military reform.
Source: Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, 2001.

CHAPTER 1 – SPECTRES OF ŠVEJK: THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF THE GOOD SOLDIER IN THE AGE OF MILITARY PROFESSIONALIZATION

“If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs. ... The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.” (Walter Benjamin 1968: 89–90)

I.

In the middle of a small Central European country that is now the Czech Republic, there is the picturesque village of Lipnice nad Sázavou (Illustration 4) Almost a century ago, a hero was born to a writer who moved to a little house tucked behind an old castle high on a rock overlooking the settlement. In this fairy tale place, several years after the Great War had ended, the author spent the last years of his life dictating to his assistant many stories about the most extraordinary soldier whom he named Josef Švejk.

Švejk, a literary hero born out of his creator’s own experience with war and the unpredictable ways of his imagination, is a rheumatic trader in stray dogs from the Prague periphery, where he starts his wartime adventures by volunteering to fight Serbians as soldier in the imperial Austrian army. Švejk spends much time theatrically professing his patriotism and devotion to the monarchy and its war campaign, but his activity behind enemy lines only impedes the achievement of his proclaimed objective. Through his behavior, which his superiors name “idiotic” (a classification Švejk cheerfully endorses), the Good

Soldier Švejk, despite his extreme diligence and eagerness, never manages to complete what his superiors want him to do. While literally and perfectly executing orders assigned to him, the results of his actions are unfailingly disastrous for the war effort. Švejk speaks common Czech and in this lesser tongue he answers to almost every reproach from his commanders with a story he has heard here or there. These stories of quotidian life, grotesque in their mixture of hilarity, cruelty and violence, are Švejk's most powerful weapon. Through them, he disarms his superiors and by never as much as mentioning the war, let alone engaging in it, we are certain in our laughter that he is fully and at every moment victorious over the war machine.

For example, when Švejk gets gambled away by the Chaplain to whom he was assigned at war, he must listen to a long litany of threats and warnings by his new boss Lieutenant Lukáš who prides himself in hating his batmen. "He hit them across the jaw, boxed their ears and tried to train them by precept and deed, not looking upon them as soldiers. He struggled with them hopelessly for a number of years, changed them continually and finally sighed: 'Now I've got another filthy bastard.' He regarded his batmen as the lowest form of animal life. He was very fond of animals" (Hašek 1973: 167). In his welcoming speech Lukáš tells Švejk that he requires his subordinates to always tell him the truth and that they must fulfill his orders without grumbling. Just as he is telling Švejk, "If I say to you: 'Jump into the fire', then you must jump into the fire, even though you don't want to," he notices that Švejk is not looking at him. When he asks him what he is looking at, Švejk answers in a "gentle, good-natured tone: 'Humbly report, sir, there's a Harz canary there'. And having interrupted in this way the flow of the lieutenant's words Švejk adopted a military stance and looked him straight in the eyes without blinking. The lieutenant wanted to say something sharp, but observing the innocent expression on Švejk's face said nothing more than 'The chaplain recommended you as a frightful idiot and I think he was not wrong'. Švejk immediately interjects with a story: "Humbly report, sir, he certainly was not wrong. When I was serving as a regular I got a complete discharge for idiocy and for patent

idiocy into the bargain. In our regiment only two of us were discharged in this way, me and a Captain von Kaunitz. And whenever that captain went out in the street, if you'll pardon me, sir, he always at the same time picked his left nostril with his left hand, and his right nostril with his right hand, and when he went with us to parade ground he always made us adopt a formation as though it was going to be a march past and said: 'Men, ahem, remember, ahem, that today is Wednesday, because tomorrow will be Thursday, ahem'" (idem, p.168). After he has heard Švejk's story, the lieutenant is clearly at a loss: "Lieutenant Lukáš shrugged his shoulders, like a man who did not know how to express a certain thought and could not immediately find words to do so. He went from the door to the window on the other side of the room past Švejk and back again. All this time Švejk did 'eyes right' or 'eyes left' wherever the lieutenant was and did it with such a marked expression of innocence on his face that the lieutenant lowered his gaze to the carpet and said something which had no connection at all with Švejk's observation about the stupid captain. 'Yes. With me there's got to be order, cleanliness and no lying. I like honesty. I hate lies and punish them mercilessly. Do you understand?'" To which Švejk responds: "Humbly report, sir, I understand. There's nothing worse than when someone tells a lie. As soon as he starts getting tied up he's done for. In a village behind Pelhřimov there was once a teacher called Marek..." continuing with another story that distracts the lieutenant who realizes the gradual loss of his authority (idem, pp. 168–169).

Since the period between world wars when the story of Švejk first saw the light of this world, the nature of his unexpected victory has occupied not only critics, scholars and readers, but even those people who have only heard of the Good Soldier, but never actually read the book. In Central Europe, the region where Švejk was born, these deliberations, which frequently comprised only momentary allusions to his name announced at critical times, have gradually produced a peculiar effect: as if with every drop of time that has passed since the book's publication, Švejk has gained a little bit of substance to the point that today he seems to have been quite real. "As Švejk said:" is

a contraption that one can hear announced by a person who lets it be followed by a wisdom that usually has little in common with the original text. Numerous signs indicate that the story of the Good Soldier Švejk has left the detached realm of the novel to become a popular legend that changes through numerous retellings and new uses.

In the Czech Lands, Švejk's legacy preoccupies the living generations with particular insistence. In his emergences from the shadows of the literary, Švejk, the specter, exercises similar powers that he has held as a fictional hero: through the comic principle, he reveals how the war machine depends for its power on a seriousness with which we treat it. When denied importance and the cover of historical inevitability, war and the military as its instrument show themselves for what they mostly are – a means toward the achievement of idiotically banal political aims. Švejk's increased appearance in the Czech culture today, after NATO had become one of the main international alliances to which the country ties its future – signifies the growing need for his counsel. After some time around the end of the Cold War when laughter at things military predominated popular discourse and imagination, the management of war and of military violence are now becoming accepted by many as necessary and desirable attributes of political power. But this transitional process does not go uncontested. An omnipresent oppositional actor is the specter of the Good Soldier Švejk, which haunts many occasions that mark the shift to the new order of things, in which military violence has once again become the openly acknowledged tool of politics.

II.

Frequently, the specter of Švejk is evoked through a particular discursive contraption – the utterance, not dissimilar to a magical spell – “Švejkárna,” “Švejkovat” or “Švejkoviny.” “Švejkovat” (to do things like Švejk), Švejkoviny (activities reminiscent of those of Švejk) and “Švejkárna” (situation evocative of the grotesqueness of Švejk's legendary escapades) are usually

spoken to mark situations of absurdity and contradiction. Most obviously, these are situations, in which the common sense of a smaller and less powerful entity confronts the irrational rationality of a larger and more powerful body. But in the resulting effect, the former wins over the latter against all odds by virtue of the comic principle – laughter is what defeats the adversary and brings victory to the powerless. Not surprisingly, “Švejkárna,” “Švejkovat“ or “Švejkoviny” are expressions often heard in and with respect to the military institution, where the rules of discipline and order based on seniority and hierarchy so organically defy those of human reason. I would sometimes hear “That’s Švejkárna, man!,” by the enlisted caught at the intersection of two mutually contradictory orders from his superiors. The enlisted, by executing these conflicting commands literally, but with disastrous effects for the military institution would then be said to “Švejkovat” or to have been engaged in activities summarized under the term of “Švejkoviny.”

But the terms, “Švejkárna,” “Švejkovat“ or “Švejkoviny” are most often applied to situations that surpass the level of individual conduct. When I asked a young enlisted who served at the unit where I was stationed to give me his opinion of the readiness of the Czech military to engage in combat, he said:

This military? This military is composed of Švejks and to send us to war would be a sure massacre. Look at the equipment and the training we get! I have been here for three months and fired six shots at a training range using a thirty-year old rifle. Instead of teaching us how to fight, they use us to guard the hangars at the airport. But there is nothing inside the buildings that we are supposed to protect! They have no planes there or ammunition, and so we spend the whole draft-year guarding nothing. That’s simply a Švejkárna! (“To je normální švejkárna!”)

Naming the entire Czech military after Švejk is certainly not restricted to the involuntary draftees. The Czech press and government officials concerned with the poor reputation of the Czech military inside and outside of the country have repeatedly evoked the name of the Good Soldier to criticize the institution

for its low level of preparedness and the slow pace of post-Soviet reforms. In a feature article published by a leading Czech weekly shortly after September 11th events in the United States, entitled, “Rambos versus Švejks: Why Do People Laugh at Our Military?,” the author describes the Czech military as composed of „handful of elite gunmen and thousands of useless men to fill the ranks” – few elite Rambos among many Švejks (Vrána 2001: 16–19). In his reckoning, the Rambos are “professionals” in the use of military violence and “to them belongs the future”. Their chief attributes are their superior technical and physical skills, which combined with the knowledge of English and personal qualities emphasizing self-confidence and professional detachment make them deployable in international operations, outside of the country borders. The participation of these professionals in international operations brings a good name to the Czech military – a reputation that the country’s leaders desperately desire. This is because through the good results of the elite soldiers, not only the Czech military, but also the Czech state gain points on the precarious scale measuring the degree of redirected loyalty and Westernization of the Cold War adversary who has only so very recently become an ally.

It is understandable that for the achievement of the desired goal – a military full of NATO-compatible Rambos – the Švejks must be eliminated. But the Švejks are not only the bored conscripts whose boycott of the military institution and its demands naturally fits their position as its involuntary draftees. They are also those professional officers who have served under the socialist regime and whose contributions to the process of the current “military professionalization” or “ramboization” are not larger than those of the enlisted. These officers usually do not speak English, they do not understand modern warfare, technology or the strategic reorientation of the country. Through their inability to adapt to the many changes in the military profession – to become different professionals – they are an obstacle to the complicated spatio-political-temporal movement, which the Czech Republic together with other countries of the former socialist bloc of Central Europe want to make toward the West, toward democracy – toward the bright future. And

since in this age the eligibility to gain membership in the democratic world is measured by the aspiring country's military readiness, the Soviet-type military institutions and their officers must change. Most importantly, however, these changed militaries must gain the respect and acceptance of citizens, who need to begin treating their armed forces with unprecedented seriousness.

III.

“Let's Put an End to Švejkism!,” screams a title of a newspaper article published shortly before the Czech Republic joined NATO. The author who subtitles his article, “NATO: We need to convince the public,” pleads with the Czech public, at the time still lukewarm about the upcoming accession to the Alliance, to become serious about military and security affairs and consider all the advantages of NATO membership. According to the author, a major obstacle to changing people's attitude toward the role of the military is of course nobody else but Švejk!

“[Š]vejkism,” the author laments, “might have helped us survive through the bad times, which we have lived through in this century. But let us face the fact that Švejk is not a hero that should be followed, but a dog thief with the innocent face of a baby, who always took good care – of himself. Today, this kind of thinking will not bring us security” (Kopecký 1997).

Another author also warns the Czech politicians of Švejk's dangerous example in an article entitled, “Czech Diplomacy Cannot Take Pleasure in Švejkoviny“. Criticizing the Czech politicians for their lack of diplomatic tact when dealing with their Western counterparts on the international stage, the writer declares, citing the hero himself:

“Czech politicians should not listen to Švejk's assurances that ‘spoiled reputation is but an inconsequential trifle,’ since ‘there are at least ten times more of those whose reputation is bad than

those whose reputation is unspoiled.' It is likely," the author hopefully asserts, "that Czech diplomacy will not find pleasure in Švejkoviny. After all, this is no time for recklessness. The security umbrella of NATO will not open above the Czech state automatically" (Jégl 1997).

From the wand of one of the chief magicians in charge of banishing Švejk comes another example of this peculiar kind of witchcraft aimed at the establishment of solemnity toward the war machine. On the eve of the Czech Republic's accession to NATO and shortly before the NATO operation in Yugoslavia began, Michael Žantovský, the Chairman of the Senate Committee for International Affairs, Defense and Security wrote:

"After bad experience, we [the Czechs] prefer to avoid big words and important dates. Let March 12, 1999 be an exception – we are leaving the vicious circle of modern Czech history, we are starting out on a new path. Our entry into NATO is giving us an unprecedented degree of security and geopolitical stability. ... This decisive confirmation of our own freedom, however, also brings with it the commitment to protect the freedom of others. ... We will probably soon have the opportunity to prove the value of our role in [allied security]. NATO is preparing a peace operation in Kosovo, [whose] success will depend on the contribution of all members, including the new ones. **We could be seen as peacemakers**, such as our soldiers in SFOR in Bosnia. Or we could be seen as Švejks" (Žantovský 1999, emphasis mine).

In Žantovský's salutation even more openly than in the other examples, Švejk emerges as a product of a voyeuristic fantasy: he is brought to life in response to an imagined gaze from elsewhere. And it is mostly in such relationship to the political and cultural outside that the hero survives in the Czech culture in his extra-literary form. In this shape, Švejk is a voodoo doll – a national fetish – for the displacement of cultural anxieties caused by external pressures related to the changing geopolitical context of the country in the period of post-socialist

transition. Švejk stands for traditional Czechness with respect to transnational alliances such as NATO and the EU – at the same time a symbol of cultural uniqueness and the cause for a trauma and embarrassment. Illustration 5 shows the cover of the May 2001 issue of the *EURO* magazine, which focuses on the EU's negative evaluation of the Czech Republic's compliance with the Union's standards (Žižka 2001a: 3, 2001b: 16). Švejk represents the Czechs with respect to the European Union when he announces: "Humbly report, sir, that after ten years of marching to the West, we found ourselves near Sarajevo."

Ex-president Václav Havel has been a faithful believer in Švejk's magic. In a recent memento published to celebrate the end of Havel's presidential career, Adam Michnik remembers how in 1989, his fellow dissident and friend defined the essence of Czech character as oscillating "somewhere between Kafka's fatalistic melancholia and Švejk's self-deprecating irony" (Michnik 2003). To prove that he takes Švejk's force seriously, Havel recently joined other post-socialist leaders in the war against Švejk to establish solemnity and respect toward the place of the military in Czech culture. Aware of the gravity of the task, which, if successfully completed would provide access to the legitimizing membership in the brotherhood of NATO states, Havel did not hesitate to resort to the means of black magic. In a speech given on the second anniversary of the Czech Republic's accession to NATO, Havel, in the company of NATO Secretary General George Robertson, Minister of Defense Jaroslav Vetchý and the Chief of the General Staff Jiří Šedivý, proclaimed: "We must show to the world that we are not Švejks any more, that our army is good and professional!" But as in virtually all other attempts at banishing Švejk from the world of the living, the Good Soldier ended up victorious. This is so because even the military and political leaders, resolved to erase the connection between Švejk and the military institution, were not resistant to Švejk's magic. And so the spell intended to expel Švejk's spirit was pronounced by Havel over pints of beer at The Chalice (*U kalicha*), Švejk's favorite Prague pub, where he starts his wartime literary adventure. The Chalice, crowned by the portrait of Švejk and deeply associated with his legacy, was

a location perfectly suited for the celebration of a major military anniversary (Růžička 2001). As always, the effort to exorcise Švejk could not happen without his evocation, but was instead producing a grotesque effect in which the ghost haunts the very spectacles meant to purge him from cultural imagination.

IV.

Like most spectres, Švejk's power is concentrated in certain physical sites – pubs carrying his name, such as the aforementioned *Hospoda u Švejka* in Prague or geographic locations through which the hero passed on his literary escapades. Nowhere is his influence more powerful, however, than in the place where he was born – the little fairytale village of Lipnice nad Sázavou. In this settlement of 300 residents Švejk merges with the legacy of his author to produce particularly strange events with uncanny potential. Upon arrival, the road sign welcoming visitors to Lipnice is crowned with the portrait of the Good Soldier Švejk, and when you enter the hamlet, many other cues remind you of whose place you are entering. There is Hašek's house, which has been made into a museum. Next to the house on the way to the castle the author's bust looks down upon you from a pedestal. And at the end of the street there is a pub where the writer liked to spend his time and the money he made by writing the episodes of *Good Soldier Švejk*. In keeping with the spectral tradition of the family, Hašek's grandson recently purchased the tavern, which he now operates after he has retired as a colonel from the Czech military! And there is also Hašek's grave, where he is sometimes visited by Lipnice citizens at night after their drinking orgies in the pub. In the epitaph engraved on the gravestone, the author merges with the hero of his book: "Jaroslav Hašek – in memory of the author of Švejk." A local informant told me that in the morning, one can often find pints of beer left on the tomb donated by intoxicated devotees of the author and his hero.

But there are other signs that the spirits of Hašek and his Good Soldier Švejk are alive and well in Lipnice. Since 1958, the

open-air amphitheater under the castle (Illustration 6) has been the site of *Haškova Lipnice*, a well-known annual festival of humor and satire attended by prominent Czech actors and comedians as well as by thousands of spectators from around the country. And of course, at least one performance in the festival is usually devoted to the Good Soldier Švejk (Illustrations 7 through 9).¹⁶

In 1991, two years after socialism had ended, the festival became an opportunity to celebrate an important occasion – the Soviet Army finally left Czechoslovakia after more than twenty years of military occupation. Michael Kocáb, famous Czech rock musician turned politician, who was instrumental in the successful completion of the departure of the occupying forces, came to Lipnice that June accompanied by his American wife and transported by a chopper lent for this purpose by the Czech Air Force. At the conclusion of the evening full of music and comedy, Kocáb was to preside over an important ritual. The poster that invited people to Lipnice that year, announced this event proudly: “The Good Soldier Švejk will receive all things military from the last Soviet soldier into his own hands!” (Illustration 10) Indeed, the ceremony administered by two actors dressed as a Soviet soldier and the Good Soldier Švejk did take place, watched by among other people a General of the Czech Army prominent under the communist regime. But by the time the ritual presentation of military power took place, most attendees were already heavily intoxicated and shortly thereafter, the entire show turned into a Dionysian carnival.

One of the local residents told me of how, upon the completion of the ceremony, he was entrusted with the task of giving a guided tour of Lipnice to a small group of important visitors, including Kocáb and his wife as well as the Czech Army general in attendance of the celebrations. On the way to the castle where lavish refreshments and entertainment awaited the VIPs, however, the company was stopped in their climb by the sight of

¹⁶ I obtained these archival photographs during my visit to the Lipnice city hall. The mayor showed me several boxes in the attic full of photographs from which I selected a few to copy. The photographs were not dated, however, and therefore I cannot provide complete reference.

a large group of men, some of whom my informant recognized as town officials, absorbed in a serious and very confusing fist-fight on the nearby meadow. Figuring that involvement of more people might only add to the already very unclear situation on the battlefield, our tour guide continued leading his visitors to the castle explaining the happening in terms of local traditions. Eventually, full of gastronomic expectations, they arrived at the courtyard, only to find that all food and drink has already been consumed. There was no doubt that it was the refreshments that provided inspiration to the warring group of gentlemen. My informant, desperately trying to save the day, inquired with the warden about an expensive bottle of Russian vodka with which he had entrusted him anticipating the current turn of events. The explanation arrived by itself, without the exhausted keeper's effort as his wife stumbled onto the courtyard holding an empty bottle previously filled with the precious liquid. The fiasco was finally concluded by a scene in the local pub where the desperate tour guide took his guests for more modest refreshment only to be swept aside during the ascent to the second floor by a gentleman tossed down the stairs by his friends. As usual, the successful night was concluded at Hašek's grave, who, as my informant told me confidently, "would have loved to see that day".

I arrived in Lipnice ten years after things military had been delivered from the control of the Soviet soldier to those of the Good Soldier Švejk, invited by a Czech officer who served in a diplomatic position in the United States to attend a festival here. Most of my friends whom I told of my plans to travel to Lipnice thought I was planning to attend *Haškova Lipnice*, the well-known festival of humor and satire. They were wrong. The festival to which I was invited was called, *Azalea: A Salute to NATO*, and was organized by members of the local branch of the conservative Civic Democratic Party in partnership with the City of Norfolk, Virginia to celebrate the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Illustration 11). In addition to my person, military and political representatives were invited through electronic mail to "come and engage in serious debates about the state of our military and to celebrate NATO and our

membership in it.” In the end the festival was not attended by most of the invited, partly because shortly before it was held, an internet journal published an article that described *Azalea* as a conspiratory group of politicians, high-ranking military officers and former militaries who were planning a coup d’etat against the state (Mácha 2001a). While for many military and political figures such a warning was a deterrent, for an anthropologist, albeit temporarily in military service, this was a tantalizing temptation.

A confirmation that my decision to attend was justified as far as anthropological profession was concerned came from my friend Krista Hegburg, an anthropologist whom I knew from New York and who was studying in Prague at the time, and whom I invited to come with me to Lipnice. When I warned her that the event might be under secret surveillance of special services, she immediately responded: “Great! When is it? Let’s go!” And so one sunny April Saturday morning we set out in my old Škoda car toward the picturesque village of Lipnice nad Sázavou.

Because we were early and the event was not starting for another hour, we took a tour of the city, paid our respects to Hašek’s tomb, looked at his house and his bust and then ordered lunch in the local restaurant called Bohemia (not to be confused with the Czech Crown pub of which Hašek was so fond), a place where the *Azalea* festival was to start. There were three flags outside of the restaurant – American, Czech and NATO – and under the flag poles was a group of Czech enlisted men in camouflage pitching a canteen tent. When we walked into the immaculately clean restaurant with extremely polite waiters (both very unusual traits in the world of Czech restaurant business), we sat down at a table next to a glass cabinet installed in the wall. Inside the cabinet was a detailed model of a US aircraft carrier and above it was the following heading: “United States Navy: Auxiliary Navy/Marine Liege Post in Czech Republic, Lipnice nad Sázavou, The Czech Republic Member of NATO.” The still life was complimented by an advertisement poster for Jack Daniels. It was surely strange for the US Navy to have a post anywhere in the Czech Republic – a landlocked Central European country that does not even have a fleet – but for the

US Navy to have a post in Lipnice nad Sázavou – a village of 300 people in the middle of Czech highlands currently run by the Communist Party (elected in the last communal election) and haunted by Švejk’s spirit – that was simply grotesque!

While we were eating lunch, we talked in muted voices about the possible presence of surveillance devices in the room, leaving our impressions of the weirdness of it all for the car trip back. Then, around one o’clock in the afternoon when Azalea was supposed to start, people started coming into the restaurant. They were mostly well-dressed business couples and few men in military uniforms. All of them passed by our table and disappeared in the rear part of the restaurant. After some time, I got up and went to see where they went, but the only people I could see were several of the well-dressed couples silently eating lunch at one of the tables. They looked at me with suspicion and then returned to their plates. There was no sign of the military people that I saw coming through the place a short while ago – they simply disappeared! If we were not in Švejk’s territory, I would have thought that the situation was rather Kafkaesque. This impression was confirmed when I returned to the table to convey my confusion to Krista and was suddenly approached by a waitress who had been looking at me intently for some time. She asked me for my name, which I gave to her. Then she said that gentlemen were already expecting me and asked us to follow her. Without any further information, she led us through a small door which I had not previously seen into an upstairs room in which men sat in a circle, some dressed in uniforms, some in civilian clothes. There were cameras on the wall and the entire atmosphere was so heavy with suspicion and caution that our prior speculations regarding the presence of surveillance apparatus now seemed embarrassingly redundant.

We sat down on chairs placed in the circle of approximately twenty people and joined in the “debate” that was just starting with a speech given by a man dressed in a white shirt and a cowboy tie. He welcomed the participants and thanked us for our serious concern with military and security affairs of the country, which we had duly demonstrated by attending the Azalea festival. He explained the connection of the Azalea festival in

Lipnice to the same festival that was simultaneously starting at the US headquarters of NATO in Norfolk, Virginia, where the Czech Republic had a representative – a man I also knew and who was responsible for inviting me to Lipnice. In addition to this Czech–American officer with whom everyone in the room seemed to be familiar, the connection between Norfolk and Lipnice consisted in the newly established transatlantic friendship symbolized by the Azalea Festival, which, “albeit named after a fragile blossom would nevertheless become a strong symbol of friendship, world peace and humanism, like the spring that is now awakening.” In his short speech, the man expressed his grave concern about the position of the military in the Czech political and public life and about the bad situation inside of the military institution itself. The persistence of the problems related to military and security affairs and the lack of interest in changing the situation and in taking security and defense issues seriously were gravely endangering the membership of the Czech Republic in NATO. The concern of the Azalea group, synonymous with the local branch of the conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) engaged in a bitter fight with local communists, was to “change things starting from a local level, to start with a group of people concerned with bringing seriousness to our partnership with NATO.” This process, symbolized by azalea, would be “like growing a beautiful blossom from a small delicate plant.”

After this opening speech, the participants at first continued sitting quietly in the circle, looking at each other, occasionally glancing toward the cameras on the wall. But after a while, most of them, one by one, joined in the “discussion” for which the organizer called them. Instead of a dialogic exchange, however, what followed was an ordered deliverance of announcements in which the participants seemed to follow a highly premeditated script. Rather than a debate, the event my friend and I silently witnessed resembled a performance, in which the actors presented a predictable sequence of observations that everyone in the room had already intimately known¹⁷.

¹⁷ It was Krista who first whispered to me this idea during the discussion in her original mixture of Czech and English: “To je normální performance“ (This is simply a performance).

I was not able to record the session fully, but from the notes that I took under the watchful eye of everybody in the room, the arguments were presented approximately in the following sequence: First, the fact was established that things were very bad in the country when it came to things military. Second, the gravity of this situation was stressed, and it was asserted that because we are now a part of NATO, the continued disregard for military issues brings a bad reputation to the Czech Republic in the eyes of the Allies. In conclusion, the participants searched for an explanation of this state of things, and here, two categories of arguments were offered, neither of which, of course, offered anything surprising or novel to anybody in the room: First, it was said, the problem lies in the military institution, which did not project favorable public image. Secondly, it was difficult for the military to find support, because disregard for things military was a chronic problem of Czech society. The connecting link between both accounts was that the acute problems of the present were the results of the unwanted persistence of attachments to the past.

In the first segment of explanations, the problems within the military institution were caused by the presence of the old cadres whose thinking was still that of the socialist times. These older officers were keeping the young progressive NATO-oriented professionals out of the top military ranks, thus preventing institutional change:

“When one sees the situation, one is surprised that some of those highly qualified younger people are still staying,” a military officer said. “But they are staying, because they love their work – it is their hobby. But they are surrounded by the majority, who are only interested in their monthly paychecks. That is how it is in the Czech military – “Hodně chovnejch, málo tažnejch”.

This phrase could be translated as “Many for breeding, too few for work,” or, depending on the zoological preference of the listener, either “Many studs and few geldings,” or “Many bulls and few oxen.” This favorite saying of elite Czech military professionals who used them frequently in their interviews with me,

summarized the notorious problem with redundancy of old cadres. The prevalence of older officers in the breeding sector of the military signified their connection to the senior leadership who used them to reproduce the older, Soviet type of military professional. In the lower sector were the stronger, mostly English-speaking workers, but their influence over change was severely limited – both because of their location in the military hierarchy and because of their quantitative disadvantage, causing them to take on the symbolic form of castrated male animals. This explanation provided by a military officer was followed by a commentary from the organizer, who established a connection between the necessity to oust the old cadres from military ranks and the efforts of the members of the Azalea group in Lipnice.

The other category of explanations also stressed the persistence of the past as the main factor causing the low position of the military in Czech society, portraying it as a natural outcome of the national consciousness of the Czechs formed through centuries of foreign occupations and military defeats: “How could the Czechs be proud of being Czech and proud of their military as an institution defending national interest and pride? During WWII, the military did nothing. It was because it was given orders to do nothing, but people think it was the military’s fault,” said one officer. Another man, a journalist, added: “I think more than that, it was the Soviet occupation, when the military was again given orders not to act. And we were occupied again.” And as if one century was not enough to form the collective memory of the Czechs and to produce their hostility toward the military machine, another man reached back to medieval history: “It all started with the White Mountain!” he said, reminding us of the infamous battle in 1621, in which Bohemian nobility lost the kingdom to the Austrians, starting the 300-year long colonization of the Czech territory.

But then, as the history of military defeats seemed probably insufficient to explain the lack of gravity and importance awarded to the war machine at the present time, one of the participants – a former elite officer – finally brought the main culprit to the stage: “There is no other nation that would be so negati-

ve toward its military as the Czechs," he said, in resigned despair. "The Czechs are a nation of Švejk. And because we have Švejk, nothing can change here". So, in the denouement, after which the curtain was drawn, the hero that loomed in the background of the plot the entire time was finally convicted and brought forth. It was Švejk who provided the link between historical events and present social problems – a literary figure whose spectral existence was here again sustained and strengthened by the very efforts at his expurgation.

When the show ended, we were asked to go to the terrace to take a group photo. The picture, we were told, would be sent to the man in the US, who could not attend the event, but of whom everyone knew. This promise was a reminder to everyone present of the omnipresent gaze of the outside world, for whom the performance was really staged. This Big Eye, reminiscent of the ever-watchful eye of the Party, present in its very absence, provided the moving force behind things, and caused even the final desperate summons of the Good Soldier Švejk. But this was not the end, just a foreplay that established a bond of understanding between the participants, who would then be asked to collectively banish Švejk's specter – the real cause of national adversity to the military machine.

We were asked to walk to the open-air amphitheater underneath the Lipnice Castle. The auditorium of this natural theatre was formed by the grassy terrain sloping to the bottom of the "stage" all the way from the rocks which formed a semi-circle closing the theatre in the back of the sitting area. At the top of the rocks was the Castle and a little underneath it toward the other side of the mount was Hašek's house. The amphitheater was, of course, the annual location of Haškova Lipnice, the famous festival of humor and satire that drew its popularity from its connection with the Good Soldier Švejk who was born here and whom the festival always honored in its theatrical productions. Today, however, we were participating in a spectacle which did not have humor, grotesqueness or satire intentionally included in its program.

As we walked in past a road-block, we could see that the space was already half-filled with people, many of whom had

small children with them. While waiting for this part of the festival to start, we watched enlisted attending to an army truck standing to the left of the stage. For quite some time, nothing was happening and so I used the occasion to meet several of the military officers, some of whom I knew from television and who I thought could be helpful in my research. Then, suddenly, loud sounds of rifles and machine guns were heard from all around us. I looked toward the stage and saw that the soldiers on the truck were shooting approximately in our direction, and when I then glanced at Krista, until recently exhibiting her usual composure, she seemed genuinely horrified. Looking past her, I saw men in camouflage rappelling from the rocks into the auditorium shooting at their adversaries on the truck from machine guns. The next phase of the fight, which started after they had landed, took place directly in the auditorium, among the audience. At the conclusion of the spectacle (which altogether lasted for approximately half an hour) – the remaining soldiers engaged in a one-on-one fight on the stage. After the army truck had exploded and the scene was littered with bodies of “dead soldiers,” there was a minute of silence. Finally, the dead stood up, joined the chorus of survivors and together they bowed to the audience, which rewarded them with hesitating applause. The organizers then went to a microphone and thanked the elite paratrooper unit from a nearby garrison for preparing the show, which, we learned, was a staging of a successful battle of the Czech Army with terrorists.

It was highly ironic that the spectacle intended to contribute to the Czech military’s rise in importance and seriousness produced overwhelmingly grotesque effects. The military violence, which was shown with excessive authenticity, must have produced genuine horror in the spectators who reacted with measured enthusiasm to the exhibition. The sincerity with which the fight was staged was subverted into ridicule by the context of its performance in the space saturated with memories and symbolism of popular enjoyment when masses laugh at power through comedy and farce. The awkwardness with which the performance was accepted lasted throughout the rest of the evening, which we spent in the Bohemia restaurant. Next to a miniature model

of a US aircraft carrier, a night of spontaneous merriment and dancing to live music that the organizers announced, turned instead into an uncomfortable sit-down dinner. Despite the organizers' efforts, none of the present obviously felt like dancing. From a man who attended Azalea the following year, I heard that things proceeded much more smoothly then, also due to a much higher attendance by prominent members of the conservative party who thus demonstrated their seriousness toward partnership with NATO as opposed to the governing Social Democrats who did not sanction the event. But in April 2001, when I was in Lipnice, Azalea was a rather wonderful demonstration of the awkwardness with which power attempts to use the strategy of the masses to make the need for violence an accepted part of everyday life. (Mbembe 1992: 29–30). When I was in Lipnice, there was no doubt that it was still the spirit of Švejk who was victorious over the war machine.



Illustration 4: *An aerial view of Lipnice nad Sázavou.*
Source: Lipnice nad Sázavou, contemporary official city brochure, date and author unknown.



Illustration 5: *European Union Enlargement: "Humbly report, sir, that after ten years of marching to the West, we found ourselves near Sarajevo."* Source: Cover page, EURO, May 14, 2001.



Illustration 6: *Amphitheater under the Lipnice castle – 2001.*
Source: Photo by author 2001.



Illustration 7: “Haškova Lípnice.” Source: City Hall archive in Lípnice nad Sázavou, author and date unknown.



Illustration 8: *“Haškova Lipnice.”* Source: City Hall archive in Lipnice nad Sázavou, author and date unknown.



Illustration 9: "Haškova Lipnice." Source: City Hall archive in Lipnice nad Sázavou, author and date unknown.

HAŠKOVA LIPNICE

ANEŽ
PŘIJĚTE SE ROZLOUČIT S POSLEDNÍM SOVĚTSKÝM VOJÁKEM

33. ROČNÍK - SOBOTA 29. 6. 1991 - PŘÍLEŽNOST OBLASNÍ OUVĚŘENÍ LIPNICE

<p>LIPNICKÝ JARMARK !!</p> <p>LIPNICKÁ LOTERIE - PRODEJ LOSŮ ISTUJE C. H. RAKOUSKÉ VOJŠKO LENA = OSOBNÍ VÍZ. SKOPKA NI JAVNOŤI V I. K. CASLAVSKÝ - CESELOHAY</p> <p>LIPNICE - STŘEDOVĚKÁ HRANICE S NOVOU OBZVLNU, HISTORICKÝ JEMŤ, NI PŘEHLEDNÁ PLEAŤ, "A" DVA NI DVA</p> <p>PRŮPŘEDKŮ VUTPENEK: ČLEVA 3 KŮ KODI MOLEJNA AXIC - NÁMETI TLA N. J. PRODEJNA KŮMŤ PROLEC - MĚJŤ, KULT. STŘEDNÍHO</p> <p>PROGRAM JE ROMA I ZA NEPŘÍZNIVÝCH PŮV. V. DOLHOVNĚ.</p>	<p>Hlavní program - letní scéna pod hradeň</p> <p>1. POPOLEDNÍ BLOK 10-12 HODIN VSTUPNÍ 10 Kčs DOŠPĚL 15 Kčs</p> <p>2. ODPOLEDNÍ BLOK 14-17 HODIN - VSTUPNÍ 20 Kčs DOŠPĚL 40-DETI</p> <p>3. VEČERNÍ BLOK 20-23 HODIN - 20 Kčs DOŠPĚL 40-DETI</p>	<p>TELEIZNÍ STUDIO ROSA NA LIPNICE UVÁDÍ JAM ROSAR, VYSTOUPÍ JARMA HLOVA LEŠA ČEMELKA, PETR KALIVA I. BENTEL PRO NEJVNĚŠ. ÚČASTI SOUTĚŽE</p> <p>VEŠELE ODPOLEDNĚ UVÁDÍ IVO MILDRELL VYSTOUPÍ HONZA VYKITAL A TELEIZNÍ HODNŮ PĚTIL'HA O. B. PROFFEDU VLADĚK JORDA ADIRI, MILHABE, KARLA PETRINA A SPOL.</p> <p>PĚTR HONZINŮ UVÁDÍ ON. TĚ. BAVL. J. HONZEL VYSTOUPÍ F. HONZEL, P. B. FECH. J. HONZEL DOŠPĚL 40-DETI</p> <p>NA ZÁVĚR PRŮVĚZNE DŮRŤ VOJÁKŮ ŠVEJKŮ SPŮSOBŮ VĚCI VOJENŤE DOŠPĚL 40-DETI PŘÍLEŽNOSTI HOCAR - MILHABE - VUTPENEK I. J.</p>
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Illustration 10: A poster announcing “Haškova Lipnice” in 1991: “Come and say goodbye to the last Soviet soldier.” At the bottom of the page, the last item on the program announces: “The Good Soldier Švejk will receive all things military from the last Soviet soldier into his own hands!”

REGIONÁLNÍ SDRUŽENÍ ODS VYSOČINA VE SPOLUPRÁCI S TISKÁRNAMI HAVL. BROD, A. S.,
BAUKOMPLEX, A. S. A MS ODS LIPNICE NAD SÁZAVOU POŘADAJÍ
V SOBOTU 27.4. 2002 OD 13.30 V AMFITEÁTRU LIPNICE NAD SÁZAVOU



**II. ROČNÍK SLAVNOSTI LIPNICE – NORFOLK
SOUBĚŽNÉHO 49. MEZINÁRODNÍHO FESTIVALU V USA**

AZALEA

A SALUTE TO NATO!

NA POČEST ZALOŽENÍ SEVEROATLANTICKÉ ALIANCE NATO.

**PROGRAM: OD 9.00 HOB. HAVLÍČKOVO NÁMĚSTÍ, HAVLÍČKŮV BROD – DOPROVODNÝ PROGRAM
AMFITEÁTRU LIPNICE NAD SÁZ.
13.30 – 14.00 HUDEBNÍ PRODUKCE (FERNĚT, NOVÍ PAKA)
14.00 – 14.30 ZAHÁJENÍ MÍSTOPŘEDSEDOU ODS RNDR. PETREM NEČASEM VYSTOUPENÍ POSLANKYNĚ
MIROSLAVY NĚMCOVÉ, VELITELE 4. BRN A HOSTŮ
14.30 – 15.00 UKÁZKA BOJOVÉ AKCE PŘÍSLUŠNÍKŮ 4. BRN
15.00 – 16.00 HUDEBNÍ PRODUKCE
PO CELOU AKCI PŘEHLEDKA HISTORICKÝCH VOJENSKÝCH VOZIDEL A TECHNIKY
ZMĚNA PROGRAMU VYHRAZENA.**

THE CZECH REPUBLIC MEMBER OF NATO

Illustration 11: A poster announcing "Azalea, A Salute to NATO" in 2001

CHAPTER 2 – MALADIES OF MANHOOD IN THE BUZERPLAC: CZECH MILITARY OFFICERS IN ‘TRANSITION’

To those who are unable to pursue a life of adventure on their own, the Navy (as all armed forces) offers them one on a platter: all they do is sign up, and it will take its methodical course, finally underlined with the thin red ribbon of the Legion of Honor (Genet 1974: 258).

When I became an officer, it wasn't so much in order to be a warrior, but rather to be a very precious object, guarded by soldiers. Which they would protect with their lives until they died for me, or I offered up my life in the same manner to save them (Genet 1974: 265).

I.

The train was swiftly moving through the Moravian countryside. The large clean windows of this rather luxurious coach known as *Csárdás*, which carried mostly international passengers between Budapest and Prague, offered an unusually clear view. I was at first taken aback by *Csárdás*'s cleanliness and comfort when I transferred to it at *Hlavní nádraží* – the main Prague station. The difference between this and the regular commuter train I took to work every day was striking. Its comfortable space contrasted sharply not only with regular Czech trains, distinguished by dirty linoleum floors, harsh plastic red seats and desolate bathrooms, but also with the ambiance of the train stations with their dilapidated facades and interiors permeated by the smell of urine and the unforgiving presence of the homeless. In this celebrated moment of post-socialist progress, the railroad stations and trains were formidable warnings of the dream nature of our fantasy, which we liked to call ‘transition.’

In the course of the more than ten years following the end of

socialism in East and Central Europe, “transition” has become a political, economic as well as an academic commodity, resulting in the simultaneous influx of foreign investment and the production of many volumes of literature. An essential source of the high market value of “transition” is the simplicity and clarity of the movement it implies – a passage from one point to another – from totalitarianism to democracy, from communism to capitalism, from Warsaw Pact to NATO, from East to West, from evil to good. Paradoxically, it is places of transit – the post-socialist Czech train stations and trains – that challenge the simplicity of the “transition” fantasy. Relics of their own glorious past, through which one is transported into the Czech reality, the dilapidated stations and trains, remind one of the less than optimistic course of our late socialist and post-socialist modernity. After WWII, when Czechoslovakia was brought to the fold of the Soviet empire, the trains were one of the symbols of the anticipated socialist progress. Two decades later, however, following the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, it became clear that socialism had failed to bring people better lives and the trains were already dilapidated reminders of past hopes. Due to the isolation of Czechoslovakia behind the Iron Curtain, however, which divided East and West during the Cold War and did not allow us the comparison with what lay on the other side, it was not until the post-socialist ‘transition’ fully exposed the real obsolescence of our socialism and its trains. Today, the newly arriving European train reveals the degree of outmodedness of regular places of transit in the Czech Republic. Simultaneously, however, by allowing the ruthless comparison with the misery of regular trains that most Czechs use, Csárdás, whose luxury is affordable only to some, points to the newly developing inequities that characterize post-socialism in East and Central Europe. In their contrast, the new and old trains remind one both of the failures of the past dreams and those of the present. Passages that carry people from one point to another, the train station and trains are liminal spaces (van Gennep 1909; Turner 1966) that function as purgatories in which the traveler through the Bohemian and Moravian lands is cleansed of her futuristic fantasies.

I used commuter trains to transport myself between my sister's house and the military base where I worked for the first six months of my job as a military researcher. I hated the 6:00 a.m. train, which I had to take to work every morning. I thought that the overwhelmingly despondent atmosphere in the coach full of gloomy travelers was due to the liminal nature of space and time of the journey in which the privacy of one's self was being suspended in preparation for the exit into the public world.¹⁹ But then the base, which I entered more than an hour and a half after I had left home, welcomed at the gate by heavily bored, smoking conscripts, was no less disconsolate. The physical dilapidation of the buildings surrounding the central *buzerplac*²⁰, a large open space used for drilling soldiers during roll calls, combined with the obsolescence of the omnipresent Soviet technology, corresponded with the grim disposition of male military personnel whom I met on my travels through Czech Air Force bases. Both the melancholy of the military establishment and of the commuter trains grew out of the space called "transition" that opened between the past and the future, generating a peculiar blend of nostalgias for the bygone and unattainable desires for the forthcoming.

II.

The melancholic mood within the military institution, in particular, seemed to draw on the gap that emerged between fantastic aspirations and frustrating reality. The Czech military, expected to be the herald of the Czechs' victorious march into the Western world upon the Czech Republic's admission to NATO, was instead an institution that seemed quite resistant to modernization and change. My task in the military was to use

¹⁹ The melancholic suspension of the railroad traveler is beautifully described by Michel de Certeau (1984) in his short essay, "Railway Navigation and Incarceration." Rosalind Morris (2000) builds on his idea in her ethnography, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand*, especially Chapter 2.

²⁰ Read 'boozarplatz'.

qualitative methodology based on interviewing and participant observation to find the reasons why large numbers of qualified military officers leave the Czech Armed Forces – a process which military science calls ‘attrition.’ By the time I started my job, the military has fulfilled only a minimum of requirements it promised to make with its entry to the Alliance, which was a source of concern for international observers as well as the Czech political leadership, eager to use the institution for their political agenda. This impression that the military was actively resisting change was so strong that it led the U.S. army attaché to say that the Czech military, whose bases are “by and large very dumpy,” instead of working to change its negative reputation, “tends to dwell on this negative image” and attribute it to “outside forces and not to take responsibility to improve some things on their own.” Unnecessarily, he says with disbelief and indignation, “little things like painting the front gate and flying the Czech flag go undone”(Ulrich 1999: 147).

Such lack of initiative in the place where one expected to encounter its excess did not especially fit the historical moment. For many years, the Czech or Czechoslovak armed forces had submissively observed the course of foreign occupations of the national territory from their barracks: first the German occupation during WWII and then Soviet “temporary presence” in Czechoslovakia that lasted from 1968 through 1991. In fact, the Czechoslovak and Czech military have traditionally distinguished themselves from many other militaries by a peculiar privilege of never having fought in a war. Now, the membership in NATO seems to offer the military a chance to rescue itself from this image of impotence. The public and the state’s political representation rely on the Czech military’s performance in NATO peacekeeping and military operations for the country’s successful association with this first post-socialist transnational alliance – which, it was hoped, would bring the Czech Republic into the fold of the Western democratic world. But, instead of being excited about the new importance ascribed to their institution and profession, the military men I met on my travels through Czech bases did not seem particularly happy at all!

III.

The older male officers who spent most of their life serving under socialism were afraid of losing their jobs, as many of them had previously been displaced whenever the military reorganized and reduced the number of personnel²¹. These men spent much time conspiring, using old-established friendships from socialist times to keep their positions as long as possible. Whereas under socialism, people were not encouraged to leave the service and instead formed a life-long commitment to the military institution, the new *Law on Professional Soldiers*²², passed in 1999 and effective as of November 2001 (the first law on this issue since 1956), determined clearly financial retirement benefits for each rank and job position, increases being based on the number of years spent in service. The new law thus marked a move away from a life-long family-like commitment to the military institution,²³ toward a contractual form of obligation to the military, setting a new standard of the military professional. Paradoxically, while the Czech state under the new law allotted nice pensions to the military personnel for their past service, it also provided incentives for people to stay in service as long as possible with the prospect of receiving even more money in the future. This banal reason for staying in the military, of course, was the “public secret” within the military – a secret whose contents everyone knew, but that generally remained unspoken.²⁴

Instead, this older generation of men complained a great deal about what they perceived was the declining discipline within the military institution compared to the socialist times

²¹ The number of personnel in the Czech Armed Forces decreased from 131,965 in 1993 to 69,296 in 2001 (The Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2001: 43).

²² Zákon č. 221/1999 Sb., o vojácích z povolání. Most Czech laws regarding the military can be found on www.army.cz.

²³ While not specifically addressing the military, Katherine Verdery’s term “socialist paternalism” fittingly describes the quasi-family dependency of all citizens on the patriarchal socialist state, supposedly bonded by their equal share in the redistributed social product (Verdery 1994).

²⁴ I owe the notion of the “public secret” to Michael Taussig (1997:58, 1999: Part 2).

when law and order prevailed. A senior pilot I interviewed, for example, accompanied his nostalgic remembrance of the well-organized old times with an intriguing description of flight exercises:

We used to exercise all the time. There used to be the West and the East, but now you cannot call it that, because there is no enemy in the West or really in the East either. And so East and West are no longer used. Just look at the maps we now have and tell me it is not confusing. But that is bad, because even in soccer you run from one side to the other. There used to be concrete directions, there were strategic fronts. Our maps used to be marked blue, red or orange. We were red and they were blue. I do not understand what is so bad about that. Now there is no direction to fly against. We used to be on high alert all the time, there were planes ready to be flown and there was discipline and order.

In their nostalgia for past order, the former East-West divide (sometimes color-coded for easy visual recognition) manifest by the Warsaw Pact versus NATO, the older generation of officers seemed to long for a particular type of clearly conveyed and understood discipline. This discipline, which originated in the Moscow headquarters of the Warsaw Pact, was reinforced through the military structures of the alliance and conveyed in the Russian language to the militaries of Soviet colonies in East and Central Europe. During socialism, the Czechoslovak military officers thus bore a double allegiance: firstly to the nation state of Czechoslovakia whose people they swore to protect and secondly to the Warsaw Pact military command through which they were subordinated to Moscow and the transnational socialist brotherhood in arms (Rice 1984; Simon 1985). The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 exposed the uncertain connection between the state and the military: the weight of transnational military command superseded the military's allegiance to the state and to the Czechoslovak civilians. By following the orders to stay in barracks and not to oppose the invaders, the Czechoslovak military officers also revealed the

tenuous system of military allegiances and of brotherhood enforced through discipline and permeated with the threat of violence and betrayal. The Soviet, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian ‘brothers in arms’ have betrayed the Czechs and Slovaks in a magnificent act of emasculation fortified by the latter’s coerced passivity. In a quintessential homoerotic act, the invading Soviet brothers became men, while the Czechs and Slovaks who, as one officer eloquently recalled during an interview, “opened our gates to the Soviet troops who took over our barracks,” lost the fantasy of their manhood.

Was it perhaps the knowledge of this subjugation to the discipline of the friend-turned-invader, which tied the older Czech officers together in a brotherhood of military serfdom? Was it this history of Soviet “*buzerace*” – a vulgar word for “ordering around,” but literally meaning sodomy (“*buzerant*” being a derogatory term for a homosexual), which was the subject of the officers’ nostalgic longing and which made institutional change difficult?²⁵ The strength of fraternal military bonding among men who shared history of conquest, would surely make a dismissal of one officer by another in the time of post-socialist military downsizing a truly fratricidal act. The predicament of this task seemed particularly clear to me when I observed the process of so called ‘civilization’ of the Czech military in 2001–2002. The fulfillment of the NATO requirement to increase civilian democratic control of the military by lowering the proportion of military to civilian employees was accomplished by a casual act of cross-dressing. In this ritual practiced in the Czech military since the late 1990s, the military personnel retired from the military and took off their uniform on one day but the next, returned to their jobs as civilians. With a nice retirement check, which, in the case of someone who has spent 20 years in service equals a regular monthly salary of a state employee, they returned to their job to get another monthly paycheck for the same work they now performed as civilians. Not surprisingly, according to those former military officers with whom I spoke, their

²⁵ I thank Krista Hegburg for calling my attention to the homoerotic nature of the word *buzerace*, which is the main motive that inspires this chapter.

major regret now that they were civilians in the military enjoying double income was a sense of mourning for the uniform, which use to bond them to their brothers in arms.

The young generation of military officers I interviewed during my fieldwork grumbled as well. For their part, however, it was because they felt the military was not reorganizing efficiently and old cadres at the top echelons of the military and politicians ignorant of the needs of the military sector were holding their career advancement as well as the Czech military's progress. In his response to my request to speak about relations between the younger and the older generations of officers, a young pilot told me:

The gap between the base and the headquarters has only grown. Nobody who is any good at what he does would go up to the headquarters full of old cadres who protect each other and who have no interest in changing things. Anybody who is any good at his job wants to stay down here at the base, because here you can do your work. Up there, they just create paperwork. And then, when something comes from NATO to the headquarters, they send it to us to fill out and prepare here anyway, because they have no idea what to do with it up there.

In the commentary of the young officer, the generational gap in the Czech military – according to him the reason behind the slow progress of military transition – consisted in the inability of older officers to discipline themselves according to the rules of the new transnational regime of obedience. The marker of this shift was NATO-originating paperwork, which the older officers were unable to complete in English – the new language of externally instituted military supremacy.

Obviously, however, learning English was not a sufficient 'language' skill for the passage to 'the other side'. In an interview with a star member of the elite unit in the Air Force, I was offered a startlingly clear revelation of the nature of the new regime of transnational military power. He stated angrily:

You ask me if something changed with our entry into NATO? I thought it would, but it was just a pipe dream. The guys in NATO basically view us as a different species that are still climbing trees while they themselves fly jets in the sky. That is how it is when they come here. They don't consider us their partners. And they are right. We cannot be their partners, because we really do not know anything and have nothing to offer to them.

Instead of a partnership of brothers in arms within NATO – the picture that was revealed to me in the interviews with this upcoming generation of Czech elite officers – there was the next colonial regime of *'buzerace'*, a new form of subordination to a transnational military brotherhood. The type of manhood, which this new regime of obedience instituted and on which it relied, however, was of a different kind than that of the past. The subordination, which was somehow perversely satisfying for Czechoslovak officers under the Soviet rule, was now a cause for a trauma and crisis of masculinity.

The self-deprecating discourse of backwardness, of lagging behind, of needing to catch up, to reorganize, to change and to transform, to finish speedy military 'transition', to be ready "when and where NATO needs us"²⁶, and yet the apparent inability to do so, has been the defining feature of discussions within the military leadership. The young Czech deputy director of strategic planning went so far as to reach into pre-human history to label the problem of change, saying that while "the totally old dinosaurs are gone from the ranks, some problems persist" (Richburg 2002). And in a propaganda leaflet, the Ministry of Defense (2002a) uses the language from the area of nutritional and chemical instruction to identify the features of the required process of transition:

We are in NATO and we are behind in many things. ... We are trying to be modern, but our thinking is that of old times. And we do not want to be a military unable to engage in battle,

²⁶ Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2002b.

a military that only complains about the situation, Therefore – a diet. Therefore – a rejuvenating bath. Therefore – a reform. ... First, a decorroding treatment. This means shedding the remains of old bad habits. Eliminating unnecessary, obsolete equipment and gear. And starting to think.

And yet, despite great efforts, this and other campaigns at 'transition' have not found resonance in changing the melancholic attitude of most male military officers.

Contributing to the officers' sense of being behind and not at the vanguard of 'transition' is the newly emerging contrast between employment opportunities for men in the private sphere and in the state sector. This rift, previously nonexistent under socialism, seems to have a particularly strong effect on the humor of Czech military men. Once, in a moment of frustration with his private life, a very successful officer located high in the military hierarchy told me during my visit with him:

How do you think that I feel when every businessman with whom I negotiate contracts for the military arrives here in a new shining BMW, dressed in an Italian suit, money pouring out of his ears? I command thousands of people, have responsibility for millions of dollars, speak several languages, but still make a miniscule amount of what this guy brings home every month. What do you think my wife thinks about that? How can she have any respect for me?

Such a situation of emasculation through a comparison with the emergent forms of wealth and male power in the private sector obviously presents a new quandary for Czech officers. The changing gender composition of the post-socialist labor market has important implications for the formation of gender identities: whereas the opportunities for men grow in the better-paid private sector, the less paying sphere of state employment is becoming dominated by women²⁷. The effects are even grea-

²⁷ Kligman and Gal (2000: 59) point out the growing number of opportunities for men in the private sector and the changing gender composition of

ter in the case of military officers, who used to be rewarded for their acquiescence to the socialist regime by material advantages compared to people in other state sectors, but whose former lead has since been lost.

While under the last twenty years of socialism, shortages in supplies plagued most institutions, the channels of supply to the military, which remained under direct command and supervision of Moscow, remained fully flowing. These channels of supply were completely interrupted in the 1990s, and it soon became quite clear that NATO would not readily become the new source. And so when most military men in their interviews with me called for the 'transition' to end, saying "Ať už jsme tam" (Let us already be there), what they were also harking back were the former and anticipated times of plenty. What they said they wanted was 'koncepte' (a long-term strategic program) in future military development, which stood for the security of past times when materials were abundant and their daily work in the military establishment proceeded smoothly:

A senior air-ground crew member leaving the Air Force told me: For ten years they have been telling us that they are preparing a new long-term strategic program ('koncepte'), but I cannot see one! They say things will change but we are not getting anywhere. I have been struggling here for ten years every day with a lack of everything, because nothing is planned ahead. I have no spare parts to work with – I never know what will happen tomorrow. One cannot be sure of anything.

The destination of the officers' longing was the future imaginary place of order, clearly defined enemy, strategy, exercise schedule, high technology, clear values and stability – a new

different industries after socialism: "In the newly emerging pattern of gender segregation, the heretofore feminized occupations and professions remain largely in the public sector, where labor discipline is lax, allowing an easier compromise with household obligations. In contrast, men's relative greater time flexibility, due to fewer domestic obligations, becomes a valued resource in the labor market. Young men are moving rapidly into the newly expanding, more demanding, higher-paying private sector".

regime of discipline. For now, suspended in the stage of 'transition', all the unhappy military men with whom I met during my research shared a sense of melancholic disposition, surely not a desirable trait in men whose job as practitioners of violence in the new transnational regime of military power requires resolve and self-assurance.

I should add that the outlook of their female counterparts confirms the importance of gender as a crucial determinant of the attitude of Czech male military officers after socialism. Revealingly, Czech military women see as an opportunity exactly that what makes the Czech military men depressed: While the conscription of men remains a problem for the military, the enrollment of women is quickly rising (Vlachová and Pávková 1997; Ministry of Defense 2001, 2002c). The 15 women officers and non-commissioned officers that I interviewed during my fieldwork generally also lacked the melancholic disposition so characteristic of their male counterparts. When I asked them whether they were satisfied with their jobs, all, except one, responded in one way or another that they were quite happy with their job in the military, which provided great security compared to the perils of the private sector. And so while the military institution in 'transition' is an insecure and melancholy-inducing place for Czech military men, women see the same transitional military as an unusually safe and satisfying occupational setting.

The melancholic disposition of the male officers in the post-socialist Czech military seems to challenge the occupational gender model of hegemonic masculinity normally associated with men in modern military institutions. Such hegemonic masculinity, says Frank Barrett in his illuminating study of masculinity in the United States Navy, "refers to a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated (Barrett 1996: 130). Military embodies and perpetuates this hegemonic form of masculinity, characterized by such traits as perseverance, toughness, risk-taking, technical rationality and courage and also "plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in larger society (idem, p. 129). 'The murderous hero,'

violent and heterosexual, is the admired form of masculinity in Anglo-Saxon culture which is used by governments and other agents to mobilize support for war and hire men into the military service (Connell 1989). Militaries around the world depend on the definition of soldiers as embodying traditional male gender role and play thus a crucial role in promoting such model of manhood as a desired and hegemonic form.

The Czech officerdom's melancholy stands in obvious contrast to this generally accepted model of military manhood. Instead of a hegemonic powerful masculinity associated with their membership in a military institution, the manhood of the Czech military men is much more strongly defined by their subservient relationship with the more powerful military 'brothers' – previously the Soviets and now the NATO militaries. As such, the manhood of the Czech officers whom I met in the Czech military resembles more closely the demasculinized form characteristic of men in colonized cultures (Guttman 1997; Stoller 1991). Enhanced by the uncertainty of the period of transition saturated with nostalgic longing for the bygone and the dreaming of unattainable futures, the melancholic quasi-masculinity of the Czech military officers challenges the universal model of a hegemonic military manhood and points to the complex relationship between gender identities and international political and military order.

IV.

On my third day on the job in the winter of 2001, however, when I traveled by train to Moravia to sign my employment papers with the military, the melancholic world of Czech officerdom had not yet been opened to me. Shortly after the train began moving, my initial surprise at *Csárdás's* luxury vanished and I was cradled by the machine's quiet speed into comfortable oblivion²⁸. The movie-like effect of the passing

²⁸ Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes this effect of the railway journey on travelers in his inspiring social history, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1986).

scenery outside, framed by the large and clean windows allowed me to get lost in pleasant thoughts to the point that I almost forgot to leave the train in the city of Brno where I was supposed to undergo another transfer onto the local line. I must admit that in this age of computer technology I was at first surprised when I was told by my commander of the need to travel to a faraway town in Moravia and undergo such a physical ordeal because of one signature. What I came to understand later was not only that computer technology has not yet established itself as a thing of daily use in the Czech military, but also the journey was itself a ritual required in order for me to become a military employee. It was one of the rites of passage in the course of which I turned from a regular civilian into a member of the military family. I was to be questioned and observed, temporarily swallowed by the military bureaucracy and even though shortly released, I was supposed to never be the same again.

A financial department employee who borrowed for this purpose an old Škoda car from his colleague picked me up at the station. On the way back, we gave a ride to an elderly woman whom he knew and who was on her way home carrying shopping bags. The man, who did not talk to me much, was incessantly smoking cigarettes. He was a former military officer recently turned civilian, which of course changed nothing in the content of his job. Fate would have it that it was this man, a former servant of the Czechoslovak socialist military whom I initially viewed with great reservations, who eventually became instrumental in helping me transfer the grant money I received from the U.S. Office of Naval Research to the financial department within the Czech military. Thanks to his expertise, I was able to use the money for my research in the same year when I received it – a situation quite unprecedented in the Czech military and other state institutions where grants get distributed a few months before their closing date. How could the military get rid of this man possessing the essential military skill – the knowledge of the military bureaucracy, just because of his past compromising political involvement under communism? These post-socialist military officers turned civilians, the long-time

insiders who thoroughly understood the bureaucracy that was the military machinery, seemed essential for its continued functioning.

When we arrived at the military university, with its large campus and military training area built in the 1950s as a bastion of the Czechoslovak People's Army, I felt like entering a museum to the Communist regime, one which I always had wanted the Czech Republic to have. A complex of concrete high-rises was standing on top of a hill above the city. The military university, the purpose of which is to serve as a training place for the practitioners of violence, is situated in one of the most beautiful spots of the country – a place in Moravia with fertile soil covered with rich woods, fields and vineyards. During my visit in 2001, more than ten years after the regime had changed, there was still nothing except the obligatory framed photographs of President Havel that would have given me a hint that socialism had come to an end. But then the issue was perhaps that in this remote isolated place, where the military university was adjacent to a town in which the majority of inhabitants were former, present or future military employees or their relatives, the previous regime was not that much matter of the past at all. Even though people turned in their communist membership identification cards or they gave up their uniform, the university still employed many of them and together with those who left continued to make illusion of one big happy military family whose cohesiveness seemed untouched by tumultuous political times.

I was sent to a room, where a man in civilian clothes questioned me about my history, my background and my reasons for seeking employment within the military establishment. I also filled out a security clearance form, with questions that included a several-page narrative of my life. During this bureaucratic ordeal, I was chiefly struck by the stress the man that interviewed me placed on the many social benefits. As a military employee I was to receive pension, extra bonus for emergency readiness, high number of vacation days, healthcare benefits, etc. While he was talking to me, exploring my history of studies in the United States, he seemed especially intrigued by the “real reason why

I decided to get a job in the Czech military of all places?” He also wanted to know “why I decided to return from a surely more comfortable life in the United States?” When he saw that I did not have an answer ready, he found one himself noticing in the questionnaire that I was divorced and so he figured out that I “came back home to find myself a Czech man to marry”. During the interrogation, the woman who was his secretary served me coffee. She, like most secretaries in Czech state institutions, was wearing slippers and she had nail polish and various cosmetic and pampering instruments laid out on her desk as well as in the open compartment of the closet. The beautiful cup with a saucer in which she served me coffee and the space of the office privatized by the little beautifying female objects gave me an irresistible impression that I just entered her home territory rather than a military bureau. The social benefits for which I was signing the employment contract only affirmed my impression that I found myself on the home front of the state. But after all, like many secretaries I have later met on my travels through Czech military bases, she was married to a military officer who worked in another office in the same university building. Most of their friends worked at the university as well. But while her husband wore a uniform and engaged in the serious official rituals of military brotherhood, she, dressed in civilian clothes and camouflaged by her womanhood, could traverse the boundary between the home turf and the public territory. Through her transgressive placement of feminine objects in military space, she accentuated the boundary that divided her from the world of military men. The boundary also marked her presence, which otherwise remained unacknowledged in the space military pecking order – an island of femininity in the sea of maleness²⁹.

An hour later, after I had filled out the forms and signed what I was supposed to sign, I was told to introduce myself to people in another university office. I was now quite tired after my long journey. I was hoping that perhaps the people I was about to meet would give me a ride back to the station – this polite

²⁹ I thank Liz Fitting for this metaphor.

gesture I thought would surely make my upcoming seven-hour train journey back home more bearable. I knocked on the door with just a number indicating the identity of its occupants. Someone shouted, "Vstupte!" (Come in) and so I entered a small room. I made a step forward through the heavy screens of smoke that hung in the air and found myself face to face with a voluptuous topless blond who was wetting her seductively open lips with her tongue. This was my third day on the job and I just experienced my first contact with the art of Czech military wall decorating. While I was still meeting my sister in arms, a man in his early fifties in jeans and a shirt stepped in through the open door of the other room and asked me who I was. I told him my name upon which he looked me up and down and said with a knowing smile that they were expecting me. And without further ado, he asked me: "So when is your train back?" "In about twenty minutes," I said, feeling myself sinking into an overwhelming fatigue from the memory of the journey behind me and the idea of the one ahead. Without hesitation, the man declared: "Well dear, you'd better put your hands on your nipples and run!" I looked past him at the pornographic picture of the blonde on the wall to take inspiration from her and said, "Sure, thank you." Without further comment, the man in civilian clothes left.

I did not move from the spot where I was standing. The sight of the woman on the poster, the man's recommendation and my own sense of being utterly out of place created a strange comic effect saturated with absurdity. I was about to start laughing uncontrollably when another man in his fifties, but this time dressed in green Czech Army uniform with signatures of high rank, came in the room. He was smoking a cigarette, looked me up and down, and with a knowing smile, without any further introduction, he asked me: "Would you like to look at my bananas?" Not seeing another way to respond, I checked with my blonde sister that seemed to know these guys and I said, "Sure, I would sir." I then followed him through another room to his back office. And there, on the sill of a window overlooking the *buzerplac* where young soldiers were being drilled during boot camp, was an exquisite specimen of a banana tree heavy with

ripening fruit. On the bookcase next to the door where I was standing was a picture of the officer as a handsome young man dressed in overalls in front of a mud-covered tank. In the short conversation that followed I learned that he was a tank division commander and joined the military in the 1960s. I wondered what he did during the times of the Soviet Occupation, but he said he spoke good Russian.

Bananas were a scarce exotic commodity under socialism when they were sold, together with oranges in rations during a short period just before Christmas. Even today, more than a decade after they had become cheap fruit available in every Czech supermarket, their taste still transports me into holiday mood, shot through with momentary feeling of guilt for failing to share the luxurious item with my older sister. At first sight, the presence of a banana tree on a military base in the remote place of post-socialist Central European country seems irresistibly absurd. But on the other hand, this now outmoded item of former luxury seems to fit perfectly the melancholic disposition of Czech military officers – the warlords of a Central European “Banana Republic,” a military colony of greater powers (cf. Enloe 1989). Overlooking the buzerplac where new generations of soldiers are being disciplined in the language and skills of the new transnational military regime, the senior military officer dreams of past times. By growing the banana tree in his office, he enacts his nostalgia for former times of another military brotherhood, permeated with affection and betrayal. Through the banana tree, he re-exoticizes this symbol of former privilege and sexual prowess – not one penis, but many yellow jewels growing on a tree in an office covered with pornographic posters of women. On an isolated base located somewhere within and outside of the space of the state, this Czech military officer dreams of the past and the future transnational regime of military brotherhood, which follows its own rules, outside of the realm of the political. Transition, which makes the military manhood of his memories seem obsolete and brings on a heavy feeling of melancholia, seems easier to bear with the tree overlooking a buzerplac where endlessly renewable generations of young men are initiated into the rules of military discipline. The ba-

nana tree is a sign of the phantasmagoria of the post-socialist transition to the Western fold, which simultaneously signals a return to being the intermediary Other always in need of development,³⁰ to being the eternal place of transit to the Orient.

³⁰ Larry Wolff (1994) makes this point by stressing the subordinate place of Eastern Europe as the essential Other in the imagination of Western Europeans. Moreover, he claims that the end of socialism did not end this binary subordination of Eastern Europe. On the contrary, it enabled this ambiguity to be re-inscribed in contemporary institutions and practices.

CHAPTER 3 – TIME TO WASTE: THE ENLISTED IN THE PROFESSIONALIZING MILITARY

I.

This chapter draws on interviews with fifty enlisted men with whom I worked during two months in the spring of 2001 on an Air Force Base in the Czech Republic. At the time, I was beginning my sixteen-month employment as a military researcher in the Czech Armed Forces, attempting to gain official access to Air Force officers whom I wanted to interview about the changing concepts of the military profession in the new political and military system. Gaining access to the military professionals proved to be a formidable task not only because of the aura of secrecy surrounding this professional caste and all things in the post-Soviet military, but also because of the difficulty of explaining the reasons for such an undertaking by a practitioner of cultural anthropology – a field of social science largely unknown in the Czech Republic, let alone in the Czech military. Until my arrival, most Czech military research in the social sciences had been limited to quantitative opinion and satisfaction surveys whose administration was tightly controlled by two other, mutually competing research units within the Czech Armed Forces that employed mostly psychologists and sociologists. In order to convince the military leadership of the value of qualitative cultural analysis as I was proposing it, I suggested conducting a pilot study among the enlisted.

Contrary to the case of professional officers, getting the permission for my study among the enlisted was not very difficult. About six weeks after I had submitted my proposal and request, I received the order to carry out my research. Several mornings per week for the duration of two months, the Commander of the Air Base, referring to the order of the Chief of the General Staff, sent me two to four enlisted men to be interviewed. In the Czech military institution, the roles of the anthropologist and her subject were defined by the chain of command – my

research was an execution of an order from the Chief of the General Staff, who ordered the Commander of the Air Base to order the Captain in charge of the enlisted to order them to come to me for an interview. I could forget about what I had learned in my training about modern anthropological theory and its urge to deconstruct the power relations between the anthropologists and their cultural others (Asad 1988; Clifford 1988; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Said 1979). In the relationship between the enlisted as the anthropological subjects and me as the anthropologist, the power was clearly distributed – I was the one ordered to ask questions and they were the ones who were ordered to answer.

My one-to two-hour interviews followed the same script based on a questionnaire which has been approved by the Chief of the General Staff. The explicitly stated goal of the research for which I had gained the permission was to learn about the views of the enlisted of the military service, their motivation for serving in the military, the comparison between their expectations and the reality of the service, their opinion regarding the contribution of the year in service to their life and career and more general questions targeted at learning about the connection between the motivation of the men to serve in the military and their relationship to the nation state. The findings of this research, which I duly presented to the military leadership as a readable report that included citations and Excel pies based on statistical data and content analysis (2001) showed a grim portrait. Except for one interviewee who reported that he had established a nice friendship with another enlisted man, the enlisted felt that military service did not bring them anything. In the words of many interviewees, their service in the Czech Armed Forces was a “waste of time”.

The image of time as something being wasted during the military service reappeared throughout the interviews – both in the discourse and the material cultural practices demonstrated to me by my interviewees. In this chapter, I return to the material that I had collected during my study among the Czech enlisted men, for whom ‘time’ constitutes a crucial trope. Through such means as a particular definition of ‘time’,

different from that shared by the majority society, the enlisted form a bond as a separate cultural group. The specialized and highly gendered knowledge of 'time' of the enlisted is a source of their collective self-definition – their intimate cultural knowledge. This cultural know-how allows them to assume social agency in a situation when they are turned into *liminal personae*, placed outside of society, temporarily deprived of their social identity.

The building of the enlisted men's agency, which draws on their own concept of time, assumes a special importance in the context of the process of military professionalization. This is because professionalization, based as it is on the elimination of general conscription, depreciates the former importance of the enlisted men's role in the military. Professionalization institutes a new model of the professional soldier (Rambo), different from the previous ideal of an involuntary draftee who engages in various forms of passive resistance against the coercive military institution and by extension, the authoritarian socialist state. As I showed in Chapter 1 – the former model, important as it was for the construction of oppositional civic identity among the Czechs, in significant ways drew on the symbolic agency of the Good Soldier Švejk, the literary anti-war hero who successfully ridiculed the war and the coercive bureaucratic machine of the Austrian monarchy. I also tried to demonstrate how, by commenting on their experience from serving in the Czech military as a situation of absurdity reminiscent of Švejk's adventures, the enlisted reaffirm their connections to the figure of Švejk and his lasting power as an appropriate symbol for describing the Czech military. By endorsing Švejk's continued relevance to describing things military and by stressing their own connection to the symbol, the enlisted resist the official efforts at turning the Czech Armed Forces into a professional force which would make the enlisted irrelevant to the new national military system. In this chapter, I approach the enlisted men's discourse and practices related to 'time' construction as another way of assuming agency in the situation of subjection.

II.

In the way they turn a negative image into a source of cultural identity and social agency, the Czech enlisted men resemble other disadvantaged cultural groups around the world (de Certeau 1984; Goffman 1961; Herzfeld 1997; Taussig 1984). The enlisted men in the military bodies across the globe share the experience of what Erving Goffman has called a 'total institution' – a place which imposes a different set of rules, quite separate from those of society. But contrary to the generally assumed image of inmates as passive recipients of orders, inhabitants of total institutions develop various strategies that help them survive the institution in which they have been involuntarily placed (Goffman, op.cit.; van Bladel 2003). Joris van Bladel, for example, suggests that Russian *dedovchina*, "the informal hierarchical structure installed among the group of soldiers that is primarily based on seniority," is such a response of soldiers as active agents to the perverse effects created by total institutions (van Bladel 2003: 64). The application of an anthropological framework, I suggest, can help us further explain the potential of the enlisted to become agents in the conditions of an oppressive total institution that imposes discipline directed at the suppression of their individual and social identity. The enlisted seem to fit particularly well into the anthropological category of *liminal* beings, a term customarily applied to mark a person or a group in the middle period of the rites-of-passage, such as a neophyte during the puberty initiation rituals that bring him or her into adulthood (van Gennep 1909). Liminal entities are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law" (Turner 1966: 95). The enlisted men as liminal entities experience the transitory stage from becoming 'men' from 'boys', from half to 'full citizens' of their nation states. As Turner reminds us, liminal entities, suspended as they are in a stage of a 'post' and a 'pre' and excluded from social life, are ambiguous and potentially disruptive, escaping classification and possessing of an openness that challenges harmony, hierarchy and structure. It is in this context that I propose to view *mazárna*, the hierarchical

system of authority among the Czech enlisted men, and its disruptive role in the formal system of discipline in the Czech military.

Time is a precious commodity in capitalism, which, unlike time in task-oriented societies that follow a nature-bound life rhythm, is strictly measured and can be sold, bought, used well or wasted (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Thompson 1967). As an instrument that measures labor, time in capitalism is also an instrument of control and discipline. In the context of the professionalizing Czech military, which is a part of Czech society experiencing transition into the capitalist system, the liminal period of military service becomes strongly defined by the enlisted as time out of time, as time being lost from their lives, when they could use it to their advancement. In their interviews with me, the men complained heavily about this aspect of the military service:

“Military service is a total waste of time and money. I think that it is fundamentally useless. Everybody just wants to finish the service and get to the end.” (22 years old, high-school graduate)

“I thought I would learn something here, but I am just wasting my time.” (20-year old, completed vocational training)

“While I am here, my colleagues from the university are getting their work experience. They are making money and I am just losing my time.” (23-year old, technical university graduate)

“Today, military service is a waste of time. I did not expect it. I thought it would be better. Here, the officers call you during your duty to come and clean their office. That is such a waste of time. I thought I would learn something about combat and things military. But all they do is that they use us as cheap labor – we are the cheapest cooks and cleaners of trash.” (25-year old, completed three years of technical university)

Because of the process of reform, many units in the military were forced to institute saving measures and the most obvious place to do so was in the training of the enlisted. Instead of providing military training, the Czech military mostly turned the enlisted into what in their popular jargon the interviewees called *UBS*, when asked about their function in the unit. *UBS* stands for *univerzální bouchač služeb* (universal duty doer) and consists in standing on guard at the assigned places of the base. Not surprisingly, in their complaints about time-wasting, most men were expressing their disappointment when they compared the reality of service with their expectations prior to it. Sixty four percent of the men responded that they wanted to complete the military service and did not try to avoid it. A majority (78%) of this number explained their attitude as: “military service is a part of life and without it, you are not a man.” The ensuing disenchantment of the enlisted was a result of the discrepancy between their traditional expectations of the military service as a rites-of-passage into adulthood and the reality of the professionalizing institution. The imagined military service was filled with physical training and hardship, which was to provide the transition into manhood and by extension, citizenship (Lesley 1997). The real military service consisted in the passive duty system in the service of an institution that clearly considered the enlisted unfit for any ‘real’ military tasks. The frustration of the enlisted was further aggravated by the other most frequent activity assigned to them – cleaning and cooking. The fact that the politics of domestic duties traditionally assigns these tasks to women further contributed to feeling of emasculation among the enlisted and found its expression in a variety of misogynic practices.

The system of *mazárna*, I suggest, the hierarchical system of authority among the Czech enlisted based as it is on the length of time spent in service, is their response to these totalizing effects of the military institution. The year of service is taken out of regular life of the individual and his social time. Life in the system of *mazárna* starts with the beginning of the service and is divided into four principal stages irrespective of the actual physical age and/or social standing (based on class, profession

or education) of the individual outside of the military. The person's place in the hierarchy is fully determined by the time that he has spent in the military. Each day spent in the service becomes a 'dead' day, and with each passing day, the enlisted man rises in the hierarchy, becomes more of a man and more alive. With 365 dead days on his account, the enlisted is fully transformed into a man and gets born again into the civilian life. Each transition to the next stage is marked by the rites of passage, which involves psychological and physical violence perpetrated by the senior on the junior enlisted (*šikana*). Importantly, most violence is based on the humiliation of the neophyte by making him perform activities traditionally associated with women, such as cleaning or by calling him by derogative names designed for female victims ('pussy', 'whore', etc.).

Because of the dress code associated with the system of *mazárna*, the enlisted are easily able to identify the individual's position in the hierarchy. This cultural code works efficiently to determine seniority in social interactions. Because officially forbidden, the breaking of the dress code is also a typical example of 'messing up' – a way of showing the senior enlisted men's lack of respect for officers and the military institution (Goffman, op.cit.). For example, after each stage, the enlisted person was able to change the system of tying his boots to include more of the so called "bridges." (Illustration 12) He could also tie his belt lower and loosen the tie on his barrette. A particularly interesting set of hierarchical markings included the custom of weaving a special lash, called *mazačenka* preferably from the boot laces, which the senior enlisted would hang on their key chains. (Illustration 13) The custom of weaving *mazačenka*, closely resembles another Czech tradition of weaving *pomlázka* – a lash from willow branches made and used by men to lash women on Easter Monday in exchange for dyed Easter eggs, a tradition to which I return in Chapter 5. *Mazačenka*, like *pomlázka*, are material symbols of the Czech men's prowess and dominance over women. In the hierarchical system of *mazárna*, they can only be woven and worn by *mazáci*, the senior enlisted in the system of *mazárna*, the only real men among the emasculated and dominated freshmen/conscripts.

One of the cultural customs most explicitly connected to time as the basis for the hierarchical system of *mazárna* and by extension the expression of the reversal of the official military's concept of time, is the system of the measuring of the days left to the end of service by different forms of military 'calendars'. The enlisted person counts the dead days, symbolized by a section of tailor's measuring tape. The measuring tape is placed in an empty plastic container of the Kinder Egg³¹, which is hung on a key chain. Each cut off section of the measuring tape symbolizes a day and is termed 'the dead' and placed in another Kinder Egg container on the key chain. (Illustration 14) The connection between two Kinder Eggs on the key chain and men's genitalia (both called *vejce* in Czech) is more than a matter of linguistics. The two 'eggs' hanging on the key chain, one of which contains the *dead* days marking the time of the completed military service are the embodiments of the enlisted men's manhood. Moreover, like the Easter eggs that the Czech men get for lashing the women on Easter Monday, the Kinder Eggs on the key chain are **earned** trophies. Contrary to the passive reality the enlisted men's tasks in the professionalizing military, the customs related to the measurement of time which are a part of the hierarchical system of *mazárna*, mark the time as filled with manhood-building activity.

Another highly gendered way of measuring time by the enlisted men consists in various forms of calendars drawn on paper. (Illustrations 15 and 16) Usually, they portray a naked woman with exaggerated genital organs embodying the American Statue of Liberty (liberty being civilian life). The woman – liberty – is surrounded and/or covered with numbered fields marking days left to the end of the service that the owner of the calendar fills out. The final destination of the calendar owner's longing is, of course, the sexual pleasure promised by civilian life once the military service ends. One of the verses of the poem in illu-

³¹ Kinder Egg is a sweet the shape and size of a goose-egg made of brown and white chocolate shell with a plastic egg-like container inside that contains a plastic puzzle or a toy.

stration 19 eloquently describes the main content of the Czech enlisted men's daily activity: "Every day I count how many days I have left, and I won't stop till civilian life is what I get."

III.

In the situation which defines them as passive neophytes doomed to wasting one year of their life, the enlisted in the professionalizing Czech military attempt to claim agency in a way typical for their hero – the Good Soldier Švejk. Taken out of society and subjected to the rules of the total institution, they take discipline to the extreme and make the waste of time, the military's tool for their oppression, into an instrument of their own, albeit imagined, agency.

The smoking, bored enlisted men were an integral part of life on every of the air bases on which I worked. Dressed in green camouflage with blue berets, young and bored beyond belief, their eyes spilling apathy, the involuntary enlisted appeared to me as heralds of earlier times, a dying species in the era of military professionalization. The physical youth of the men contrasted sharply with their occupational obsolescence as soldiers. They were unwilling laymen in the age that was to belong to enthusiastic professional practitioners of the art of military violence, which made the former appear irrevocably stuck in the past. On my travels, the enlisted men's boredom, which channeled the general misery of the post-socialist Czech military establishment, projected a distinct aura of intimacy. Because of the initial research, which I was conducting among them, I was able to tell, by the details of their uniforms, by the ways that they tied their shoelaces and straps of their beret how many days they had left till the end of his service. This cultural know-how as well as the soldier's distinct unprofessionalism gave me a certain level of self-assurance. As I watched them, I felt the anthropologist's honor to have been able to witness and record a culture threatened with immediate disappearance. The year 2004 was the last year of compulsory conscription in the Czech Republic.



Illustration 12: *„Messing up” – Shoelaces tied to show the status of mazák of their owner. Photo by author 2001.*



Illustration 13: *Mazačėnkas on the key chain.* Photo by author 2001.



Illustration 14: *Key-chain with Kinder Eggs – one containing the measuring tape (right) and the other the “dead” days cut off and marking the time left till the end of the military service.* Photo by author 2001.

EX. VOJENSKÝ SE
IMPERNÝ, ALE
FINANČE JSOU ČASŤEN

inova Kbely 101 1907

KDE KOL
ROZUM, ŽE JI
VOJENSKÁ LOGIK
SOU FUNKČNÍ, TEĎ CO VOJNU
ZABÍJÍ, ALE MILIONY TEĎ CO JÁ
SEROU!

GOLDEN CIVIL - VOJENSKÝ SEN
ZALITR RUMU
ZABÍJU GUMU!
ZALITR SLIVOVICE
ZABÍJU JICH VÍCE!!

AT NÁS BÍDOU,
AT NÁS MĚNÍ,
- ŠTEJNĚ SE NĀM,
ČÍSLO KRÁTÍ.

PANE PORUČÍKU, JEN JEDNO NĀM
PĀVÁ SILU, ŽE IY TU ZŮSTANEŤE
A MY PŮJDEM DO CIVILU.

MODLITBA:

OTČE NĀŠ, TY
MILÝ PANE, NĀ
VOJNĚ SE MĀME
ŠPATNĚ, NENECH
NĀŠ TU TAKHLE
TRĀPT, SNAŽ SE
NĀM TU VOJNU
ZKRĀTIT, MĀME
Y TOBE VELKOU
VĪRU, PUSTĀ NĀŠ
RADŠÍ DO

CIVILU!!!

PRO VOJÁKA JE TO RĀNA
KDNĚ NA NEHO ČASNĚ
Z RĀNA MĪSTO SLABĚCH
HUBIČEK ĚVE DOZORĚŤ

BUDIČEK!!!

PANE BOŽE DEJ MI
SILU, AT VYDŘÍM DO

CIVILU.

HODNĚ JÍDLA,
HODNĚ PĪTÍ, HODU
DĚVĀT JAKO
KVIŤI, TE ZNĚOBY
NĀNČEKY DĚJ
VČIVIKUŠE

VYHÝBED!!

KAŽDÝ DEN TO POČÍTĀM,
ZA KOLIK TO JEŠŤE MĀM,
A POČÍTĀT NEPŘESTĀNU
DOKUD CIVIL NĚDOSTĀNU!



OLOMOUC [redacted] 5259

THE RETURN TO NORMAL PEOPLE? OH YES!!!

FUCK OFF ARMY!!!

Illustration 15: "Golden Freedom" – A calendar showing the numbering system of the enlisted who fill in a numbered field for each day spent in the military service. Photo by author 2001.

vojenský ...
 Hodně jidla, hodně pít,
 hodně děvat jako kvítí.
 Tě zásady vždycky dbej,
 výeviku se vykýlej.

Fuck off Army
 Za litr rumu
 xabiju gumu.

Motivka:
 Otče náš Ty milý pane,
 na vojně se máme špatně
 nenech nás tu takhle trá
 pit, snaž se nám tu voj
 nu akrotit, máme v
 Tobě velkou víru, pusí
 nás radši do

každý den to počítám,
 za kolik to ještě
 mám.
 A počítat nepřestanu,
 dokud civil
 nedostanu!

At' nás bijou,
 at' nás mlátí,
 stejně se nám
 číslo krátí. ✨

Civilu

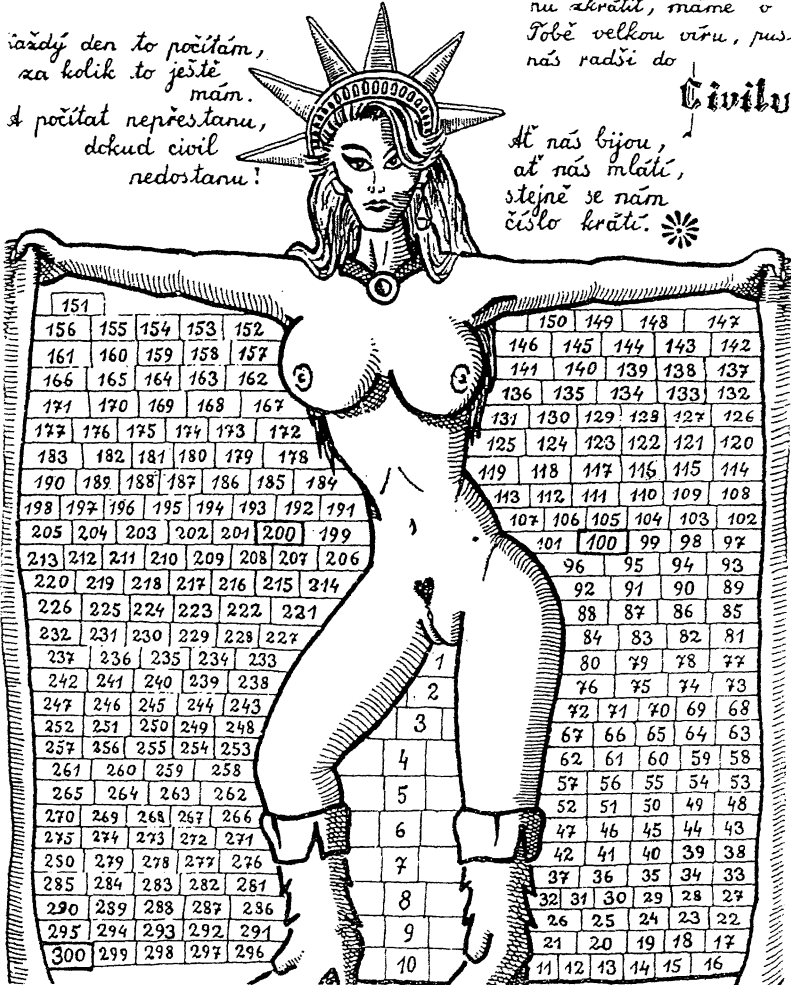


Illustration 16: "Fuck Off Army" – A calendar showing the numbering system of the enlisted who fill in a numbered field for each day spent in the military service. Photo by author 2001.

CHAPTER 4 – MIGS AND CADRES ON THE MOVE: DISPLACING THE WAR MACHINE

“So what is this tickling at the heels to which Kafka’s all too human ape would refer us all too apish humans to? I call it the mimetic faculty, the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power.”³²

In this essay, I approach “post-communist transition” from the perspective of identity change that I see as the displacement of a particular form of a mimetic faculty in favor of another. I focus on the institution of the Czech Air Force and its officers whose professional identity is seriously challenged by the circumstances of large socio-political and institutional changes that accompany the “transition” from socialism to democracy. The mimetic faculty at the basis of the professional identity of the Czech Air Force officers whom I interviewed is firmly tied to the Soviet technology and Soviet-type military discipline. Following the sociopolitical reorientation of the Czech Republic from the East (membership in the Warsaw Pact) toward the West (membership in NATO), the Czech state apparatus of legitimate violence (war machine) changes the original object to be mimicked from the Soviet to the Western type of military discipline and technology. In this essay, I use ethnographic material to comment on how this process of mimetic change “happens” on the level of individual Air Force officers who find themselves in the liminal (Gennep 1909; Turner 1966) space and time of the war machine “in transition.”

³² Taussig. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, p. xiii.

I.

By the time I arrived at base X, I had some experience interviewing men in the Czech military. It has been almost a year since I began my job as a social scientist at a military research institute in Prague. Even though I was a civilian in the military, many of the same military rules applied to me and the first six months on the job were quite difficult. The main pillar of my dissertation research proposal which I defended before my committee at New School for Social Research was a plan to interview officers about the changing demands of the military profession. But for the first five months on the job, I was not sure whether I would ever be even allowed to leave the premises of my office. Most of my work at the time consisted in translating and editing what my boss and other people wrote and in meeting with foreign military researchers and NATO representatives to whom I was presented as “our Hanka who lived in America for 10 years” and who “speaks such good English!” After months of being mentally and physically exhausted from endless commutes to my job, long work hours, and general deprivation from employment in the military research establishment where I was pushed into participating on projects whose titles and contents sincerely scared me, I was beginning to lose hope that I would ever be able to accomplish my ethnographic ambitions. I realized and was repeatedly reminded in case I forgot, that in order to go anywhere and talk to anybody, I needed to secure the order of the top military man – the Chief of the General Staff. I was told that this difficult task could only be achieved by writing a proposal for a project that would be completely indispensable to the military.

In the absence of access to literature on which I have previously so foolishly relied and without the customary (and by the standard of military social science highly overrated) freedom anthropologists like to enjoy when they are conducting their fieldwork, I created a project over two days and nights in the office based on media reports that at the time spoke of the upcoming exodus of Czech Air Force officers.³⁵ I already knew how most newspaper reports about the Czech military were

produced – through isolated phone calls between several higher-ranking officers and the three or four Czech reporters who were loosely interested in military and security issues – and so the question of whether the rumor was a fact or a fiction seemed particularly irrelevant. Based on these media accounts, which talked of the imminent depopulation of the Czech Air Force, I wrote a project proposal bursting with urgency. Reasons for such exodus of qualified and indispensable officers must be investigated! I included a plan of action to deal with the problem through ethnographic research. My research, I said, would help military leadership deal with this burning issue, crucial for militaries in the 21st century. I did not forget to list the exact number of people I would interview, the length of each session and the methods of data processing. This proposal got me not only the signature from the Chief of the General Staff, but also a grant from the Office of Naval Research through its Human Factors program entitled, *Attrition and Retention in the 21st Century*. I was free to go! Thanks to the grant for which I was eternally grateful, I had funds for gas for my ancient Škoda car, a laptop computer in which I recorded interviews and in my bag an order signed by the Chief of the General Staff, laminated for protection against frequent use.

When I arrived at Base X, I had more than thirty interviews completed and transcribed based on sessions with men who were planning to leave the military that year. After several months of interviewing on one base, I was now slightly frustrated by what I perceived was a sense of repetition – of hearing similar stories over and over again. Before going to the field I was told that the point when you feel like you are not learning anything new is usually a good indication that you should stop what you are doing and start with something else. I could not do that – for one thing, my project proposal to the Navy stated that I would complete 101 interviews – and I did not dare to mess about with numbers when it came to military research! More importantly, I felt strongly that

³⁵ E.g. Gazdík (2001), „Šedivý: Čekají nás mimořádné potíže: Krize armády, důstojníci chtějí do civilu;“ Jan Gazdík, „Armáda se vylidňuje kvůli fámám a nejistotě,“ Pavel Mácha, „Mozky a stůhačky,“ Jan Gazdík, „Armádu deptají zastaralé stereotypy.“

there was a significance to the repetition of stories; I realized that the monotonous content of the interviews was indistinguishable from their manner of deliverance – resigned discourse of men leaving the military institution, saturated with disenchantment and melancholia. In the stories of these experienced officers, the decay and finally the termination of the old Russian fighter planes – Migs and Sus – intermingled with ironic and self-deprecating observations testifying to the end of good times for the people of the Czech Air Force and for the institution in general. Crucial to the men's stories was the narrators' acute awareness of an historical process of change, which was bringing about their own obsolescence as soldiers. Their accounts of the decline of the military profession as they have known it and of the deterioration of the aging Soviet technology on which they have spent their lives flying and working, were simultaneously stories of their own inevitable displacement.

II.

The displacement of the military men and machines was an integral part of the process of military professionalization, which was instigated by the geopolitical changes following the end of socialism. It was largely from the interviews with the men who were leaving the Air Force that I came to see military professionalization itself as a highly paradoxical form of displacement – a movement of the military in the outward direction from the core of the state. But while this process characteristic of post-communist modernity involves the removal of the military from the center of state power through its depolitization and voluntarization, it simultaneously entails a greater infiltration and dispersion of the very idea of the military in the minds and lives of the civilian public. The goal of military professionalization is the achievement of the harmonious and therefore uncontentious coexistence of the military with the democratic state and civil society. This is achieved by the externalization of the war machine to where it really belongs – outside of the state apparatus³⁴ – to a less prominent location from where it can be

more conveniently and without public participation or protest harnessed for the goals of the state and the transnational regime of military violence.

This general movement of the military in the outward direction is accomplished through a series of concrete measures, which involve multiple layers and forms of displacements. The one that became central to my sixteen months' fieldwork in the Czech Air Force had, like all things military, a name. It was called "officer attrition" (*odchodovost*). Attrition normally denotes gradual deterioration, a slow death of an object. In the military terminology, "attrition" as opposed to "retention" denotes the termination of the employment contract between personnel and the military institution. Military scientists spend much time and tax payers' money looking for scientific ways to determine the appropriate levels of attrition, in order to prevent the deterioration and the death of the military institution.³⁵ In my project for the Office of Naval Research and the Chief of the General Staff called, "The Problems of Officer Retention in the Czech Air Force," I followed the calling of military science and promised the military leadership to use ethnographic methods to find the reasons for the exodus of qualified people from the Czech Air Force.

Essentially, the results of my research confirmed a highly predictable process of displacement initiated by a new military law and by concrete measures instituted by the state. The new *Law*

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari (1987). "1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine."

³⁵ The military studies focused on attrition and retention usually identify determinants that are sure to affect military personnel retention, such as "the family factor," pay and bonus, job content satisfaction and peer recognition, as well as different sets of psychological dispositions of individual soldiers. Through questionnaires and psychological tests, the researchers find the most likely factors causing attrition and through mathematical calculations they determine the probability of future levels of retention if each of the factors negatively affecting retention is eliminated. E.g. L.N. Rosen and Doris Briley Durand, "The Family Factor and Retention Among Married Soldiers Deployed in Operation Desert Storm," Brice Stone, Vince Wiggins, Kathryn Turner-Holland, Larry T. Looper, "Air Force Pilot Retention: Evaluating the Results of Alternative Models," Gerald D. Gibb, Tatree Nontasak and Daniel Dolgin, "Factors Affecting Career Retention Among Naval Aviators."

*on Professional Soldiers*³⁶ passed in 1999 and effective in November 2001 (the first law on this issue since 1959³⁷), directly encouraged people to leave the military institution, determining substantial pensions based on the number of years spent in service. Moreover, unlike the previous law, which only loosely defined the relationship between rank, education and job position, the new code strictly determined this relationship, generally requiring higher education level and lower rank for a given job position than was customary before. At the same time, an official military decree gave promotion advantage to those people who passed special military English language exams. An associated ruling lowered the number of high ranking officers allowed to serve on the bases outside of the headquarters. The combination of these measures forced many officers with high ranks but low education levels and no English language skills to leave the military. The new law thus set a new standard of “the military professional” and the new “professional military” – a modern, young, English speaking, internationally deployable, mobile and quantitatively small force.

While the standard explanation blames military downsizing on the advancements in technology and military strategy that require operation by fewer personnel than before, the case of post-communist militaries reveals an additional factor. Namely, the reorientation of NATO-member militaries from large forces intended to protect the nation state, to smaller militaries composed of highly specialized units capable of contributing to allied military operations. “The new NATO,” said NATO’s secretary general, “is going to be about countries who do different things, and each of them well.”³⁸ During the Gulf War II, the negligible importance of the quantity of soldiers and technology needed to contribute to allied operations was exposed in the U.S. assessment of Poland’s loyalty in the American struggle against Saddam Hussein. Poland was praised by the United States for the combat participation of approximately 250 mem-

³⁶ Zákon č. 221/1999 Sb., o vojácích z povolání, www.army.cz.

³⁷ Zákon č. 76/1959 Sb.

³⁸ Richburg (2002), “Czechs Become Model for New NATO.”

bers of the Polish military in Iraq and awarded the administration of a large section of the territory in post-war Iraq. This American decision has caused a dilemma for Polish state and its military, utterly unprepared for such a task and unable to finance the operation from its own sources. The grotesque effect of the situation whereby the former member of the Soviet bloc is awarded a privilege and order to conquer another country, for which it lacks means and motivation, was topped by the fact that due to insufficient finances, the American government will have to help finance the participation of the Polish contingent.

In case of post-communist militaries, the quantitative reductions of forces and their specialization toward international deployment especially strongly affects the national Air Forces. In the Czech republic as well as of the other new post-communist NATO-member states, the Air Force has been considered the most expensive and difficult part of the military to modernize due to the costs of new technology and training.³⁹ The new logic of the political and military alliance of which the Czech Republic became a part, moreover, did not encourage the new member countries to build their Air Force, considered an ineffective investment limited to the defense of the national air space and not useful for deployment in allied operations. Despite international pressure, most post-communist countries have attempted to save their national Air Force through modernization programs and extremely costly contracts for the purchase of new air craft. During his visit to the Czech Republic in the spring of 2001, NATO Secretary General George Robertson (as well as other NATO leaders) was quite upset with the Czech government's decision to invest over 100 billion in the purchase of new supersonic jets, JAS 39 Gripen, from a British/Swedish consortium. In his criticism, Mr. Robertson seconded Mr. Frank Kramer, Deputy Secretary of Defense of the United States, who had warned the Czech Republic in November 2000 against the purchase of new supersonic planes: "Your military is too big, it is awkward, most officers are not educated, you do not have enough ammunition with which to

³⁹ Szayna (2002). *NATO Enlargement 2000–2015*, especially Chapter 5.

shoot, enough fuel for your cars and planes. Those are the things in which you should invest!“ The angry author of an article covering George Robertson’s visit, which he shrewdly entitled, “Jet Fighter for Švejka,” laments: “Three months later, the government did the exact opposite. As if despite the „American hawks“ the government decided to put out tender for the acquisition of supersonic jet fighters!“⁴⁰ The conflict over the purchase of the supersonics finally escalated to the point, where it seemed that their potential purchase would result in the suspension of Czech Republic’s membership in NATO!⁴¹ Eventually, the country’s financial difficulties caused by the 2002 disastrous floods have led the Czech government to use the \$ 2 billion set aside to buy new Gripen combat aircraft for flood relief. In the absence of Western-made replacement for the Soviet jet fighters, the last of which was eliminated in 2004, the Czech Air Force was facing the dismal facts: it will not have a single supersonic fighter plane on time. Jaroslav Tvrđík, the member of the social democratic government that for several years unsuccessfully advocated the purchase of the new aircraft before the Senate, resigned in May 2003 in protest of budget reductions. The Ministry of Defense was then for a while led by Miroslav Kostelka, who was not a party member, but like Tvrđík, he was a former officer who took down the uniform to become a civilian leader of the defense sector. This new Minister of Defense, soon after he assumed his office, presented a solution to the problems of the Air Force – to lease the protection of the national air space from the Germans.⁴²

⁴⁰ Spurný (2001), “Střhačka pro Švejka.“

⁴¹ Spurný (2002), „Gripeny, nebo NATO.“

⁴² An abundance of jokes and cartoons replied to the protracted negotiations for the purchase of new jet fighters. A newspaper cartoon (Illustration 17), for example, shows Jaroslav Tvrđík, the Minister of Defense ordering a Czech Air Force pilot to fly at supersonic speed on a subsonic speed air craft of Czech origin, L-159: “Shut up! I have issued an order! You will fly at supersonic speed!” Eventually 14 Gripen aircraft were leased from Sweden in 2005 and baptised by Kostelka’s successor Karel Kühnl, vice-chairman of the Unie svobody party.

III.

It is no wonder that my research among Czech Air Force officers satisfied one of the fundamental urges that bring anthropologists to the field – to study and record the life of cultures threatened with disappearance. But beyond the displacement of people and machines, ostensibly brought about and explained by the discourse and practices of military modernization and professionalization, a less tangible and infinitely more complicated dilemma of post-communist modernity is reasserting itself with great insistence. In the liminal absence of secrecy which covers military power with a veil of seriousness, the excessively mimetic condition of the modernization process was revealed – cadres and Migs merging in their melancholic exodus.

The mimetic faculty, according to Walter Benjamin, is “nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else.”⁴³ Mimesis, the faculty “to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other,”⁴⁴ Michael Taussig claims, testifies to the fundamentally sensuous nature of human thought. “Like Adorno and Benjamin ... my concern is to reinstate in and against the myth of Enlightenment, with its universal, context-free reason, not merely the resistance of the concrete particular to abstraction, but what I deem crucial to thought that moves and moves us – namely, its sensuousness, its mimeticity.”⁴⁵ Both Benjamin and Taussig also indicate that the mimetic faculty as a fundamental aspect of human thought is strongly brought out by modernity. Together with the resurfacing of the primitive, and the juxtaposition of the very new with the very old, modernity “both stimulates and is predicated upon mimetic modes of perception.”⁴⁶ Initially through the optical perception of the camera and the movies, but now increasingly

⁴³ Benjamin (1978), “On the Mimetic Faculty,” p. 160.

⁴⁴ Taussig, (1993): xiii.

⁴⁵ Taussig, (1993): 2.

⁴⁶ Taussig, (1993): 20.

through the computer, the internet and television, the language of the human body “combines thought with action, sensuousness with intellection,”⁴⁷ signaling the importance of mimesis for human thought.

The pilots’ and the technicians’ stories of their attachment to the Soviet planes – which for them were the Air Force – were saturated with an abundance of sensuousness based on tactile knowing. Over the course of their careers, in the process of mimetic transference made possible by bodily contact, the men have merged with their machines and with the military institution itself. There is no doubt that the displacement of the Soviet machines, the displacement of the officers and the displacement of the former military system are connected through the logic of mimesis, whereby the original becomes indistinguishable from the copy. It seems, moreover, that what I encountered in the melancholic stories of the Czech Air Force officers, was a condition of mimetic excess, spilling out of control. After the closure of the supply flow of spare parts from the Soviet Union, the old technology was slowly dying out, while new Western-made forms have not yet replaced it. Trapped in the moment of liminal uncertainty, the Czech Air Force officers realized their obsolescence brought about by post-communist modernity, which required different forms of technology and corporeal knowledge that was not at their disposal. While visiting base X, this mimetic cause of the melancholic disposition of Air Force officers, which were the subject of my study of military attrition was revealed to me in an illuminating set of experiences.

⁴⁷ Susan Buck-Morss (1991), *The Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 267 in Michael Taussig (1993), *Mimesis and Alterity*, p. 20.

IV.

I was staying in barracks far from Base X, so I left very early – I could not be late. I did not mind getting up before sunrise, because I looked forward to the drive, which I knew would hold surprises for me. I avoided the highways. The roads were empty and I passed only few slowly moving tractors going to the fields and buses collecting workers at countryside stops to take them to their jobs in towns. I preferred to drive off the main roads because that way I could watch the intriguing pace of life in the villages. I was especially fascinated by the regularity with which people went to work before sunrise and returned in early afternoons to tend their beautiful gardens full of useful and edible vegetables. While the inhabitants of Czech cities have often adopted the capitalist work ethic, in the villages as well as in the military, the old socialist-time work principles still reigned – after coming from their public jobs, men and women worked even harder their second shift cultivating a family plot.

As always, I hoped that a hitchhiker would stop me. This morning it was a young woman. She worked as a shop assistant and she said she often hitchhiked since the bus service had gotten more expensive and less frequent. She said she was not scared of male drivers – in the nine years she had been hitchhiking she had met only a few men who had tried to “seriously molest” her. She said that customers at the supermarket where she worked were much worse, especially mothers with young children, who leaned against the shop’s glass counters and touched them with dirty fingers. During the half an hour she spent in my car, she complained about her boss and her ex-husband who both took advantage of her. When I mentioned that maybe she should not put up with what sounded like an abusive treatment, she responded that she would have to be a “crazy feminist” (“prdlá feministka”) to make a big deal out of the situation. Then she continued complaining about men and her life in general until she got off in front of her supermarket. When she left, I realized that I again failed in the elaborate cultural ritual of gendered complaining whose end was not a resolution of what I naively saw as a power-imbued conflict

between her and two important men in her life. Instead, hers was not a problem calling for a solution, but rather an irreconcilable condition not void of certain charms. It reminded me that I have been largely unsuccessful in exploiting the reassuring nature of the dialogic exchange with the few Czech female officers that I have met. At the end, I felt them to be quite as distant from me as were their male counterparts. So much for sisterhood and gendered access in fieldwork!

When I arrived at the base two hours later, I knew what to do. I had ten minutes left till my scheduled appointment at 7:15 a.m. After I had parked my car, I called the Base Commander from a familiarly dilapidated gatehouse. While I waited, a teenage enlisted whose tired eyes spilled apathy filled out my visitor's pass. As I watched him fill out my pass, unhurriedly dropping cigarette ashes on my ID, I felt confident that this would be a good day.

The commander was already expecting me in his office. After an official welcome and after I showed him my research authorization and my previous report to the command, he asked the secretary to bring us coffee. The secretary asked me what coffee I wanted – Turkish or instant and whether I wanted milk or sugar. I asked for black Turkish coffee. The secretary did not ask the Commander. She knew exactly how he drank his coffee. We chatted informally with the Commander for about ten minutes during which time I laughed at his jokes and he in return seemed to acknowledge my presence. He was a man with authority – commanding a base with thousands of employees – yet his manner was lenient, almost jovial. On the wall behind the commander was the Czech Armed Forces 2001 official calendar, which featured women in uniform (Illustration 18). I had seen the calendar on all the bases that I had visited and I had my own copy in Prague. Everybody had the calendar in the Czech military – before the beginning of the New Year the central military publishing house distributed it to all the departments. The calendar bonded military employees together in the same manner as was accomplished by the special internal military phone system with receiver displays that identified callers from the outside world, enabling you to get prepared for unpleasant

questions from the civilians and to treat them differently. As I was laughing at the commander's jokes, I realized that his humor matched remarkably well the playfully pornographic rendering of female military officers in the calendar. Having mentioned strategic names of people we both knew in the Air Force and having thus clarified our mutual positions, the Commander imparted me to his subordinate who led me to the place where I was to meet a group of officers that I was planning to interview that day.

As we were silently walking through the base, passing by dilapidated barracks and staff buildings, I was overcome by a sense of warm familiarity. When I first came to the Czech military, I wondered what NATO observers and official visitors thought when I saw them driving in the latest models of military jeeps through the bases overgrown with grass or when I once accompanied a group of them to see the decades-old Russian Mig jet fighters helplessly stationed in the hangars. Most of these Western men built their careers at the time when former Czechoslovakia was on the other side of the Cold War divide as a member of the Warsaw Pact. I figured, therefore, they must have felt like victors inspecting a combat zone after a prolonged battle. The trouble was that due to the hoaxes of history, the former Warsaw Pact enemies were now NATO Allies, and their military weakness was no longer of advantage to the victors. Today, not even a year in the military and things that had first shocked me made me feel at home. The decrepit buildings, overgrown grass, bored conscripts, gloomy officers in uniforms, diffident secretaries – they were all part of my world now. While walking through Base X, I realized that I was more shaken by the congenial beauty of the Bohemian countryside through which I drove to get here than by what my senses few months ago had perceived as a desolate ruggedness of the military establishment. A week before I arrived at base X, I met one of my friends in the center of Prague, and I remember feeling quite traumatized by what I recognized as the city's dazzling beauty and optimism. I had been broken in, having mimetically merged with an institution that had first shocked my eyes as an appalling remainder of the socialist system.

After few minutes of walking from the Staff building where I had met the Commander, my escort and I arrived at an edifice located at the end of the row of barracks. Because of the sharp light outside, I could not see much of anything in the long dark cold hallway completely lined with old yellow and brown tiles. When we arrived at the hallway's end, my escort knocked on the door and left without a word. After some time, the door opened and I was let into another hallway. When my eyes got used to the darkness, I was first comforted by the familiar sight of pornographic posters of well-endowed blondes on the yellowed walls and cigarette smoke lazily hanging in the air. I was at the right place, I thought, and lowered the computer bag from my shoulder. I then looked into the room to the left where in torn armchairs and on a very old polyester couch sat several men who were smoking cigarettes and sipping unidentified liquid from chipped mugs. Except for one, they were all dressed in old tracksuits wearing slippers. The man who opened the door turned out to be their superior, because he told the others: "This is the young lady from the General Staff who came to interview you, so be nice." The men continued to sit and smoke, quite unimpressed by my presence. There was awkward silence when none of us knew what to do next. I felt the acute absence of a female secretary who would be asked to bring me coffee, which would interrupt the uneasiness of the situation.

At the worst possible moment, as usually, I needed to use the bathroom. Into the general silence interrupted only by a radio on which popular Czech singer Lucie Bílá was singing her early hit, "Love is love, when girls marry girls and boys marry boys," (*Láska je láska, když se holky ženěj s holkama a kluci s klukama*), I asked the commander of the group for directions to the toilet. He hesitated a little, but then showed me to the door back in the hallway. It is not that I was not ready for a dirty lavatory customarily found in our part of the world, with the reassuring sour smell of urine and no toilet paper. But this one was special. The bowl was caked with layers of excrement of various ages and sources. There was also urine on the floor and cigarette butts swimming in a half-empty dirty pickle jar on the miniature sink to the left side of the toilet. Pornographic posters that I expert-

ly judged to be the socialist Škoda Car company advertisements from the early 1980s were not missing from the walls. “Láska je láska,” I thought. My natural instincts directed me to “put my hands on my nipples and run” – as I was recommended to do on my second day on the job by a retired colonel employed in the same department within the military. But because I was desperate after four hours of driving and the coffee with the Commander, I did what I needed to do and for what toilets are made, and slightly shaken by the experience, I returned to the room where I left my bag.

I set the laptop computer on a dusty desk, which I cleaned with my sleeve and asked for coffee, which was eventually brought to me in a filthy mug. I walked out of the room and asked the group of smoking men for four volunteers whom I would interview in the course of the day, one at a time.

V.

The man who came in the room first was in his fifties, rather good-looking, slim, in a golf T-shirt and blue jeans. He was smiling at me as he entered the room and closed the door behind him. I liked him. He asked me how I was and I said that I thought I had had better days. He said he understood that, noting that I looked tired and pulled out something out of his pocket. Then he extended his hand and opened it – on his palm was an exquisite head of garlic. He said he grew a lot of garlic in his garden and this one was fresh and he wanted to give it to me to make me feel better. He had a slightly perceptible Slovak accent – that was nothing surprising, at least one third of the people I have interviewed were former Slovaks who opted for Czech citizenship when Czechoslovakia divided into two separate states by the end of 1992. After the “Velvet Divorce” as the separation of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic was called, former mates eventually technically became military opponents, since Slovakia was not admitted to NATO at the same time as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary.⁴⁸ I asked him to sit down, and he did. He seemed in a great mood and kept smiling at me.

This was little disconcerting to me. I was not used to meeting happy people in my interviews with departing officers. I told him, like all others before and after him, that I was doing research, which was paid for by the U.S. Navy and the Czech Armed Forces and that I was interested in hearing about his career and why he was leaving the Air Force.

Officer X, so we shall call him, was an air-ground crewmember – a technician – and he had served in the Air Force for 32 years. He was married and had three children, all of whom were married – one of the two sons was an officer in the military. His wife was a teacher and all of their life together they lived in the same two-bedroom apartment in a military a bloc of flats (*panelák*) in the nearby housing estate (*sídlišťe*) built in the 1950s for the officers' families. His income was approximately 16,000 CZK (450 USD) a month, only slightly more than mine.

When I asked him to tell me something about his motivations for joining the Air Force and to talk generally about his job, he smiled broadly and told me a passionate story of his love affair with planes. His story included the *falling in love* – when he first sat down in a Russian Mig during an air show as a teenager in the early 1960s; *the pursuit* – surviving through and graduating from military high school; *the frustration and setback* – when he did not pass the physical tests required for him to receive training as a pilot; *the consummation* – becoming a technician and spending almost thirty years in a beloved job in which “I was able to touch planes everyday, feeling like they touched me gently back right where my soul is.”

I asked him to tell me more about planes, which he did, smiling incessantly, his eyes shining with pure pleasure. In his account, his love of planes and the Air Force family was the main storyline for which the history of the Soviet occupation and then political change and NATO membership were little more than stage sets that switched between acts:

⁴⁶ While the Czech Republic entered NATO in 1999, Slovakia became a member in 2004.

You see, with planes, it is not like with cars. When something goes wrong with a car, you stop by the side of the road and repair it. But when something goes wrong with the plane, it falls down on the ground and it is gone. In the almost thirty years that I have been a technician, not a single plane that I prepared for flight had a mechanical failure. I have worked on three types of the Migs and then Sus. Those I particularly loved. I have a beautiful miniature model at home and whenever I touch it, I feel warm all the way to my soul. The day when they recently took them out of operation was a terribly sad moment for me. Those planes could have lasted several more years. They never failed you. I remember that once one of the planes sucked in part of the cabin, the engine was bare, but it was still running till it stopped at the depot. Those Russian engines were great; they just kept going, completely reliable. You cannot compare that to this new Czech plane L-159 that they are bringing in now. The day that they put the Sus out of operation was one of the saddest days in my life. I thought that the best planes would stay, but the decisions were made at the top where other things than technical considerations mattered. It is such a shame that we do not have this great plane any more.

You probably don't think so when you look around and you are so young, but I think my job was beautiful and I loved it. I looked forward to coming to work every single day, because I loved planes and here I could touch them all day long. We used to be in contact with the pilots all the time as well. The pilot, the technician and the plane – we were all one. We were like a family. The pilot depended on the plane and the plane depended on the technician. When the Soviets brought the Sus for the first time, it was terribly exciting. We prepared the plane for the test pilot who took it for a ride and when he returned, and said that it all ran smoothly, there was such a great feeling that spread all over me. We had an excellent collaboration with the Soviets. When they came here, they brought all the technology with them and they showed us how to work on the planes. We could also understand each other

– the languages are so similar, it is not like with English. We were real partners, not like now. I thought we would get new planes and we would work with the NATO guys on them, but they are nowhere to be seen. I thought that we would collaborate much more closely. I thought perhaps we would go visit one of the Western bases, to exchange experience and learn something new. Or maybe, I thought, they would come here and look at what we are doing – but nothing...

You see, those were very different times before the change came; we were flying all the time, we worked all the time. Overtime was never paid; we were tired as dogs, but happy, because we worked. There were emergencies, we were on call twenty-four hours a day, and there were mock alarms – but you could never know they were mock, because the enemy was there. We worked weekends too... There were planes standing ready all the time... We were the attack force of the Warsaw Pact and that was what we were being prepared for. I know it was a different international situation – there was the enemy in the West and the friends were in the East and so you knew how things stood and why you exercised. Now, after the change, things are different – the discipline is gone. We used to have to walk in uniforms – people could see that you were a soldier. Now you don't have to wear a uniform and the discipline went down terribly. We don't have the enemy now, but we also do not have people who would understand the military at the top. Now with the new young minister – Tvrdík – things might change, because he is a former military and he seems to be taking military seriously. But I remember Havel, how he mocked the military at first and then he turned around and thought we would not remember it. Or one of the first civilian Ministers of Defense after 1989 – I remember him on TV, showing the military shoeshine kit and ridiculing it. That really hurt me – how could someone like that make decisions about the Air Force?

And you ask me what changed? Everything changed – those times are gone now. There are no planes for me to work on – the old ones are gone and new ones are not about to arrive

any time soon. I am leaving in few months – I never thought I would leave, I thought I would serve till retirement, but then this new law came and now I do not have enough education for my rank. I have already been asked to stay as a civilian, but as what – as a guard at the gatehouse? But I might consider staying if I could be civilian technician. They have this new law, which they follow, but they are losing people they will not be able to replace – apparently they do not have enough airground crews. But I do not know if I am offered the job. It means anyway, I will never wear the uniform again. It is so sad you know – what it came down to. I sit here in the office all day long, waiting for my time to go home and then soon, I might never come back. When they were taking those last planes to be put away, I cried... And you see, now I am too. I just never thought this would be the end – like this, here – waiting for the end. But this is the end and that is how I look at it. Fortunately, I have my garden.

He stopped talking, and I looked at him – his eyes were shining, there were tears in them. But then he gave me a broad smile and said:

You should see my garden, it is an unbelievable thing – I work on it now all the time. I have a lot of garlic, but many other things as well. I have these new roses coming this week, I cannot wait to go and plant them.

I looked at the garlic he gave to me and then at him. This guy astounded me. It is not that he would have said something so different from what I have heard many times before when interviewing other officers on other military bases. The difference between them and officer X was primarily the latter's astonishing lack of melancholia. Articulating the reason for his sadness – the loss of his beloved work with planes – he was able to mourn it as genuinely lost.⁴⁹ His mourning of the past signaled the lack of melancholic desire that refuses to acknowledge the missing

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud (1914–1916).

object as forever gone. He cried about the planes and the dying Air Force, but only as a closed chapter in his life that he was able to externalize and displace onto a different object and activity – the planting of garlic and roses in his garden.

Pointing to the fetishizing tendencies of the mimetic urge,” Michael Taussig claims: “The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power.”⁵⁰ In their displacement, the Czech Air Force officers merge with their Soviet planes and the socialist Air Force, indistinguishable from each other in their melancholic disappearance. I owe this anthropological insight to the post-communist moment of liminality whose mimetic excess of the reciprocal longing between the machines, the men and the institution was revealed to me in the dialectical images of dilapidation and modernity on one sunny day on Base X.

Postscript 1

Flying and gardening seem to share love and control as defining characteristics of people’s mimetic attachment toward them. A former Air Force pilot decided not to part with his plane, placing a disabled Soviet jet fighter as a decoration in the garden of his house (Illustration 19).⁵¹

Postscript 2

The pilots on an elite Air Force base where I spent several months later that year have a club room, which holds an intriguing exhibit. On one of the walls, they place metal pieces of

⁵⁰ Michael Taussig (1993). *Mimesis and Alterity*, p. xiii.

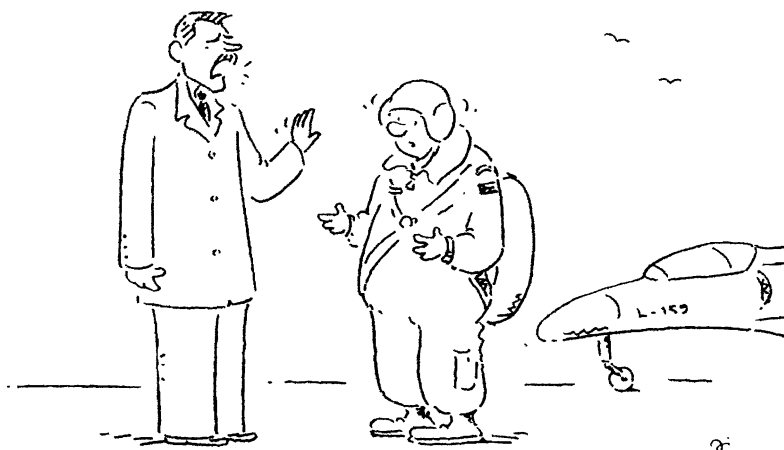
⁵¹ The photograph was taken by the owner, Pavel Vaňouš, and included in the book about the history of the Czechoslovak and Czech Air Force 1989 - 1994, eloquently called, *Zrušená křídla* (Displaced Wings), see Lorenc and Rogl (2000), p. xciv.

wrecked planes with a name of the pilot that died during its crash. It is hard to imagine a more complete consummation of love through mimesis.

Postscript 3

Some time after I had returned to the base which was my primary fieldwork site, its Commander was approached by American filmmakers with an intriguing proposition. Another line of Soviet jet fighters, which were in fact the only fighter planes left on his base, were going out of operation. The American star and movie director Vin Diesel was making a film in the Czech Republic and insisted on having Russian jet fighters included in its final action scene. The Commander welcomed the proposition in exchange for English language laboratory equipment for his pilots.

For several weeks, the elite pilots of the base were training under the instruction of American movie makers how to elegantly run towards their planes before take-off. Ironically enough, I saw the movie, *XXX* (read “triple x”), on the plane from the United States. In the theatre of violence, which the movie essentially is, the Czech lands and Czech women serve as a location on which the battle between the American government and the Soviet mafia takes place. Vin Diesel, the lover of extreme sports, is the main hero named *XXX* who is hired by the US secret service to fight his Soviet counterparts on the Czech territory. The final scene takes place on the Vltava River in the historic part of Prague. In an American action movie, the melancholic Czech pilots with whom I worked on a lonely country base fly the Soviet jets into the timeless space of the Hollywood silver screen. The filming took place on the last day when the Soviet jet fighters were in operation. “At least we can now look at them whenever we want,” commented the pilots when I asked them how they felt about the movie.



NEZAJÍMÁ! SLYŠEL JSTE ROZKAZ : POLETÍTE NADZVUKOVOU RYCHLOSTÍ!

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Illustration 17: “Shut up! I have issued an order! You will fly at supersonic speed!” A newspaper cartoon showing Jaroslav Tvrdík, the Minister of Defense ordering a Czech Air Force pilot to fly at supersonic speed on L-159, a subsonic-speed air craft of Czech origin. Source: Cartoon Vladimír Jiránek, in Lidové noviny, November 8, 2001.



Illustration 18: The cover page of the official 2001 calendar of the Czech Armed Forces. Source: Photo Oldřich Jeřábek, Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, Prague, 2000.



Illustration 19: Photograph of a disabled plane that Pavel Vaňous purchased from the Air Force and placed in his garden.

Source: Photo P. Vaňous, in Miroslav Lorenc and Stanislav Rogl.

Zrušená křídla: Poznámky k československému a českému vojenskému letectvu v letech 1989 až 1994.

Olomouc: Votobia, 2000.

CHAPTER 5 – BRINGING THE VIOLENCE BACK IN (PRAGUE 1989–2002)

“For the continuous coming-into-being of the state rested, in other words, on the continuous passing away of the body of the Liberator into the body of the people, and this constant passing-away itself depended on a capacity not merely to continuously resurrect his image, but to be possessed by his spirit by virtue of that image.” (Taussig 1997: 101–102)

“Optimist: ‘Militarism means increasing the state’s authority by exercising force, so that – ; Grumbler: – the means will lead to its eventual disintegration, the dissolution of the state. In wartime, everybody becomes his fellow man’s superior. The military men become the superiors of the state, which sees no way out of this unnatural constraint but corruption. If the statesman allows the military man to control him, he has fallen under the spell of a grade-school idol which has had its day and which, in our day, can be allowed to rule over life and death only at our peril.’” (Kraus 1974: 18)

“Maybe our colonel knew why they were shooting, maybe the Germans knew, but I, so help me, hadn’t the vaguest idea. As far back as I could search my memory, I hadn’t done a thing to the Germans, I’d always treated them friendly and polite. I knew the Germans pretty well, I’d even gone to school in their country when I was little, near Hanover. I’d spoken their language. ... But from that to shooting at us right in the middle of the road, without so much as a word of introduction, was a long way, a very long way. If you asked me, they were going too far.” (Céline 1983: 7).

I.

This book is a form of a journey in space and time. It starts in Prague in the revolutionary atmosphere of the first years following the end of socialism and ends there with the NATO Summit in 2002. The theme that haunts these pages has haunted me from my student days in the Czech capital, through my anthropology studies in the United States until my return to my home country during my research in the Czech military. Throughout the book, I stress the personal nature of this project, because at its basis is an individual and a generational dilemma, which nevertheless speaks to larger issues of general importance.

An important attribute of the transference of regimes in the former Czechoslovakia in 1989 was its non-violent character. The Velvet Revolution as the moment of political turnover got called⁵², has opened up the possibility not only for the establishment of the democratic political system, but even more importantly for new critical thinking about the place of violence in politics. “Máme holé ruce!” (“We have bare hands!”) chanted the students on Národní třída (National Avenue) in Prague on November 17, before they were attacked by police cordons (Illustration 20). “Chceme dialog!” (We want a dialogue!), we said to the communist principal of my high school when we decided to join the universities in the student strike. “Nechceme násilí” (“We do not want any violence”) was one of the most frequent mottoes on banners carried by anti-communist demonstrators. “Spoločnosť proti násiliu” („Society against violence“) was the name of the Slovak association and later a political party that led the Slovak struggle against the communists. During the revolutionary days following November 17, 1989, the effervescence that filled the air was not only due to the fall of the communist political system, but also to the liberating possibilities brought about by the conclusion of the Cold War.

⁵² For an English-language example of the celebration of Czech non-violent transition to democracy inspired by the imagery of velvet, see Fawn 2000.

The moment seemed to establish an opportunity for a new rationality in which bilateral view of politics based on military violence would be deposed.

The last decade, however, has not fulfilled these hopes for a more peaceful future. A final confirmation that the liminal period of anticipation is coming to an end was provided by a ritual event of colossal proportions in the fall of 2002. At this time, Václav Havel, the leader and the symbol of the 1989 Velvet Revolution welcomed the heads of states at the Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Prague. Seventeen years earlier, Havel, together with other dissidents wrote the following paragraph in a declaration of Charter 77: "Let us recommend that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact start negotiating about the dissolution of their military organizations as soon as possible; that they plan the removal and destruction of all nuclear weapons in or targeted toward Europe; and that they begin the departure of American and Soviet military troops from the territories of their allies" (Grohová 2002). In 2002, Václav Havel, the departing president of the Czech Republic, hosted the largest NATO summit in history, an event he considers to be one of his greatest presidential accomplishments and the "fulfillment of his dream" (ibid).

II.

My research in the Czech military, on which this book is based, grew out of my long-lasting fascination with a peculiar site in the landscape of the Czech capital city of Prague. To the East of the historic center, there is Žižkov, a notorious Prague district, associated in the minds of many contemporary Czechs with a rather grimy area inhabited by the marginalized cultures of the poor, the immigrants, the Roma and other unwelcome elements of Czech society. Built as a working-class development in the 19th century and separated from the rest of Prague by the concurrently constructed railroad and the main train station, the district is the quintessential neighborhood "on the other side of the tracks."⁵³ Towering on the mountain above Žižkov,

there is an enormous marble monument and a bronze statue of a warrior on the horse⁵⁴. (Illustrations 21 and 22) The mountain on which the monument is located is the topographic and symbolic center of the area – a place where Jan Žižka as an intrepid leader of the peasant Hussite armies won a first major battle over Catholic Crusaders back in 1420.⁵⁵ Czech nationalists resurrected Žižka as a legend three hundred years later when they renamed the neighborhood as well as individual streets after famous Hussites and made the mountain a place of pilgrimage for the participants in the Czech movement for independence from the Austrian Empire. And when the Czechoslovak state was established as a result of the post-WWI geopolitical reordering of the world, the Monument to national heroism was built on the top, completing the mountain's consecration⁵⁶. For decades Žižka has sat there on his gigantic bronze horse looking down upon Prague, leading a disparate army of national dead buried in the pantheon behind him. Legionnaires, resistance fighters, Soviet liberators, concentration camp victims, RAF pilots, communist leaders – all at different points designated as national heroes – were resting in the crypts, vaults and tombs of the pantheon.

Until shortly before the political change in 1989, the monument had been a shrine for the celebration of sacrificial death for the cause of the nation and the state. From their place on the mountain above the city – the bodies of the dead were emanating their power over the people who lived underneath,

⁵⁴ For a discussion of Žižkov's historical development, see Hlavsa (1970); Holec and Mikota (1966) and Šebek (1988). The connection between railroads and social transformations of the 19th century is described in Schivelbush (1986). For an interesting article on the history of Prague railroads see Novotný (1993).

⁵⁴ The statue is allegedly the largest equestrian bronze statue in the world. It is 9.6 m long, 9m tall, 5m wide and weights 16.5 tons.

⁵⁵ Both the mountain and the monument have repeatedly changed names. The mountain is called Vítkov or Žižkov. The original Monument of Liberation on Žižkov is now called the National Monument on Vítkov.

⁵⁶ Peter Demetz's book, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City*, has a large section (118-170) dealing with the complexities of the Czech Hussite movement in connection with the urban history of Prague.

creating a community bonded by the ultimate sacrifice of dead heroes. A visit to this national temple was to have a deep effect on the Czechs and Slovaks – by revering the national dead, the living were daily interpreting the violence and death of their ancestors as foundational and essential acts for the establishment of the present order, creating amongst themselves a sense of shared community essential to the building of a nation. The intention to make the Monument on the sacred mountain an *axis mundi* connecting the past, present and the future generations of those who lived in its symbolic radius of influence was made clear by Rudolf Medek, a WWI general and the first director of the monument: “The nation, the people of Czechoslovakia, will see in this work as well as in the monuments brought together inside, itself, its own face. The construction of the monument is therefore not self-glorification and self-praise; it is an instructional act for the future, it is a sign pointing toward greatness” (Sbor 1928: 9). And the main architect of the monument confidently proclaimed, “the nation will come here to pay tribute to the great dead” (Zázvorka in Sbor 1928: 15). Indeed, my old German teacher once told me of her visit to the monument in 1956, when she came with her husband to see the embalmed body of the first communist president, Klement Gottwald, who was put on display in the pantheon. She told me of the long line in which the two of them stood waiting for their turn to see the body, of people breaking into tears at the sight, of masses flowing in and out of the gates ...

When I first visited the monument on one hot summer day in 1991, it was hard to imagine that the mountain was once filled with swarming crowds of citizens eager to pay a ritual visit to the national dead. It was 1991 and the city was just awakening after many years of depressed slumber under state socialism. The center of Prague was being rebuilt and the streets were flooded with thousands of tourists and young people from abroad who came to live here after the country’s borders had opened. I was just beginning my university studies and we were all listening to the Beatles, the Doors, the Velvet Underground – as if history took off where it had been so suddenly interrupted by the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It was as if we

needed to finish living through the sixties to bring our parents' trauma of 68 to a closure. Life in Prague that spring seemed like an extended carnival – my Danish roommate and I rarely slept, instead we spent nights sitting in the park by the river, talking with foreign visitors, drinking wine and after midnight going dancing in newly opened clubs run mostly by Latin American and African students.

While the historic center of Prague was full of tourists enjoying the city that had been until then hidden from the view of the Western world, the scene around the monument the day I first saw it as well as on all of my subsequent visits featured a handful of people walking their dogs and mothers pushing strollers. I myself did not even come to Žižkov to see the monument, of whose existence I had no prior knowledge. Instead, I rather stumbled upon it on my way home from a nearby Olšany cemetery where I went to pay visit to a monument much smaller in size, but considerably greater in tourist popularity – the grave of Franz Kafka. The hot summer streets of Žižkov were almost empty as I walked through them that day with my two American friends. There were only the ubiquitous elderly voyeurs – the retired men and women who spend their days watching life in the street from their apartment windows. One could also see groups of Roma children running and playing games. The air was filled with distant noises of trains pulling in and out of the main Prague station and clamor coming out from local pubs where Žižkov residents were spending Sunday afternoon drinking beer. My friends and I were admiring the worn charm of Žižkov and its pubs when we spotted the gigantic Monument on the mountain in front of us and decided to approach it.

The ascent to the monument is a curious experience. In order to reach the top of the mountain, one must pass through the dilapidated Žižkov streets named after valiant Hussite heroes, walk underneath and above arterial roads and railways, smell car fumes mixed with alcohol and urine emanating from the alleys behind pubs, all the time lured by the monument's monstrous grandeur. The magnificent seduction of the marble monument on the mountain operates in bizarre harmony with

the magnetism of the quotidian life in Žižkov streets. In a modification on the hero of Georges Bataille's story, who, ready to call to mind the grandeurs of human history at the sight of a national monument is stopped by a pain in his big toe, reminding him of the ignoble life of his body, the visitor to our monument is never allowed to forget about the world of physical existence that lies below (1985: 22). But rather than competing for his attention, the opposing sensations of grandeur and baseness combine to produce a seductive effect of absurdity not void of humorous touch.

In Žižkov, the story of the grand national heroism of those who participated in the violence accompanying the foundation of the state is represented by the monument. This story, however, clashes and subsequently blends with that of a country that has lived, for most of the last century, under foreign rule. Gradually, the tales of heroic Hussites, WWI legionnaires and WWII resistance fighters were abandoned for those of a nation betrayed by the West, oppressed and occupied first by Nazi Germany and then by the Soviet Union. Strengthened in the last twenty years of socialism when the country lived under Soviet military occupation, the story of victimization by foreign powers became the defining popular narrative for the Czechs. The trauma of the experience of occupation, under which we produced for the enemy, was repressed in favor of a fantasy of oppression that saved national subjectivity by displacing our agency for the country's adversity onto exterior others. The bloodless change of regimes in the fall of 1989, called Velvet Revolution, has brought an unexpected surcharge of external legitimation to this national fantasy. Gradually, possible cues to our past active involvement in what we now call oppression were displaced together with the monuments and memorials that embodied them⁵⁷.

On my first visit to the monument of national liberation in Žižkov in 1991, I was no longer used to seeing reminders of the socialist celebrations of violence around me. And so when I pas-

⁵⁷ For a useful overview of the history of monuments in the Czech Republic, see Hojda and Pokorný 1997.

sed by a busy beer tavern on my way up the mountain, U vystřelenýho voka (At the Shot-Out Eye), and looked up to the lonesome one-eyed warrior on a horse rising above me, the absurdity of the sight brought smile to my lips. When I reached the top of the mountain, the massive iron gates to the monument were open. Organ music was coming from inside and so I entered and walked through a large hall illuminated only by the sun coming through tall stained glass windows, shedding strangely broken light on a row of tombs of red marble in the center of the room (Illustration 23). Then I noticed a large and centrally placed sarcophagus with the name and dates of birth and death of Klement Gottwald, the first communist president of Czechoslovakia. Seeing this macabre reminder of things past shocked me. Overtaken by a strange horror, but lured by the organ music to go further and further inside the monument, I followed a red runner, walking through the tombs and sarcophagi up the stairs passing by murals of dying WWI Czech and Slovak guerilla fighters. On the mezzanine, I saw two gigantic statues of a peasant woman with a sickle and a man with a wrench and entered a large auditorium filled with rows of red chairs (Illustration 24). Hanging close to the skylight on the wall ahead of me, there was a statue of a screaming angel of Victory who looked as if she were trying to tear herself off the wall; the music was coming from a large organ on the opposite side, powerfully resonating in the marble-lined room.

I sat down on one of the red chairs lined up in the hall, my unceasing dismay now saturated with sudden flashbacks: looking at a giant bronze wreath on a tomb in front of me I was suddenly taken back to my childhood – marching with my classmates in a long procession through the cemetery in my hometown in the mountains accompanied by a brass band playing funeral music. The procession walked up a steep hill on a path, which divided the cemetery in half; about half way up the convoy had to split to walk around a statue of Christ, which stood in the middle of the road. When we finally reached the top of the hill, there was a marble platform with burning torches and green wreaths with ribbons expressing thanks to the Soviet liberators for our freedom. Every October as I was standing on

the marble platform I thought of a family friend who had once told me that this used to be the German section of the cemetery, and that after the Germans were forced to leave the area following the war, their graves were open – she said that she could see bones and half decomposed bodies being dug out in 1948 when communists came to power and built a memorial to the Soviet army on the spot. After they had dug out the German dead, they covered the top of the hill in marble and every year on the anniversary of the October Revolution herded the school kids and employees into the cemetery to listen to speeches and pay homage to the Soviet liberators and their 1917 Revolution. The most diligent members of the school youth organization would recite poems celebrating the Soviet Union and its heroes; sometimes I would see my mom or dad in the crowd patiently waiting for the ceremony to end to go back to their work.

When I awoke from the uncanny excursion, I found myself talking to the building's caretaker, who told me that virtually all the remains of the dead heroes had already been removed from the monument in the two years following the end of socialism⁵⁸. (Illustration 25) They were returned to the families or to various organizations, such as the Communist Party or the RAF Commission⁵⁹. So by the time of my visit, there were only two warriors left on the mountain – the statue of Žižka and the remains of the Unknown Soldier in the crypt underneath the horseman. The underground cooling mechanism and dissecting room that once served the embalmed body of Klement Gottwald, once a source of pride of the socialist art of embalming, had been out of operation since 1964. At that time, Gottwald's body was cremated, the ashes enclosed in the sarcophagus in the main hall, only to be expelled with all other dead from the monument in 1990. The Hall of the Soviet Army, an extension built in the 1950s in gratitude to the Red Army

⁵⁸ The Monument had been closed for overall maintenance since 1984, but the dead were evacuated only in 1990–1991.

⁵⁹ The process of post WWII burial and 1990 exhumation of the remains of the members of the Royal Air Force, including the list of names is well documented (Váňa, Sigmund and Padior 1999: 222–246).

that freed Czechoslovakia in 1945, was now completely closed to the public. The body of the Russian liberator who used to rest in a white marble sarcophagus in the center of the globular room with blue ceiling full of stars was returned to his homeland. Simultaneously with his departure, in an ironic twist of historical correlation, the Soviet soldiers who had been occupying Czechoslovakia since the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 were leaving their colony for the metropolis. The most obvious reminders of their unwelcome presence had been removed from the Czech public life. We stopped hearing the Soviet anthem and stopped seeing the Soviet flag on the poles in our cities. The former Red Army Square in front of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University where I was a student was renamed to the Square of Jan Palach in memory of the Czech student who burned himself to death in January 1969 in protest against the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968. The bodies of the Soviet soldiers who died liberating Prague in 1945 and who were subsequently buried in the square, however, have never been retrieved. Today, while crossing the square, nothing reminds you that you are stepping on their graves⁶⁰.

Probably the most widely publicized displacement of a monument to the foundational violence of the socialist state was the removal of the Soviet tank monument in Prague in 1991. Established to commemorate the liberation of Prague by the Soviet Army in 1945, the monument underwent radical change in its meaning after the 1968 Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. Shortly after the end of socialism, a student of the Academy of Fine Arts, David Černý, painted the tank pink (Illustration 26) and put a baby-bib on its barrel and was arrested for it based on Communist-era anti-dissent laws. The army then painted the tank green again only for it to be repainted pink by the members of the Czechoslovak Parliament, after which the Czech government decided to remove it. Its stone pedestal, however, stayed in its place for six more months until the radio station Europa 2 placed a pink Trabant, a car of East-German

⁶⁰ I myself learned about the Soviet soldiers buried in the square from reading the English-language cultural history of the Czech Republic (Sayer 1998: 235).

origin that uses highly polluting fuel, atop of it in order to generate support for its ecological campaign. After about ten days the pedestal was destroyed and the place made into a flower patch and later a water fountain⁶¹.

Unlike the Soviet tank monument and other symbols of past power, however, the national monument in Žižkov has not invited serious defacement. The tombs are now empty of the national dead, the statue and the building invisible in their sheer magnitude. Repeated searches for other forms of utilization of the building have failed.⁶² Besides the annual laying of wreaths by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier outside, the only activities taking place inside of the monument are occasional concerts organized by the state through the Ministry of Culture often in collaboration with the mayor of Žižkov. State officials with whom I spoke complain about the high maintenance costs of the monument – now an empty monster without any practical use for the state or the city. Many link the monument's abandonment to its "unfortunate location in the neighborhood full of Gypsies and criminals."⁶³ In several conversations with Czech

⁶¹ For a seminal work on this monument, see Bubriski 1997.

⁶² Since 1989, the Monument has been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture. In 1992, the Ministry, due to a lack of funds, organized an unsuccessful competition for a proposal and completion of a project called "Revitalization and Utilization of the Vítkov Hill in Prague." The theme to be addressed was the contemporary continuance of the democratic tradition of the Czechoslovak state as begun in the First Republic, 1918-1939. The competition called for a plan, which would utilize the whole area of the Vítkov hill, and offer to visitors "cultural and educational activities, sports and relaxation activities (including eating facilities)." It also stipulated the improvement of existing passages and transportation to Vítkov, since "in its present conditions the hill is virtually inaccessible." In 1993, the Monument was "rented" to a company called Žižkov 2000, headed by a Czech entrepreneur Vratislav Čekan. The company opened the building to the public and organized several events of promotional and business nature. In less than a year, however, the contract between the City Council of Prague 3, the Ministry of Culture and Čekan was invalidated and the management of the Monument again fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. The inclusion of the Monument in the city-wide celebration of Prague, the City of 2000, however, did not result in further utilization. Currently, the National Museum which became responsible for the Monument in 2001, is again preparing plans for utilization.

⁶³ In 1996, a representative of the Ministry of Culture, when asked about the reasons for the monument's present abandonment, told me: "This Monument

academics, I also learned that the monument “does not belong in Czech history.”⁶⁴ Yet, as the few articles published about the monument in the press indicate, on the rare occasions the monument is open, it enchants those who visit it with an aura of mysticism – the structure’s very silence and emptiness inciting speculations about what it is hiding – “Gottwald’s ghost perhaps?” (Chang 1993). Most writers choose curiously similar words to describe their impression of the Monument referring to it as “dead” and in need of “resurrection” (Věčerník Praha 1993), and to its location as a “haunted” or an “enchanted mountain” (Kovář 1992).

In my search into the mystery of the monument, I became convinced that the metaphors of magic and ghosts people use in reference to the monument are fundamentally tied to the same experience of the uncanny that I found on my first visit there. Freud teaches us that the basis for the occurrence of the uncanny is not an encounter with something new or foreign, but something what was once “familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud 1963); the uncanny being something which ought to have remained concealed but which has nevertheless come to light. Moreover, even though inciting horror, the uncanny was originally not something we feared, but something we desired⁶⁵.

I wonder whether the root of this desire turned sinister in the form of the uncanny grows out of what Renata Salecl, in her Lacanian analysis of post-socialist realities, called “the guilt for the double-edged crime”. This strange form of crime, she ex-

has had a bad luck, because it is located in Žižkov, far from the center, in a neighborhood full of Gypsies and criminals. That’s why nobody wants to go there.”

⁶⁴ For example, when I told my Prague professor of history in 1993 of my interest in the monument, he told me: “It’s a monster. Pull it down. It doesn’t belong in our history. We are a small nation and we cannot afford such monuments.”

⁶⁵ Freud gives an example of what to many people is the uncanniest thing of all, namely, the fear of being buried alive. Yet, this uncanny terrifying fantasy, he says, is only a transformed version of an earlier fantasy that was not terrifying at all, on the contrary – it was full of lustful pleasure – the fantasy of intra-uterine existence (Freud 1963: 50).

plains, consisted in the disbelief and yet passive acquiescence to the socialist system, which caused, through the mechanisms of guilt, that every citizen came to perceive herself as a potential enemy of the structure (Salecl 1994: 106). Does the uncanny in our case, therefore, originate in the deeply situated memories of the socialist system with which our identity was so completely bound that we feared its collapse would cause our own subjectivity to subside? (Salecl 1999). Is the uncanny tied to the crime which we committed every day by joining the Communist Party, by attending political meetings and denouncing colleagues – all of those not out of conviction, but fear and weakness? And is the specifically Czech form of post-socialist uncanny attached to what Paul Ricoeur calls “servile will” that emerges through a deeply internalized experience of guilt known to a people in an occupied territory who manage to survive, but whose labor becomes completely alienated by producing for the enemy (Ricoeur 1967: 150–152)? Under socialism, only few would have been free of this crime and of the associated guilt. Not even children were innocent. After all I was only ten years old when I became the cynical socialist criminal by becoming a member of the socialist youth organization and pledging my allegiance to the Communist Party in which I did not believe. But how does the uncanny get generated in the interaction between our subjectivities and the material structure of monument to the dead?

In this context, I find Walter Benjamin’s assertion that architectural objects contain revolutionary potential in embodying hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past astonishingly relevant. Containing elements of prehistory in the era of industrialization, which hectically dreams the future, the outmoded architectural reminders of the past – neglected arcades and crumbling monuments – are dream images, says Benjamin. In their obsolescence, they point out that the future, in which the dreaming presence wishes to awaken, is only a wishful fantasy (Benjamin 1978). Only the sight of the ruins of the past can work against the myth the presence produces, reminding dreamers of the true course of history – “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in

front of [the angel's] feet"⁶⁶. In much of his work, Benjamin points to the active component within material objects. So does Robert Musil who, in his well-known essay on monuments, attaches this active component within material structures directly to their invisibility. "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen – indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right off, like water droplets off an oilcloth, without even pausing for a moment. They repel the very thing they are supposed to attract. One cannot say we did not notice them; one would have to say they "de-notice" us, they elude our perceptive faculties..." (Musil 1987: 61–62).

It seems that it is through the very appearance of death that the monument on the mountain lives its secret life. From behind the structure's locked iron gates and marble walls, the tombs and crypts scream the power of their emptiness. The names of heroes who used to rest in them have been erased, but the emptiness itself is a source of the uncanny, which draws its power from the excess generated by the process of repression and concealment. The emptiness of the monument and the corresponding absence of attachment to ancestors during the post-socialist period generated power that has endured in the uncanny potential through which the foreclosed memories of things past continue to haunt the living.

Haunted by the shocking experience of the monument, I kept coming back for more. I eventually got access to the monument and worked alone in a utility room in the back of

⁶⁶ In his 9th thesis on the philosophy history, Benjamin says: "A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 1968: 253-264).

Gottwald's mausoleum, which I set up as a temporary office. Occasionally interrupted only by the monument's caretaker, I spent a week there in the spring of 1996, submerged in the world of messages to the dead. I got to read the visiting books from the 1950s – 1970s where guests and tourists – famous or anonymous – wrote commemorations of their commemorations. I also read responses from the families of the dead when they were asked in 1990 to retrieve the remains of their loved ones from the monument. Most of the correspondence came from family members of men who fought at the Western Front as foreign members of the Royal Air Force. Shortly after the war, the soil from their graves in Great Britain, France and other countries was placed in more than 300 wooden urns, which were then buried in a crypt under the floor of the Hall of the Fallen. Their presence in the monument, however, was hardly stressed under the Communist regime and during the Cold War, when the memory of Czechoslovak involvement on the Western front was actively suppressed. In 1990 the families showed mixed reactions in their letters to the monument's director who asked them to collect the remains of their kin. Some letters were saturated with relief that the authors could reclaim their loved ones and bury them privately. Some, however, were charged with indignation and sometimes despair over practical complications related to the reburial. People's question of what to do with the remains touched on an important dilemma. Why and how should families create private remembrance for a former national hero who was being returned to their realm after many years when his death had been the means for the generation and management of very public sentiments?

Suddenly faced with the physical remains of the dead and expressing practical concern over their interment, the families spoke out on issues that we exorcised from public thought together with the removal of the corpses from the pantheon. The relatives' problems with the disposal of the remains of their kin were a clear articulation of the anxiety concerning the surplus power of the dead, whose ambiguous and threatening facilities most cultures fear⁶⁷. In order to protect ourselves from their

power, we construct elaborate rituals which are meant to keep the dead happy and away from harming us. We give candles, food, flowers, widows, gold and property to the dead to keep them content. At the same time, however, shamans and sorcerers continue communicating with the dead whose power they channel for magical purposes. Interestingly, our civilization, while forbidding most dead from coming back and interring them in cemeteries lying on the outskirts of settlements, has for many centuries placed few chosen dead in the middle of our cities. Among the dead most often used in this way have been soldiers who died violent deaths in wars waged between states⁶⁸. In monumentalizing the soldiers' death, turning the ultimate loss into powerful gain, the state behaves like a sorcerer, harnessing the power of ghosts rather than keeping them away from our universe. Placing the dead in the marble monument on the top of the sacred mountain in Žižkov, a place made holy by the foundational violence of medieval Hussite troops who consecrated it with sacrificial blood of their enemies, was an act highly consistent with the sacred ambitions of the modern state exercised through its monopoly on military violence.

The question, which motivated my interest in the monument, however, concerned this sacred ambition renounced. Why, I asked, would the state at this point in time give up the dead, which it had readily claimed in the past? Why is the state now abandoning this source of its sacred power? The 1990 evacuation of all bodies (communist and pre-communist) from the monument, I felt, had to signify an important change in the relationship of the state toward those who died in wars and toward the state's relationship to the institution of legitimate violence.

⁶⁷ Anthropologist Katherine Verdery presents several compelling illustrations of the importance of post-socialist reburials in the larger landscape of post-socialist changes in East and Central Europe (Verdery 1999).

⁶⁸ For the 20th century history and importance of dead soldiers for the manipulation of memory by Western European states, see Mosse 1990.

III.

Indeed, in those days after 1989 one rarely heard about war heroes or military prowess. It seemed that instead of claiming the power that the military offered, the state preferred to stress its velvet conception. Until shortly before the Czech Republic was admitted to NATO, for example, the leading political party delegated the control of the Ministry of Defense to the minority coalition party, indicating that it did not view the institution as strategic to its authority and popularity. This apparent lack of attention to military matters on the part of the state found resonance and support in the Czech public sentiment, uneasy about the memory of military violence in the country's socialist past. The accepted image of the military as a seriously discredited state institution, dismantled during the WWII Nazi occupation and impotent during the post-1968 Soviet occupation, made it a subject of intense joking rather than source of national pride.

And then gradually, as we moved away from the socialist past into the democratic future, the military began emerging from the shadows. The most glaring example of this spectral return of violence is embodied in the personal transformation of the former president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic – the courageous dissident playwright Václav Havel. The advocate of the “power of the powerless”⁶⁹, so uncomfortable at the beginning of his political career in his position as the Commander in Chief of the Czech Armed Forces, Havel has eventually become an uncritical supporter of NATO and its military interventions. I was fascinated to read Havel's speech, which he gave during his last presidential visit to the United States in September 2002 and in which he addressed his personal transformation. Opening with reminiscences of his first presidential visit to the United States, he stressed the non-violent nature of the “velvet revolution” that brought him to power (Havel 2002, emphases mine):

⁶⁹ Václav Havel's probably best-known critique of the socialist regime in the former Czechoslovakia is indeed entitled, *The Power of the Powerless* (Havel 1985).

I still have vivid memories of the concert almost thirteen years ago—in February 1990—when New York welcomed me as the freshly minted president of Czechoslovakia. It was not, of course, just to honor me personally. Through me, it was a way of honoring all those fellow citizens of mine who, by nonviolent action, were able to overthrow the vicious regime that ruled over our country. And it was also to honor all those who, before me, or with me, had resisted this regime, again by nonviolent means. Many freedom-loving people throughout the world saw the victory of the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution as heralding hope for a more humane world, one in which poets might have as powerful a voice as bankers.

In a hopefully self-reflexive note, he then asked himself whether he changed over the last thirteen years when he was the president. While his immediate response is that he is now even more timid and unsure of himself than he had been twelve years ago before he became a politician, he gives the real answer less deliberately at the end of his speech. After he identifies himself as a fairy tale hero made king by the powers of history (how fitting for a president of a country, where the favorite TV evening holiday programming are Czech film fairy tales), Havel concludes (*ibid.*, emphasis mine):

[T]here is no more relying on fairy tales and fairy-tale heroes. There is no more relying on the accidents of history that lift poets into places where empires and military alliances are brought down. The warning voices of poets must be carefully listened to and taken very seriously, perhaps even more seriously than the voices of bankers or stock brokers. But at the same time, we cannot expect that the world—in the hands of poets—will suddenly be transformed into a poem.

And to confirm his point, he concludes his speech by citing three fundamental ‘certainties’ that have been confirmed to him during his career in the world of politics. The central one of the wisdoms reads (*ibid.*, emphasis mine):

Evil must be confronted in its womb and, if there is no other way to do it, then it has to be dealt with by the use of force. If the immensely sophisticated and expensive modern weaponry must be used, let it be used in a way that does not harm civilian populations. If this is not possible, then the billions spent on those weapons will be wasted.

Not surprisingly, Václav Havel subsequently offered his full support to President George W. Bush for his potential military action in Iraq when the two heads of states met in Washington later during the Czech president's September 2002 visit. Two months later, the two men embraced again, this time in Prague that was welcoming the largest meeting of powerful men in its history.

IV.

"Summit in a Dead City," announced newspaper headlines of the Czech weekly *Týden* that covered the NATO Summit in Prague during November 21–22, 2002. (Illustration 27) Stanislav Gross, then the Czech Minister of Interior feared potential disruptions to the meeting from anti-globalization protesters as well as from possible terrorist attacks. For security purposes he therefore mobilized 12,000 members of the police and called in several hundreds of soldiers. The Czech government closed 150 Prague schools and 11 schools of Charles University. The deterrent campaign preceding the summit produced its effects: so many people left the city that George Bush asked a Czech reporter before his departure to Prague whether the city had been evacuated (*idem*, p.16). The summit, which offered lavish refreshments in the most beautiful interiors of the Prague castle, cost the Czech state 800 million Czech crowns, more than half of which was used for security measures. 11 years earlier, on July 1, 1991, Prague hosted a meeting of the representatives of the Warsaw Pact, which announced the dissolution of the alliance. In 2002, the Prague streets were silent, vacated by Prague citizens to the leaders of NATO, whose safety

was guarded by tanks and policemen. The monuments of Soviet tanks were no longer on pedestals, but real tanks protect the world leaders in the city from dissatisfied protesters (Illustration 28).

With the exception of one woman – the president of Latvia – the Summit was a gathering of the most powerful men in the world who spent two days deciding about how to best use the military prowess of their countries for joint purposes, especially the war on terror (Illustration 29). In the meantime, their spouses were entertained in a separate program by the wives of the Czech statesmen (Illustration 30).

The summit was concluded by the admission of seven new post-socialist states into the Alliance. For this purpose, President Havel prepared a special gift for NATO Secretary General, George Robertson. Havel's architect and sculptor friend, Bořek Šípek, created a hammer whose knock would validate the admission of each new member in the future Alliance. The hammer is a curious and a rather grotesque object, which brought a certain uneasiness to Mr. Robertson (Illustration 31). Its basis is a golden branch-like column crowned by leaves. Underneath the leaves, there are two white eggs attached to the column. The symbolism of the object builds on the imagery of a popular Czech Easter customs. On Easter Monday, Czech men go from house to house lashing Czech women with *pomlázky* – lashes woven from the young branches of the willow trees – which closely resemble the column of the hammer given to Mr. Robertson as well as the *mazačeny* that the Czech enlisted men make while “wasting time“ in the military service. The explanation of the tradition of Czech Easter Monday beating ritual says that it ensures women's health and fertility during the upcoming year. To complete the symbolism, Czech women reward the men for their beating with carefully decorated eggs. And it is egg-shaped plastic shells that the Czech enlisted men carry on their key chains to mark their status as *mazáci*, the senior and real men in the hierarchy of the enlisted. When turned upside down, George Robertson's hammer looks like a penis with testicles. It is such an object and no other that the departing president of the Czech Republic had to give to the

chief of the military alliance to which he brought his country during his time in office. It is with the stroke of this hammer that NATO must “confront evil at its womb”. It is with the stroke of this hammer, that the Alliance will welcome new states into its brotherhood in the future. It is the stroke of this hammer that closes the period of liminal hopes in the post-socialist period that the importance of military violence may diminish in politics.



Illustration 20: “*Nechceme násilí*” (“*We do not want any violence*”).
Student demonstration on Národní třída, November 17, 1998.
Source: www.radio.cz/en.article/34448.

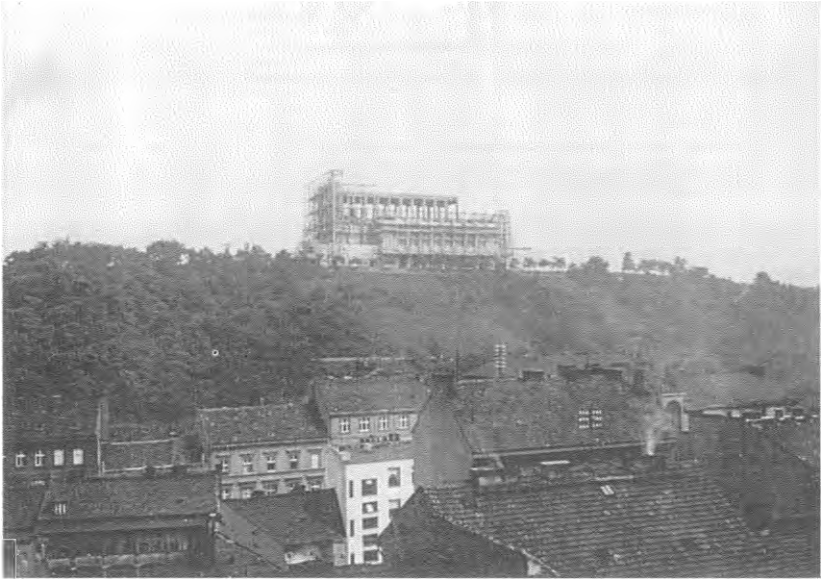


Illustration 21: The construction of the Monument of Liberation on Žižkov, August 5, 1932. Source: Archive of the National Monument on Vítkov.

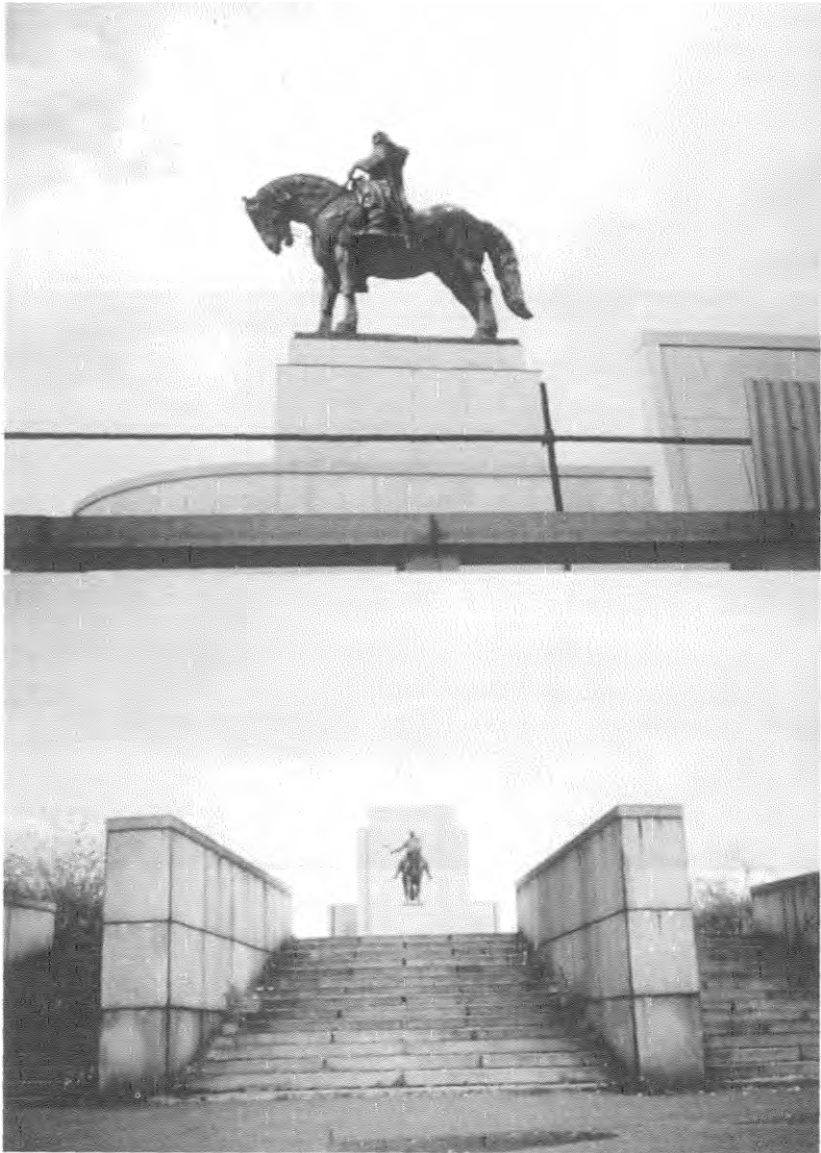


Illustration 22: The statue of Jan Žižka at the National Monument on Vítkov, 1993. Source: Photo by author.



Illustration 23: Mauzoleum, The National Monument on Vítkov, 1993. Source: Photo Jan Tachezy.

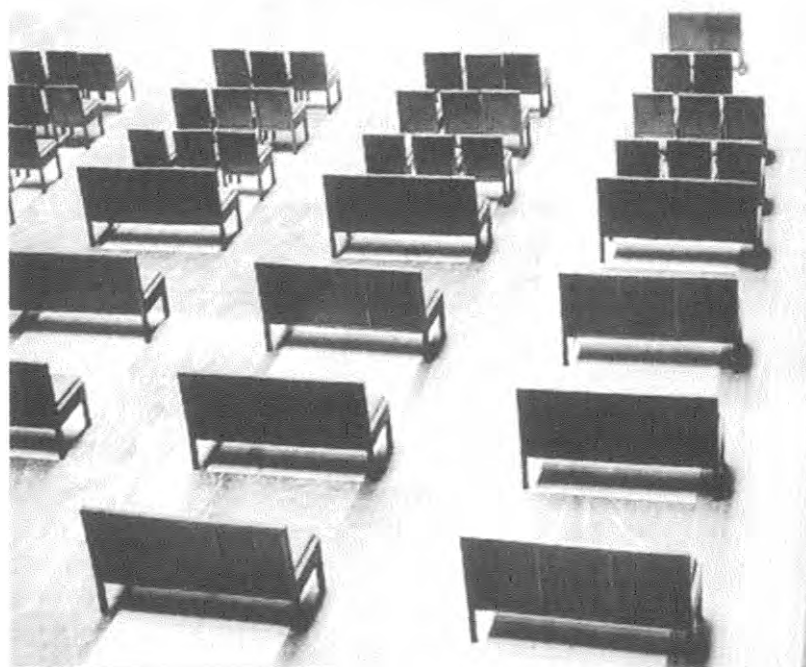
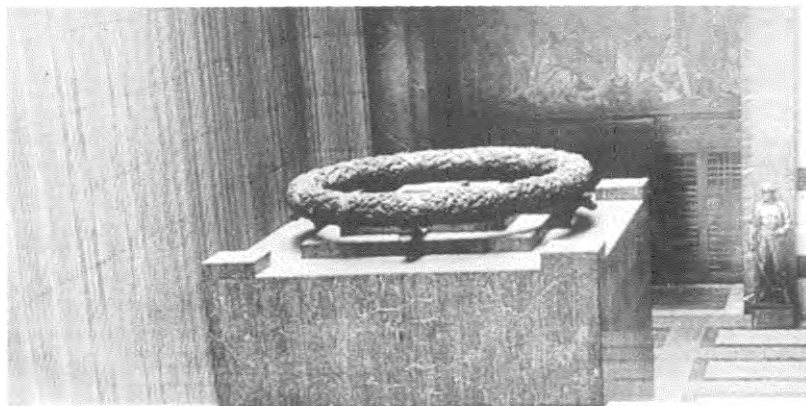


Illustration 24: *The Hall of Remembrance, the National Monument on Vítkov, 1993. Source: Photo Jan Tachezy.*

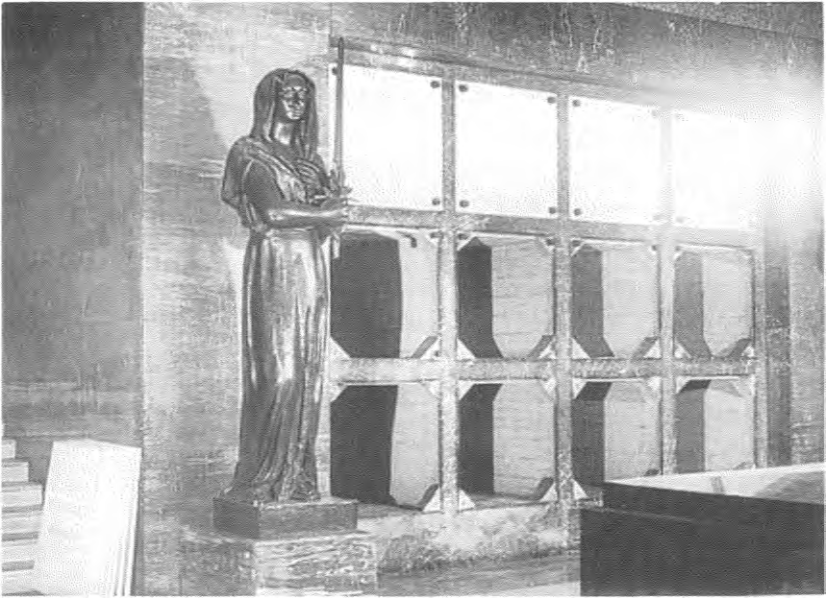


Illustration 25: Columbarium, The National Monument on Vítkov, 1993. Source: Photo Jan Tachezy.



Illustration 26: *"The Pink Tank," Smíchov, 1991.*
Source: www.noise.cz/david/EN/tank.html.

Jak nám Špidlovi inženýři naplánovali budoucnost
Lidový dům chrlí recepty na štěstí jeden za druhým

15.2008

28. listopadu 2002, 28 Kč / předplatitel 20 Kč / 1. díl

TÝDEN



Fotbal na policii

Kdo a proč měl prodat
minulý ročník ligy



James Bond

Reklamní tržník,
luxusních značek



Pavel Klener

O léčbě prezidenta,
rakovině a nádeji



9 771210 334337

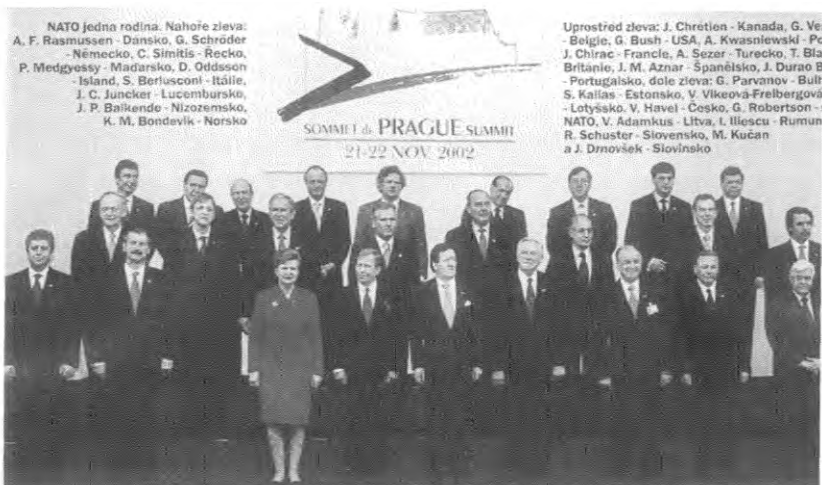
SUMMIT V MRTVÉM MĚSTĚ

NATO se rozšířilo, problémy trvají

Illustration 27: “Summit v mrtvém městě” (“Summit in a dead city”). Source: Cover page of Týden, November 25, 2002.



Illustration 28: *Anarchists against the police. NATO Summit, Prague 2002. Source: Photo Hynek Glos, Lidové noviny, November 22, 2002, p. 4.*



Summit v mrtvém městě

Nejednotné NATO v Praze přijalo sedm nových členů

Na dva dny se Praha stala díky summitu NATO
středem severoatlantické civilizace a Kongresové

letem do Prahy. V přátelském tonu nachodil
dotaz, jak se české hlavní město před sum-
mitem cítí. Nejspíš vůbec, ojetášil. Že kvěří

Tehdy se demonstrace českých i
ních antiglobalizátorů zorbly v por-
Po 11. září 2001 dostali ministři vnít

Illustration 29: *The new enlarged NATO at the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague. Source: Photo Karel Šanda, Týden, November 25, 2002, p. 16.*

Ženy státníků si zazpívaly a poobědvaly v Lánech



Chcť prezidentka Václava Havla Dagmar pozvala na státnostní oběd do zámku v Lánech manželky nejvýznamnějších politiků světa. V roli hostitelky jí vypomohla manželka českého premiéra Viktorie Špidlová. Pozvání přijaly první dámy Kanady, Řecka, Turecka, USA, Polska, Dánska, Islandu, Norska, Portugalska a Španělska.

Illustration 30: “The wives sang together and had lunch at the Lány castle.” *The wives of the presidents’ of NATO member states during the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague.* Source: Photo Jan Hrouda, Lidové noviny, November 22, 2002, p. 2.



Illustration 31: “The Hammer” – a gift from Václav Havel to George Robertson during the NATO Summit in Prague 2002.
Source: Photo Herbert Slavík, MF Dnes, November 23, 2002.

CONCLUSION – TROUBLES WITH THE WAR MACHINE IN THE POST-SOCIALIST STATE

I did not really make lasting friendships with the people that I met during my fieldwork in the military, except for David⁷⁰ with whom I worked in the same unit. A week before I left for New York to defend my dissertation, I spoke to him on the phone. He had just returned from the United States where he had participated in an intensive three-month military English language course followed by another three months of training in highly specialized military operations. David was one of the hundreds of military civilian employees and soldiers that have been sent by the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic to receive instruction in the English language and military training in the United States and other militarily advanced NATO member countries over the last 12 years. Like many of his predecessors, David was not welcome especially warmly by the Czech military leadership upon his return. Eager to share what he had learned with his colleagues in arms, he found his enthusiasm scorched when he arrived home. While he was learning the art of allied warfare on one of the US training bases, the Czech military had sent him a letter of discharge to his permanent home address, informing him that due to downsizing caused by the new wave of reforms of the Czech Armed Forces following the change of leadership on the ministerial level upon Minister Tvrdík resignation, the military research institute where he had worked was earmarked for closing. No other alternatives for employment within the military were offered to him. After he had made several futile attempts to communicate to his superiors the importance of his newly gained knowledge in an effort to convince them of his value for the Czech military institution, he signed up for state unemployment benefits and decided to spend some time in the country outside of Prague, rethinking his future career.

⁷⁰ David is a pseudonym, not my friend's real name.

David's story is not unique: many military employees in whose foreign training much Czech and foreign taxpayers' money had been invested left the military institution upon their return home. Even if their position had not been eliminated like David's, they left of their own volition explaining their decision in terms of their irresolvable frustration with the Czech military institution which did not utilize their newly acquired knowledge and technologies. "When I came back from the States", I was told by a pilot who was leaving the military two years earlier, "I kept writing reports about my experience to the headquarters. I even organized a presentation, but nobody at the top was interested in what I had to say. It was terribly frustrating. I felt that all I have learned was good for nothing and could not be applied in these conditions". In their commentaries and sometimes in their voluntary or forced departures from the military, people were expressing their frustration over an important paradox characteristic of the transition from socialism to democracy in the Czech Republic. This paradox, whose various forms and manifestations were the subject of this book, consists in the discrepancies between the varying ideas, expectations and practices concerning the change within the Czech military institution as well as the larger reconfiguration of the military's social and political role in the post-socialist period.

In this book I am arguing that the military is an institution which always remains in an idiosyncratic, but mutually dependent relationship with the state. I said that the space in which the military, state and society meet is characterized by mutual mistrust, dependency and anxiety – an ambivalent set of attitudes that draw on the problem of the legitimacy, of violence embodied by the military institution (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Benjamin 1978). Violence is at the inception of the law of states, which later justify their original recourse to violence with the coming into being of the new law. After a period of revolutionary rupture, the new law eventually assumes its divine and impartial character. But the military continues to embody the violence which stood at the law's inception and which continues to preserve its existence (Derrida 1992). As a result, the military remains an uncomfortable, yet indispensable ally of

states, which must conceal their militaries' violent content and purpose with the cloak of secrecy (Abrams 1988; Foucault 1978; Canetti 1960). What we are normally allowed to see and hear is the rather undisturbing blend of powerful technology, logic and order, delivered to us in the technical language of security and defense discourse and censored media images (Cohn 1987; Scarry 1985). The carnal violence of armed conflict then appears to be an unfortunate, yet necessary and highly rational tool protecting the modern order and civilization. This concealment with respect to militaries and their practice of violence, however, necessarily produces unintended surplus and disclosures (Bataille 1992), which include, for example: military coups, public protests by enlisted who refuse to be drafted into the military, collateral damage consisting in the killing of civilians by stray bombs and of one's own soldiers during war conflict, or rapes and murders of wives by their soldier-husbands upon the latter's return from war. In these moments, the real content of military work, relying as it does on coercion and violence, is exposed. In order to avoid these disturbances that threaten the society's acquiescence as well as the military's discipline needed for the maintenance of the established law and order, the states must continuously develop techniques for the military's management and control (Lasswell 1941; Andrzejewski 1954; Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Abrahamsson 1972; Caforio 1998; Desch 1999).

The purpose of writing this book was to construct an ethnography of a particular moment, in which the Czech state was only beginning to harness the power of the military in the period of post-socialist transition. The end of the communist rule in the former Czechoslovakia meant the end of the Cold War and with it, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Under the Warsaw Pact, the Czechoslovak military was characterized by its double allegiance: to the Czechoslovak state and to the brotherhood-in-arms of socialist militaries who were members of the Warsaw Pact (Rice 1984). Despite the official discourse which talked of the independent national military, the Czechoslovak military was completely subservient to the Moscow command during the socialist period (Simon 1985). This situation of

colonial subordination was clearly and painfully exposed during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, which went uncontested by the Czechoslovak military. Since 1968 until 1989, it was clear that the Czechoslovak People's Army was not there to protect the country's citizens, but was instead one of the puppets of the Soviet military empire used for the pacification of the citizens of the Soviet Union and its satellites.

Understandably, the Czechoslovak People's Army, the pawn of the Soviet colonial empire, which has never fought a war, had become a target of popular jokes rather than a source of pride and respect for the Czechs and Slovaks. The most pervasive symbol of this popular laughter at power has been the Good Soldier Švejk, the internationally famous hero of an antiwar novel by Jaroslav Hašek (1973). The Good Soldier Švejk as a symbol of passive resistance to war performs a double role: the Czech military, incapable of successful military effort is looked upon as the military of Švejk type, and by extension, the Czechs are a nation of Švejks living under a military occupation uncontested by the national military. This apparently self-critical identification, however, contains a subversive element: an important feature of the story of the Good Soldier Švejk is his ultimate victory over the war machine by subverting its self-righteous seriousness through the comic principle. And consistent with the logic of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), Švejk functions as the Czechs' self-deprecating label for the outside world, while at the same time performing the role of a social bond among people on the home front.

The post-socialist period after the Soviets left in 1991 until some time after the country's accession to NATO in 1999, was characterized by indecisiveness on military and security matters on the part of the Czechoslovak and Czech state. Burdened by the history of acquiescence during the Soviet occupation, the Czech army presented a dilemma for the new leaders of the post-socialist state. This situation began to change when the Czech Republic started to prepare herself for its accession to NATO – the first important international alliance in which the country gained membership after the end of socialism. During the Cold War, NATO was a symbol of the opposition to the

Warsaw Pact, the Soviet-led military alliance which invaded the country and stopped its leaning toward democratic socialism in 1968. In 1999, by gaining a membership in NATO, ostensibly a political organization which nevertheless relies for its power and influence on military prowess, the Czech state (and the international community) placed an enormous weight of responsibility and importance on the Czech military. After a period of disinterest in military matters following the end of socialism, the military was now endowed with the task of bringing the Czech Republic into the fold of Western democratic states.

This situation created a sudden exposure of a state sector, which had been until then treated as marginal to the country's interests. As if spotlight was suddenly turned onto the backstage of politics – what was supposed to be hidden came to light, exposing the paradoxes and inconsistencies that pervade the existence of the military institution and its relationship with the state and society. I argue that this situation exhibited many elements of absurdity and was further propounded by the historical moment of post-socialist transition, which I consider to be a rather blurred stage that anthropologists call 'liminality' (van Gennep 1909; Turner 1966). Customarily applied to mark a person or a group in the middle period of the rites-of-passage, the post-socialist state in the liminal phase is undergoing both an unsettlement of old norms that ruled society and politics under socialism and the simultaneous institutionalization of new standards. During this time, the military, normally an institution covered by secrecy, is disturbingly exposed as the state is still forming its protective shield constituted by the subversions of language and the rationalizing technology of power. During this time, I was able to observe the process, whereby the relationship between the state, the military and society was being contested and reconfigured, involving the multiple actors of the process – NATO leaders, Czech politicians, the various generations of military officers as well as ordinary Czech citizens. Very frequently, this contestation between the past and the present and the various ideas concerning the future of the military produced situations of grotesqueness and absurdity very similar

to those that Achille Mbembe characterizes as typical of post-colonial regimes (Mbembe 1992).

I opened this book with the description of a campaign at military professionalization initiated by the former Minister of Defense, Jaroslav Tvrdík in 2001, two years after the Czech Republic had gained NATO membership. I argue that military professionalization has emerged as the new technology of power through which not only the military, but the larger apparatus of power that Deleuze and Guattari call *the war machine* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), changes its position vis-à-vis the Czech state and society. I describe 'professionalization' as a term used in today's Czech discourse in reference to a set of processes that transcend the military sector, but which share the appeal to modernization, progress and also Westernization. The professionalization campaign, through its charm of futuristic possibilities, I argue, presented the first serious attempt on the part of the state to harness the power of the military under its control. Military professionalization is an effort to bring seriousness to the military institution, to change it from an outdated giant into a mobile modern force. Professionalization also responds to a larger world-wide change within militaries from large conventional warfare forces to sets of smaller highly specialized and trained units capable of international and rapid-response operations. Through the professional military's prowess in joint NATO military actions, the Czech state seeks to gain respect on the international political stage.

The professionalized Czech military should be at the vanguard of the country's transition to democracy, playing a crucial facilitating role in helping the Czech Republic to solicit the trust of the Western world. Accordingly, foreign-trained soldiers and civilian members of the military such as David expect to be awarded with responsibility upon their return to their home country and play an important role in the democratic transformation of the institution. Instead, however, they are displaced or positioned in menial jobs low in the military hierarchy from which their influence over institutional change is severely limited. The paradox, which lies at the core of their frustration, is the discrepancy between their expectations which

draw on the official rhetoric of the Czech leaders as well as their own experience in NATO militaries and the reality within the post-socialist Czech military institution. Their frustration corresponds with the criticism of both foreign and domestic military experts, who complain about the lack of change within the post-socialist Czech military and the slow pace of institutional reforms (Žantovský 1999; Gabal 2001, 2002; Spurný 2001, 2002; Simon 1999; Šedivý 1999; Ulrich 1999, 2002; Cottey et al. 2002). The Czech military, rather than being the leader of post-socialist progress and the bastion of modern rationality often seems to be an institution permeated with absurdity and resistance to change, actively participating in its own backwardness and demise.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the pervasive presence of the comic figure of the Good Soldier Švejk who continues to haunt the military's and the state's efforts at bringing respect to the military institution. The specter of the Good Soldier Švejk is being repeatedly evoked in the media and in public events, which are designed at improving the slowly rising, but still rather low position of the military in the Czech public opinion. I show how these very rituals aimed at Švejk's expurgation cannot do without calling out his ghost. Švejk, the anti-war anti-hero thus continues to haunt the transition to the new order of things in which the military is expected to hold higher standing in Czech society, state and culture.

In Chapter 2, I attempt to describe the changing world of the various generations of Czech military officers whom I interviewed during my fieldwork. Contrary to my expectations of powerful military masculinity, the Czech military officers I have met shared a melancholic disposition and their stories were filled with nostalgia and longing for the past and future order of discipline. I attribute their complaints about the lack of *koncepce* (long-term strategic planning) to their sense of uncertainty produced by the transition between two different political and military systems. The Czech officers' melancholy, I argue, stands in obvious contrast to the generally accepted hegemonic model of military manhood (Barrett 1996; Connell 1989). Instead of a powerful hegemonic masculinity associated with their membership in a military institution, the manhood of the Czech mi-

litary was much more strongly defined by their subservient relationship with the more powerful military brothers – previously the Soviets and now the NATO militaries. Instead of ‘the murderous hero’, violent and heterosexual, the personification of the admired form of masculinity in Western military culture, the Czech military officers’ manhood resembles more closely the demasculinized forms characteristic of men in colonized cultures (Eng 2001; Guttman 1997; Stoller 1991).

In Chapter 3, I present the results of my initial research among the enlisted in the Czech military. I focus on the shared feeling of the interviewed that the military service in the context of the professionalizing military was just a ‘waste of time’. I look at several material practices which reflect the enlisted men’s definition of ‘time’ as different from that shared by the majority society, enabling them to form a bond as a separate cultural group. The specialized and highly gendered knowledge of ‘time’ of the enlisted is a source of their collective self-definition – their intimate cultural knowledge. This cultural know-how allows them to assume social agency in the context of a total institution whose totalizing effects are further propounded by the process of military professionalization.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the departing members of the Czech Air Force, whose jobs were being eliminated as a result of downsizing related to professionalization and modernization of the Czech Armed Forces. The questions which I ask in this section are as follows: How do older officers of the Czech Air Force experience change from being members of the Warsaw Pact to NATO? How do they negotiate their allegiance to two very different forms of states? On the example of an interview with an older member of the Air Force, I illustrate the close relationship that these military men have developed to the Soviet planes and technology that they have been operating most of their lives as officers under the Warsaw Pact. As the Soviet planes are going out of operation, so are the military men who are no longer needed by the modernizing and downsizing Air Force. I describe the men’s libidinal attachment to Soviet military machinery with which they have mimetically merged over the course of their careers and with which they now fuse in their melancholic

exodus. I show that in the discourse of these departing military officers their love of planes and the Air Force family is the main storyline for which the history of the Soviet occupation and then political change and NATO membership were little more than stage sets that switched between acts.

The last chapter, which centers on the changing historical uses of a state monument to national heroes who died in war conflicts (The National Monument on Vítkov Hill in Prague) is at the same time a reflection on the change in attitude among the Czech political leadership with respect to the military and its role in the post-socialist transformation of the Czech state. The transference of regimes in the former Czechoslovakia has been known as the Velvet Revolution due to its non-violent character. The lack of violence has in fact been considered an important asset of the Czech revolution as it seemed to point to the possibilities of non-violent action in the resolution of political problems. I argue, however, that these hopes for a more peaceful future have since been abandoned by many leaders, including the former president and symbol of the Velvet Revolution, Václav Havel. NATO is a crucial international alliance to which the country ties its future and the heavily gendered power of the military is getting to be accepted as an indispensable tool of politics.

Despite my focus on social and political change, I leave my work open-ended in correspondence with the ongoing process of post-socialist transformation. I try to show that the process whereby the military gains in its importance as a political tool of the Czech state, does not go uncontested and I describe the various paradoxes, ruptures and grotesque effects that accompany this process of change on the level of institutional and societal transformation. My goal has been to capture the specifics of this moment in an anthropological hope of making them speak to larger issues. I do not dare to predict, however, what the future holds.

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Hana Červinková
**Playing Soldiers in Bohemia:
An Ethnography of NATO Membership**

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PLAYING SOLDIERS IN BOHEMIA

Playing Soldiers in Bohemia is a book based on the author's fieldwork research in the Czech Armed Forces (2001-2002). In five ethnographic chapters, it describes several themes that dominated the socio-cultural discourse and practices within and with respect to the military institution at the time when it was undergoing extensive transformation upon the Czech Republic's entry into NATO. The book makes manifest the paradoxical situations whereby the modernizing efforts of the post-communist Czech state, pressured by the recently initiated transnational alliance, are challenged by the transitional situation in which the past comes to haunt the present: the ghostly appearances of the anti-war literary hero of the Good Soldier Švejk, the Czech officers' melancholia for the Soviet discipline and for the communist military brotherhood or their mimetic attachment to the departing Soviet machinery.

Červinková is an excellent and intriguing writer. Her language is both ironic and pointing to absurdity, but at the same time it is realistic and filled with personal impressions, which strengthen the impact of her arguments. Her book is the first one that deals with the military in the region and does it with the application of theoretical paradigms that go beyond charted patterns of interpretation. It emphasizes paradoxes, fissures and grotesqueness of the situation called „post-communist transition”. Shortly, it is a work that is novel and critical at various levels. (Prof. Michał Buchowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Hana Červinková (1973) was born and grew up in the Czech Republic. In 1993 she left for the United States and four years later she received her undergraduate degree in anthropology from Temple University in Philadelphia. The present book is based on her doctoral dissertation (New School for Social Research, New York, 2003) in which she focused on the changing institution of the military and its place in Czech society upon the Czech Republic's entry into NATO. Hana Červinková has published articles on post-socialist transformation, cultural memory, anthropology in education and she has also translated anthropological texts into Czech. She works and lives in Wrocław, Poland where she teaches anthropology and works as the Director of the International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education at the University of Lower Silesia.

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