Timothy McCajor Hall and Rosie Read (Eds.)

Changes in the Heart of Europe

Recent Ethnographies of Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, and Sorbs

With an afterword by Zdeněk Salzmann

Cover Photo: *Window, Petržalka, Bratislava, June 2005*. Much Communist-era architecture feels ugly and brutal to me, but I am occasionally struck by its unintended beauty. Such was the case with this apartment building window in the Petržalka district of Bratislava, Slovakia.

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Editors' Introduction

Timothy McCajor Hall, University of Chicago, and
Rosie Read, Bournemouth University

This volume began as a special issue of the journal *Anthropology of East Europe Review*,[1] which in turn grew out of a panel on recent ethnographies from the former Czechoslovakia that was presented at the AAA meetings in 2003.[2] In organizing that panel, and during the discussion afterwards, many researchers (particularly younger ones) noted their desire for a forum that would bring together a broad range of recent ethnographic research on the Czech and Slovak Republics. We believe that this focus is timely for several reasons: Firstly, these countries have tended to be under-represented within the anthropological literature on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Second, both native and non-native anthropologists and ethnographers of allied disciplines have developed a new interest in the processes taking place in these most central of Central European countries. Third, what little ethnographic research has been published in English on the former Czechoslovakia has been scattered in various disparate fora for anthropology, folklore, linguistics, political science, and gender studies, to name but a few.

In comparison with some neighboring countries, relatively little research in the ethnographic approaches stemming from the Anglo-French-American tradition of socio-cultural anthropology has been carried out and published to date on the Czech Republic or Slovakia, and almost none of it available in English until the late 1990s. In part, this has been because of the different orientation of Central European ethnographers, who until recently tended to concern themselves largely with folkloristic or sociological studies, attending

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1 Special Issue: "Recent ethnographies of Czechs, Slovaks, and Sorbs." *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 23(1) Spring 2005.

2 The editors wish to thank Rebecca Nash, co-organizer of the 2003 AAA panel and for help in developing the thoughts herein, and also Kurt Hartwig, Ben Hill Passmore, and Daniela Peničková, who participated in the discussion after the panel. We also thank Michael Kuby and Precious Johnson at the Center on Aging at NORC and the University of Chicago for technical support.

on the one hand to cultural origins and survivals, and on the other to more statistical and demographic surveys (cf. Fojtík 1971; Salzmann 1983a; Lass 1988). Czechoslovakian ethnologists did study ethnic Czechs, Slovaks, and related West Slavonic groups outside of Czechoslovakia (see Uherek and Plochová, and Šatava, this volume), while a few studies were published on Slovak and Czech emigrants in western countries (e.g. Stein 1974; Chada 1981). The ethnographies that were available were mainly written by émigrés from Czechoslovakia (e.g., Salzmann 1970, 1983b; Salzmann and Scheufler 1974; Holy 1996), most of whom did not primarily specialize in Czechoslovak ethnography (see, however Lass 1989). Others wrote of Slovak and Czech issues mainly in passing or by way of example, though their work may have been profoundly shaped by their experiences in Czechoslovakia (e.g. Gellner 1983, 1987, 1998; Salzmann 1993).[3]

The ethnographic literature specifically on Slovak culture (as opposed to more general ethnographies of Czechoslovakia) is extremely sparse in English, despite a number of excellent studies published in Slovak or Czech (e.g. Filová et al. 1990; for partial bibliographies see Skalník, this issue, and Torsello and Pappová 2003).[4] The few ethnographic studies in English include those by Peter Skalník (1979, 1993), Juraj Podoba (1999), and Olga Danglová (1995, 1998). These have tended to focus on village life and cultural survivals (e.g. Podolák 1987, 1990, 1991; Skovierová 1988, 1994), on the Rusyn/Ruthenian ethnic group in far eastern Slovakia and adjacent Ukraine and Poland (see Magosci 1995), or on the Roma minority (e.g. Hübschmannová 1979; Scheffel 2004). While this is by no means an exhaustive list of ethnographies of Slovakia, the studies cited here suggest the wide

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3 We do not intend to slight anyone by omission from this list, particularly the many solid community studies carried out by Czechoslovak or other European ethnologists, such as those reviewed by Skalník in this volume. However, most of these were not readily available in English and are only now entering into dialogue with western sociocultural anthropologists.

4 Literature searches by Krista Hegburg and the editors, together with an informal poll of several contributors to this volume, revealed very few ethnographic studies on Slovakia or Slovaks available in English. We particularly thank Davide Torsello for his help.

range of opportunities that remain largely unexplored, including gender relations, social change since 1989, and urban ethnography, among others.

However, a number of recent developments suggest that this situation is changing. These include the growth in the number of new graduate and postgraduate programs in social anthropology within Slovakia and the Czech Republic over the past five to ten years, the growth in the numbers of Czech and Slovak anthropologists, and the increased interest in and engagement with anthropological methods and theories amongst Czech and Slovak social scientists more generally. At the same time there has been a modest but consistent (and growing) stream of non-native anthropologists carrying out ethnographic[5] research in the former Czechoslovakia and on ethnic Czechs, Slovaks, and Sorbs elsewhere since the early to mid-1990s. In drawing together some of the writing that has emanated from these processes, this volume seeks to contribute to the overall growth of ethnographic understandings of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and to raise the profile of research from these countries within the academic fields of central and eastern European studies and social anthropology more generally.

The Czech and Slovak Republics present particular challenges to the ethnographer seeking to understand the legacies of the socialist past in the context of present political, social, and economic realities. From the point of view of the periods before and after socialism, Czechoslovakia often appears highly "western" and intrinsically "European" in comparison to many of its east-central European neighbors. Following the First World War, Czechoslovakia was the only industrialized country of the new states in the region, constituting over two-thirds of former Austria-Hungary's industrial base, (although industrial production was largely concentrated in parts of Bohemia and Moravia). After 1989, Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic/Slovakia have been fairly consistently perceived (at home and abroad) as the more successful of the "transition economies," and clear candidates for inclusion into Western institutions such as the EU and NATO.

At the same time, Czechoslovakia might also be seen as one of the

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5 And ethnographically informed but non-anthropological studies, including social and cultural histories (Sayer 1998; King 2002), and literary studies (Pynsent 1994).

most inherently socialist societies and economies in the Eastern block: a country in which socialist ideas and principles enjoyed huge grass-roots support from the post-war period right up to the experiments at the reform and renewal of socialist society in the late 1960s, and in which class- and wage-leveling achieved its greatest success. After the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 and the repression of the reform movement, the political leadership imposed a period of social and political "normalization". Czechoslovakia emerged as one of the most orthodox Marxist-Leninist societies in the region, remaining firmly bound to the Soviet Union in economic and military terms until 1989.[6] Thus the Czech and Slovak lands historically occupy rather ambiguous and contradictory positions in relation to enduring distinctions between "East" and "West," "socialist" and "capitalist." These ambiguities present difficulties and opportunities to ethnographers, who, from the very outset of their research, find themselves grappling with apparently contradictory interpretations and perspectives on history.

Indeed, the problems associated with evaluating the past in the Czech/Slovak cases epitomize some of the broader issues at stake in the debate about the concept of "postsocialism." Scholars of the region have for some years debated this concept and questioned whether it continues to be intellectually useful, or whether it increasingly obscures more than it reveals (Hann 2002). For in spite of a shared socialist past, east-central European countries are increasingly divided by more recent historical developments following socialism's collapse and the social, economic, and cultural transformations that followed. As a result, the diversities that always existed between (and within) the countries of the region appear ever more visible and exaggerated. At the same time, however, it seems crucial not to lose sight of the ongoing legacies of the socialist past within this part of the world.

Whether we retain the term "postsocialism" or not, the broader challenge is to understand the increasingly diverse ways in which the socialist past is subtly but persistently incorporated into present social actualities and experiences. It is our view that these complexities are best captured by eth-

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6 We are grateful to Rebecca Nash, whose ideas we have borrowed in developing this point.

nographic study. In putting this volume together, we have sought to be as inclusive as possible. The ethnographic studies presented here reflect the variety and multiplicity of contemporary life in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches. We hope that this volume will help stimulate further debate and avenues of inquiry, and promote collaboration between scholars within and outside these countries. With this in mind, we offer a summary of what we see as the key issues and questions arising from each section of this volume.

Section one focuses on various dimensions of socio-economic transformation in the Czech and Slovak Republics, particularly in relation to the activities of NGOs and notions of "civil society" more broadly. June considers the role of the organization Transparency International in generating apparently neutral and authoritative knowledge about levels of corruption within nation states generally, and the Czech Republic in particular. He examines how such knowledge is reconfigured and made meaningful in the Czech context and its various impacts on the Czech state's own practices of knowledge-making and public perceptions of corruption. June's contribution offers some insights into the changing ways in which citizens make active judgments about the relative truth or falsity of official, apparently "scientific" pronouncements, in a context where skepticism is an historically familiar practice. Karjanen explores forms of social disenfranchisement and economic marginalization in south-west Slovakia, and shows how these processes cannot be accounted for within certain theories of postsocialist economic change which conflate distinct forms of value and capital, thereby producing rather optimistic models of "transition." Karjanen shows how social mistrust and atomization—often associated with the socialist era—are more accurately understood as part of capitalist development in this area. Kapusta-Pofahl, Hašková, and Kolářová offer an in-depth discussion of the current political and socio-economic contexts shaping the activities of a range of women's organizations in the Czech Republic. They provide important insights into the way in which the EU funding priorities increasingly determine the internal structure and scope of these NGOs, thereby informing how different forms of civil society and civic participation emerge.

Section two brings together a range of articles exploring themes of gender, family, and sexuality. As is common with such topics, these chapters make explicit the ways in which personal experience and private morality are inextricably bound up with public institutions, state policies, and broader historical narratives. Nash analyzes how forms of social security provision for families have helped generate and maintain cultural notions of autonomy and dependency in Czech society. She shows how the new eligibility criteria governing this form of state provision inform and are informed by values of self-sufficiency, which in turn help generate quite new economic dependencies. Kozikowski provides a detailed account of the personal stories of women who have suffered breast cancer. She reflects on the frequent experience of social and emotional isolation in a context in which breast cancer has historically been highly stigmatized. Her contribution touches upon the ways in which meanings and perceptions of illness associated with the socialist period (within families as well as medical contexts) are evolving in the present. Passmore explores changing working conditions for women within a Moravian toy factory. He examines how the new forms of economic vulnerability contribute to existing gender inequalities in the workplace, but argues that, at the same time, the factory management has achieved a certain moral legitimacy in the eyes of the female workforce. His account, like that of Nash, underscores how the economic and the moral converge in everyday life. Finally, Quin provides a case study on the contemporary production of Slovak pornography. He examines the ways in which certain national stereotypes of Slovak men are appropriated and queered within the work of a Slovak pornographer. Quin's chapter draws on queer theory to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which the commodification of the sexual body and sexual relationships are important aspects of capitalist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Our third section pairs two traditional interests of Czechoslovakian anthropology in their current reflexes: two studies of the Roma/Romany (Gypsy) minority, and two studies of the cultural survival of Slavic ethnic minorities. As Krista Hegburg notes in her essay, the Roma have long been seen as a natural focus of anthropological attention in Czechoslovakia because of their ascribed foreignness. However, their relations to the majority "white" society are

problematic, fluid, and continually contested and negotiated, through both formal and informal channels. Věra Sokolová interrogates the involuntary sterilization of an unknown number of Romani women that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, at a time when the Czechoslovakian government was aggressively pro-natalist in policy — but only for certain kinds of Czechoslovak families. How could an apparently ethnicity-neutral law be taken as an injunction to sterilize a particular ethnic group (and only the women of that group), and how could the practice persist after the policy was officially discontinued?

Zdeněk Uherek and Kateřina Plochová discuss the migration of ethnic Czechs from the Czech lands to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 19th century as part of broader movements of peoples within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and examine the rise, fall, and possible rise again of their fortunes with the political and social situation in the former Yugoslavia. Leoš Šatava draws on his many years of research among the Lusatian Sorb minority in Germany, a West Slavonic group (also known as Wends) connected in medieval times with the Czech crown, and explores issues of language survival facing small ethnic groups in Europe today.

Section four examines the tensions and interactions between several kinds of history and memory in ethnographic work. Haldis Haukanes analyzes a set of life histories, narratives of Czech villagers who lived through most of the major political events of the 20th century, and finds that practically none of her informants use these macro-events to structure the periods of their own lives. Her findings complicate the relationship between memory as macro-history, as collective memory, and as personal life history, and shed light on the work of narrative in the construction of identity. Davide Torsello looks at the relationship between various kinds of official histories — land registries, maps, archival records from various periods in the past of a Hungarian-Slovak village — and the ways in which the villagers themselves name, recount, and construct their histories and their memories, tacking back and forth between elements of Habsburg, republican, and communist, Slovak and Hungarian, interpretations of their past. Finally, Peter Skalník examines a number of classic community restudies in Europe and elsewhere for their contributions to anthropological theory and method, and reviews the major

community studies in the former Czechoslovakia. He challenges our acceptance of the "ethnographic present" and argues for the importance of community restudies in European ethnography.

We hope that this volume provides a useful resource for ethnographers from many traditions who are interested in the former Czechoslovakia and western CEE. We also invite interested readers to check out the resource site for Czech and Slovak ethnographers, Národopis, currently mirrored at home.earthlink.net/~mccajor/narodopis.html, and to make suggestions for further additions.

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