

Abstract

This dissertation thesis examines the process of constructing collective memory of the socialist past in the Czech Republic during the post-socialist period, approaching it as a part of a broader effort to reconstruct national and political identities in Eastern Europe post-1989. It focuses on the ways Czech mainstream media have represented issues related to the process of “reconciliation with the socialist past” and, through an interdisciplinary perspective, examines how they have drawn on, (re)produced, and sustained a narrative that became dominant in the early years of post-socialist development. Despite being periodically contested and the ideological landscape shifting in the last decade, the narrative has retained a powerful position in the Czech public sphere; referring to it as the “dominant discourse on communism”, the thesis pairs it with the strategies of members of the Czech liberal-conservative elite who became influential mnemonic agents, seeking to enforce a particular understanding of the socialist period. The thesis situates these efforts in the context of the regional and geopolitical reshufflings that have shaped the politics of memory and heritage of socialism in the post-socialist space.

The thesis investigates two specific instances of the reconciliation process: 1) the codification of memory through the establishment of the Czech national memory institute, and 2) the efforts to reappropriate the symbolic landscape through street renaming in the city of Ostrava. The two cases provide insight into two specific dimensions of the dominant discourse on communism – the crime-centred perspective on the communist regimes and the discontinuity in approaching the socialist past as a historical period – which are interdependent and justify the condemnation of the socialist past *en bloc*. Drawing on the theory of media as significant memory agents, the thesis exposes the prevailing tendencies and key emphases in the construction of these two instances in Czech mainstream media and discusses the power dynamics between the different perspectives, with a focus on the role of the dominant discourse on communism. It examines, among other factors, the influence of the specific political and power configurations on debates about the past, the ideological inclinations of the Czech journalistic community post-1989, the reductive focus on individualized stories of repression, and the exteriorization of socialist heritage as the heritage of the ideological and historical Other. The thesis concludes that the liberal-conservative mnemonic actors sought to enforce the dominant discourse on communism by emphasizing the inherently ideological nature of the communist regime, while obscuring the ideological character of their own efforts in constructing the memory of the socialist past.