Is rural populism on the decline? Continuities and Changes in Twentieth Century Central Europe – The case of Slovakia

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Abstract

This paper attempts to present an argument that rural populism is not just a transitional phenomenon that has flourished in post communist Europe after 1989 but it characterises the region throughout the entire twentieth century. Focusing mainly on Slovakia, the essay claims that the vitality of populisms today is a result of significant social continuity throughout decades – populism is either reproduced as actual social base (family, social relations and practices, religion, etc.) or narrative (pre-modern symbols and identities) and the combination of the two – as well as discontinuity caused by the transformation shakings. Analyzing the social basis and ideology of populism, the paper argues that populist mobilisation will remain a significant part of eastern and central European politics also after May 2004 when the respective countries become members of the European Union. Nevertheless, the paper also argues that populism is not exclusively an eastern and central European phenomenon; it rather links the west and east of Europe together.

IS RURAL POPULISM ON THE DECLINE? CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN TWENTIETH CENTURY CENTRAL EUROPE – THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA*

Populism is any creed or movement based on the premise that virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions.
(Wiles 1969, 166)

The kind of remaking which features in modern nationalism is not creation 'ex nihilo', but a reformulation constrained by determinate parameters of the past. And the past, which has mainly counted here – and gives its 'bite' and sentimental incontrovertibility to all ethnonationalist belief-structure – is that of peasant existence.
(Nairn 1997, 121)

As transformations in post-socialist Europe proceed, one feature, which has been expected to disappear, is political mobilisation through populism. Expressed in the form of organic nationalism and/or political demagoguery, populism is expected to decline with the introduction and accommodation of western-style democracy. This paper attempts to answer the following questions through an analysis of the social basis and ideology of contemporary populism in Central Europe: Does populism decline when multi-party democracies are accommodated? Will the consolidated model of liberal democracy and liberal-secular political culture overcome seemingly old-fashioned populisms?

The main focus of this paper is Slovakia, the country that I am most familiar with. Nevertheless, it will also examine similar processes throughout the broader regional framework of the newly invented Central Europe (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) known as the Visegrad Four (V4) and conclude with broader European issues.[1] Before I move on to the case study of Slovakia, during which I

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demonstrate my main arguments, it would be fruitful to introduce some basic facts about current party politics in the countries of Central Europe – all of which will become members of the EU in May 2004.

Populism in Central European party politics

In Hungary, there has been a marked shift by the former self-defined liberal Viktor Orbán and his *FIDESZ- Magyar Polgári Párt* (MPP - Hungarian civic party) towards a national populist vocabulary defending traditions of ethnic Hungarians within the borders of current Hungary and abroad. Orbán's typical mobilisation attacks either the post-communist left or the European giant, although he does not in principle oppose his country's EU membership. Other successful parties in the 1990s had much stronger agendas. They included *Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja* (MIÉP - Hungarian Justice and Life Party), headed by the extreme nationalist István Csurka, and *Független Kisgazdapárt* (FKGP - Independent Small-holders' Party), headed by József Torgyán, not to mention various smaller groups, many of which appealed to the romanticized pre-communist Hungary. All these streams initially appeared under the umbrella of a catchall party in the early 1990s – the nationalistically nostalgic *Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (MDF - Hungarian Democratic Forum). Its voters today overwhelmingly follow the voice of Victor Orbán.[2] Hungarian politics is, in general, significantly 'ethnic' when defending the collective consciousness and cultural distinctiveness of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries.

The election results in 1990s Poland revealed that apart from plenty of small parties, there has always been a relatively moderate and stable agrarian party *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (PSL - Polish People's Party). The other various populist streams either remained hidden within the *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność* (AWS - Solidarity Electoral Action) or stayed on the margins of the political spectrum. After the breakdown of AWS, however, these other streams successfully emerged in the elections of 2001. Indeed, the party of Andrzej Lepper *Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Self-defence of the Polish Republic) and the Catholic nationalist *Liga*

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[1] I use the term Central Europe (with a capital C) when I mean current political use of this area as V4. For most of the time, however, I prefer geographic names such as central, east and eastern Europe which, of course, also involve a much wider part of the continent.
[2] For more details on Hungarian extreme right politics of the 1990s see Szöcs 1998.

Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families) now belong to the strongest representatives of populism in Europe. The party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice), another group renewed after Solidarity's fall, can also be included in this group.[3] A significant part of Polish politics does not only commemorate the pre-World War II populist ideal but it also mobilizes actual peasants who amount to more than 20% of Polish population today. Populist ideology is catalysed through narrow-minded Catholicism and its definitions of Polishness.

The case of the Czech Republic is structurally different from the other three in that populist mobilisation there is more urban-based and significantly non-religious. Although some demagogy of prime ministers Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman worked quite well, during the 1990s only two bright parliamentary populist parties have shown-up: nationalist xenophobic *Republikáni* (Republicans), who disappeared at the end of 1990s and the hard-line *Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy* (KSČM - Communist Party of the Czech lands and Moravia). After their impressive success in 2002, the Communists became the third largest party in Parliament and without support from this party Václav Klaus would not have been elected as a descendant of Václav Havel in the Presidential office in 2003. Communist social and national populism is doing very well in the Czech Republic and claims to defend both hard-working people as well as national interests. The defence of 'national' interests against big European powers (e.g. Germany) is widespread across almost the whole Czech political spectrum.

During the 1990s Slovakia was widely identified as the national-populist extreme of Central Europe. In the period 1994-98 the then ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar consisted of three parties: national populist *Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko* (HZDS - Movement for Democratic Slovakia), nationalist *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS - Slovak National Party) and ultra-left-populist *Združenie robotníkov Slovenska* (ZRS - Workers´ Union of Slovakia). Unlike the other three countries of V4, because of its alleged distinction Slovakia was rejected as a member of NATO in the first round of enlargement and was not invited for accession

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[3] For more details on Polish political parties see Szczerbiak 2002. As a matter of curiosity, in order to express their anti-federalist vision of Europe the leaders of Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, Czech *Občanská demokratická strana* (the party founded by current Czech president Václav Klaus) and British *Conservative Party* signed in 10th of July 2003 the Prague declaration for Europe of nations.

negotiations with the EU. It was argued that the country's politics were incompatible with the democratic values Western civilisation embodies.[4] Without the Slovak population changing, however, this was all forgotten after 1998 when the new government was formed. Apart from HZDS, which still remained the largest party, some other political streams with populist agendas gained strength: success in the 2002 election of the hard-line *Komunistická strana Slovenska* (KSS - Communist Party of Slovakia) was grounded on rural votes, and the party entered Parliament. Other examples are the party *SMER* (Direction) led by populist rhetorician Róbert Fico, which became the third largest in the Parliament, and *Aliancia nového občana* (ANO - The Alliance of a New Citizen) of media owner Pavol Rusko, which jointed the coalition in 2002. The conservative Catholic *Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie* (KDH - Christian Democratic Movement), the coalition party since 1998, has complemented these parties by stressing the importance of the patriarchal family, religion, and nation.[5]

Reproduction of populisms

This short and incomplete excursion into party politics provokes the next question of this paper: why are so many people in Central Europe so sensitive to the mobilisation of political rhetoric typical of mid-war peasant early capitalism, rather than 1990s industrial post socialism?[6] To answer this question, I argue that the populism of the first half of the twentieth century has been reproduced. The question follows, then, how has it been reproduced? How is it possible that in the 1990s as in the 1920s and 1930s, parties mobilising a similar populism appeared as powerful forces in politics; sometimes even with a similar regional electoral backing?[7]

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[4] The then US Secretary of State, Madelleine Allbright characterized Slovakia as the 'black hole' of Europe.

[5] As a special contribution of KDH to the debate about the future of Slovakia in united Europe could be considered the *Declaration about a supremacy of both member and candidate countries of the European Union in cultural and ethical issues*. The declaration, which has been approved by the Parliament, suggests that Slovakia should maintain its sovereignty in case that laws passed by the EU are in contradiction with Slovak values. Although nobody actually said what those cultural and ethical issues are (I would assume they are narrowed by Catholic social doctrine and ideology significantly, though), Christian Democrats want to include extended version of this manifesto into the constitution before Slovakia became member of the EU (Buzalka – Strážay 2002).

[6] I use the terms 'communism', 'socialism', 'state-socialism', 'actually existing socialism', etc. like synonyms.

[7] Basing his arguments on quantitative data, municipal and county election results in Slovakia, sociologist Vladimír Krivý came-up with the hypothesis that the success of national populist parties in 1920s, 1930s and 1990s in the similar geographical areas was caused by the reproduction of long-term

My response is not simple and I squarely reject the conclusions of analysts who overestimate the importance of socialist heritage in the emergence of populism. According to them, following the transformations of 1989 and after, a vague group of losers and their protest votes suddenly encouraged the populists to emerge. This argument is rather simplistic, and I would call for a more 'culturally' appropriate understanding of the phenomenon. First of all, there are no big changes in people's lives sliced by important dates (such as 1989). People do not necessarily follow intellectuals, political scientists and historians with their division of epochs, but rather live their own lives with different dynamics, keeping their own practices and relations and trying to make as much profit from the conditions available for their actual well being as possible. Therefore, I argue that apart from the failures of yet unfinished reform projects – the products of rupture – there are more significant reproduced social features, which should be taken into account when studying populism. These are: the durability of national identity constructions based on rural stereotypes, the reproduction of some pre-communist structural characteristics, social practices and relations (role of the family, religion, patronage and clientship, etc.) as well as the influence of some communist and post communist policies and how they marked the everyday life of people. Nevertheless, I do not want to over emphasise the role of 'continuity' for the success of populism – the 'ruptures' are perhaps similarly decisive - I only want to stress the importance of broad, complex views on the processes of social changes. Applying this approach to populism, I argue that the vitality of central and eastern European populisms is a result of significant social continuity throughout decades – either reproduced as actual social base (family, social relations, religion, etc.) or narrative (pre-modern symbols and identity) and the combinations of the two – as well as discontinuity caused by the transformation shakings.

To understand the complexity of social changes, one needs to go beyond macro-sociological constructions and some of its classificatory schemes (modern – traditional, left – right, East – West, etc.) as well as to overcome the limitations inherent in the nation-state. It is necessary also to avoid defining politics too narrowly, as parties, parliaments, constitutions and the like. The most valuable device

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of social anthropology is detailed ethnography, which tries to avoid the oversimplifications characteristic of paradigm-seeking sciences operating on the 'macro' scale. Using ethnographic observations, anthropologists have more success than other social scientists when explaining the role of the nationalism, family, religion etc. in people's lives, and if these institutions are central to the ongoing success of populism, then anthropologists should likewise be more successful than other social scientists in explaining this phenomenon.

Many experts who operate in the post-communist area understand the transformation from communism as a more or less evolutionary process: put simply, backward communism was surpassed by modern liberal capitalism. These scholars assume that the post socialist societies will logically approach the western European or North American types of democracy and market economy if they adopt some prescribed institutional parameters and rules. In order to resemble this new enlightenment ideal, one of the most important factors appeared to be a vital liberal-secular civil society, which, if not already existent, should be built. As a result of this development, free (western) democratic polity will be enacted.

To the anthropologist, however, an understanding of the post socialist transformations should be rather different. It has to contain the following questions: what do the notions 'civil society', 'liberal democracy', 'free-market economy' actually mean in the conditions in which they are applied, and how do they interact with domestic social practices and relations? (Burawoy and Verdery 1998; Hann and Dunn 1996; Hann 1993; Hann 2000; Verdery 1991; Verdery 1996). In this sense, anthropology can provide a corrective, particularly to the deficits of 'transitology' and neo-classical economy, which instead of careful analyses of the context of transformations, make changes happen in particular ways (Hann 2002). Stressing the importance of (micro) continuities where the (macro) changes seem to happen, anthropological analyses examine the 'actually existing civil societies' and everyday peoples' responses to the changes politicised on the macro scale.

To conclude this introduction, I suggest that it is (1) the construction of national identities as well as (2) structural features selectively reproduced from an agrarian era and broadly linked to the peasant family and (3) the role of Catholic religion, which

creates the social basis for the success of populist mobilisation in Central Europe today. Beyond that, populism also emerges as a result of the transitional ruptures that increase the calls for the harmonic past contrasting with actual insecurity. In this case, people's uncertainty fuels slightly different imaginations of the past – the nostalgic desire for continuity when the world changes (in the words of Touraine cited in Pratt 2003, 176) - that complements the one reproduced through certain social practices, relations and narrations.

This could happen because the particular macro-structural changes of the twentieth century, presented as various modernisation projects, usually worked with multiple effects: the changes of economic and political arrangements were pushed within the frame of contesting national narrations and nation buildings. Evoking the seminal work of Eugen Weber on France (1976), I suggest the first great transformation was a national one – how peasants became Hungarians/Poles/Czechs/Slovaks. The second was the state-socialist transformation, which can in most places be characterised as the transition from an early-capitalist agrarian era to socialist industrialism. Finally, the third development project was the recent shift towards multiparty democracy and free-market economy after the demise of communism. All those projects and their ideologisations brought about different discourse frameworks, different identity constructions and dissimilar policies towards the three social phenomena that make the anti-enlightenment ideas of populism succeed: the nation, the family and religion.

Understanding populisms

The presence of populism in politics is not solely an east or central European phenomenon. As it is for the rest, the imagination of a relatively recent agrarian past is common for the West as well. Although some political scientists perhaps would not agree, the current growth of national populism in Western European countries (France, Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Austria etc.) is not very different from that in the East of Europe. The foundations of populist ideology are universal: the defence of national tradition, pre-modern family, exploited hard-working people, Christianity (particularly against Islam, secularism, and sometimes also against Judeo-capitalist intrigues) and so on. Nevertheless, there are some differences between the East and West, derived from slightly more recent peasant heritage in the East.

As a result of increasing division lines between the peasant tradition and industrial modernity, central and eastern European populisms began to grow at the beginning of the twentieth century. These populisms started to be embodied in the ideologies of peasantism, which intellectually emerged as a reaction to both Russian populism and Western socialism (Mitrany 1951; Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Kitching 1989). Peasantism firstly, took the peasants explicitly as its social prototype and proposed moulding the society and its state on the peasant's conception of work, property and administration; second, blended its social-economic doctrines with a strong nationalistic concern for the emancipation of the 'people' from foreign domination; and third, claimed that the peasantry is entitled as a class to the leadership of the political society, 'not only on account of its electoral preponderance but also because of its innate spiritual and national values' (Ionescu 1969, 99). Rather a movement than party-like organized collectives, populism struggled against rootless-ness – against the feeling ascribed to modernity. Stressing order, morality and justice, it did not claim a tribal community but an agrarian *Gemeinschaft* (MacRae 1969). Since the early 1990s, the heirs of this anti-enlightenment project have often unconsciously followed the lines drafted in the 1920s – 1940s. As in the 1990s, populists placed themselves neither right nor left, they struggled against immoral, secularised westernisation, stressed virtues of simple people, defended pure traditions of their nations and often used a (Catholic) religious vocabulary as their shield. Although the social prototype of this ideology, the patriarchal heterosexual family living in an unspoiled countryside, had scarcely existed, they used it as a desired model.

Keeping in mind these characteristics, it is very difficult to define populism. As Pratt observes, it is neither an ideology nor a closed box of practices. It is a kind of discourse, a frame that can be combined with various ideological traditions, institutional settings and symbolic imagery (Pratt 2003). If needed, nationalism, communism, peasant tradition, free-market liberal newspeak, etc. can fit under the populist umbrella equally well. The boundaries between those various frameworks are blurred and if there is a limitation to a particular populism – such as that of national populism, conventionally understood as 'typical' populism – it is an artificial demarcation invented either by intellectuals or by rigid political ideologies.

The central feature of populism is a real or discursively created friction between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' structures and cultures (Stewart 1969). New states and their land reforms in 1920s Central Europe, the Stalinist smashing of the peasantry in favour of industrial modernization, the introduction of capitalism after the collapse of communism in the 1990s, all represent modernisation projects that caused tensions and crises and enabled populist politics to successfully emerge.

The people – the main source of populist legitimacy – are characterised by populists as moral, hard-working producers living in traditional peasant households, although not necessarily in an agrarian era. The people's enemies, the 'others', are usually the modernising state, big foreign businesses, metropolitan cities, cosmopolitan life-styles, etc. (Pratt 2003). An important accelerator of populist mobilisation is the tension between metropolis and the provinces. The metropolis is in the countryside 'objectively' perceived as the presence of central state power or cultural influence, and 'subjectively' as a threat to the interests, status, or values of non-metropolitan people. In all cases, certain social groups become aware of being peripheral to the centres of power (Stewart 1969). People, who felt they were extremely important in the society a decade or two ago, today find themselves unnecessary. Due to its proximity to the fast growing Budapest in the very late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, people in the areas of what is today south of Slovakia were closer to the centre than those in the mountain valleys. Whereas the South was gradually declining during the whole period of the 20th century, the importance of the industrial plants built in the northern regions of Slovakia – particularly since the 1950s – was increasing. Apart from agriculture labourers, which I deal with later, especially professions that were especially important for this growth of heavy industry, were celebrated during communism. Miners and heavy industry workers, therefore, registered the deepest (discoursive and real) fall of importance for the transforming society after 1989. Today, also the asymmetry between metropolitan centres and rural peripheries is increasing rapidly again all over the post-socialist world and herein lies very important preconditions for the success of populism to be fulfilled.

Either 'pull' factors – such as making industry attractive – or 'push' factors – such as making the peasant and artisan life unbearable in modernizing societies (Kitching 1989) – were simultaneously applied during the twentieth century. These processes

did not develop without shocks in eastern and central Europe, indeed rather the opposite occurred. Apart from two war depressions, sending people back to the land happened for the first time as a result of the economic crises of the early 1930s when, simultaneously, a massive emigration from overpopulated land was taking place. Very soon afterwards, land reforms followed by furious collectivisation, pushed people into industry and to the cities again. A special feature of communist modernisation was the ruralisation of the cities. When villagers were resettled from their hamlets they did not become urbanites straightforwardly. Obviously, whether workers, medicine doctors or university professors, they stayed in touch with the countryside intensively: they kept their backyards, folk artefacts and village identity.[8] Significantly painful was also the recent move towards de-industrialization after 1989 (Kideckel 1995, Kideckel 2002). Although people did not return back to the land in great numbers, the countryside became the source of certainty and the organic peasant tradition once again appeared to be natural.

National identity and politics

Adopting a 'modernist' approach of the study of nationalism (Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm 1990 and others), I shall describe the rise and selective reproduction of once invented national identities with their particular connection to peasantry. I will deal with the construction of the nation mostly in the Slovak case, bearing in mind that the peasant archetype plays an important role in the whole of Central Europe as well.

Instead of industrialisation pressures for a homogenising workforce, it was the nation-state centralisation, communication, the spread of state-managed education systems and bureaucracies that finally created modern nations in most of eastern and central Europe. Except for some earlier industrialised areas (such as Bohemia, Silesia or West Danubia), this all happened before the massive state-managed industrialization began in the 1950s. In Habsburg Austria (since 1867 Austria-Hungary), German speaking Austrians and Magyar speaking Hungarians gained central power in the growing agricultural modernization process, in the slowly appearing industry and in the

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[8] The number of people working in agriculture declined dramatically during twentieth century in the whole eastern and central Europe. In 1930 in Slovakia, for example, worked in agriculture 56,8%, in 1950 38,7% in 1970 20% and in the 1999 7,2% of inhabitants (Danglová 2001).

politically ethnicising state. On the other hand, disadvantageous peasant populations speaking languages other than the ones enforced by the state were forced to merge into different nations by their newly emerging national elites. All this happened when the peasants, for the first time, crossed the interest of the state, which was becoming the nation-state.

The Versailles Peace System after 1918 created the states with great regional disparities (a typical example is the contrast between the industrial Czech lands and agrarian Slovakia). The application of the nation-state ideology to the overwhelmingly multi-ethnic setting particularly visible in the cities (see Csáky 1999) buried any further possibility for the multinational arrangement of the region. New states provided state-based, nation-promoting post-independence nationalisms (Brubaker 1996) and later on, in the 1930s and 1940s projects inspired by fascism shifted to open organic nationalism (often using Catholic ideology). After various waves of ethnic cleansing and forced migration of populations during and after World War II, communist populism invented a new, seemingly internationalist ideology. As excellently explained in the case of Romania, however, communist state policies further strengthened the nationalist imaginary (see Verdery 1991, 1991a, 1996).

Only recently, from the intellectual circles of the 1980s, has the third powerful ideological project emerged: that of civil society, liberal capitalism and multicultural peace connected with the slogan of 'return to Europe'. Although for the respective people it seemed unsensible for this to return anywhere – the vast majority of them had never left their homes – the logic of this enlightened 'return' was to reach the stable (West) European harbour where ideal civil society supposedly already existed. Put differently, in the West the 'backward' East would 'civilize' itself, closing up the old national animosities forever. The problem with the multicultural concept is that it is not very congruent with the nation-state arrangement even in the West itself – the more advanced form of national exclusionism is hidden in the practices of citizenship. On the other hand, the understanding of multiculturalism is an empty catchword rather than a real practice among many members of Central European intelligentsias with their strong loyalties to national collectives and national narratives. Last but not least, discursive and actual dominance of the post Cold War West did not allow the creation of another new ideology in the East other than that of catching-up. Very soon

after the collapse of communism, many people personally experienced an underdog position – for example, when they walked down the colourful streets of Vienna for the first time or travelled with no money in old coaches to Venice and Paris or even when they worked as au-pairs in London or just listened to some of their revolutionary intellectuals who made them aware of the fact that forty years of their lives had been lost. Although most of them rationally accommodated to that new reality, it was still too difficult for them to believe that they lost the (Cold) war they had never fought in.

Everyday nationalisation

After World War I, it was the state, which had to come first to tell to people how much they needed it. In what is Slovakia today, the new nation-state idea was connected with Czechoslovak state identity (see Bakoš 1999). For various reasons, this state policy strengthened ambivalent Slovak nationalism. The Czech intelligentsia that came to build a new republic for Slovaks, did not adapt very well to different conditions and very often tried to civilize backward, Catholic peasants. This Czech concept of 'fate of the white man'[9] met with the disapproval of significant parts of the growing Slovak elite. As a result, Slovak national identity became much more anti-modernist by preserving and defending folk demonstrations and rural virtues of people as they were invented by Romantic revolutionaries of the nineteenth century.

Political practice saw the effective deployment of the idea of liberation from double oppression: from foreign rule as well as from feudalism. No ideology – either socialist or liberal in origin – had any chance of success if it did not grasp these issues. Therefore, populism operating in the name of *l'ud* (the people) – no matter what was the ideology or the name of the political party – had to become mainstream.[10] According to its logic, only peasants held the pure national identity. In the absence of

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[9] I would like to thank to Juraj Podoba for this metaphor. I also thank to him for giving the name to 'urban romanticism' I use later in this paper and sharing it with me.

[10] The term *l'ud* has (not only) in Slovak language quite confusing meanings. It means the mass of population in general. It also implies the 'nation' as an ethnic category (even when the *národ* is more explicit one) and, last but not least, it also means the class, the lower strata of the society, the opposition to elite, aristocracy, bourgeoisie, etc. The third interpretation (indirectly together with the national one) was very effectively used by communist regime when *l'ud* meant workers, peasants and sometimes 'the working intelligentsia', virtually everyone. Among others, *l'ud* is also the non-urban Slovak population. Due to its alleged contamination by communist ideology and, therefore, having quite derogative meaning, the *l'ud* disappeared from political discourse after the 1989.

Slovak urban high culture, the countryside was over-represented and urbanity predominantly perceived as non-Slovak.

As a part of the nationalist imagery, the new symbol of antiauthoritarianism was introduced in the nineteenth century: the rebellious hero from the folk whom Eric Hobsbawm (1959) called the social bandit. The robber-like freedom-fighter who loved poor peasants and hated rich aristocratic oppressors, well-off land-owners and merchants was, in Slovakia, given the name *Jánošík* – the same name as the Polish prototype of Robin Hood. Immediately after the foundation of the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and then again from the 1950s onwards, the notion of the deep-rooted 'robber for freedom' phenomenon was used in Slovak populist politics to great effect. Books, movies, and folklore are somehow connected with this rural phenomenon.[11] Later on, the reproducers of the non-aristocratic Slovak nation during communism propagated the proletarian origin of the robbers as well. Although far less intensive than during Mečiarism (1994-1998), on the European scale these *Jánošík* notations also work today.[12]

Dressed in folk costume and circled by the large belt around his body with *valaška* in his hand, *Jánošík* inspired not only romantic writers.[13] Later on, folklore enthusiasts and state-employed folklore professionals focused on the robber hero. The state, from the 1950s onwards, established and financed professional folklore ensembles and festivals, which represented Slovak culture both at home and abroad.[14] As a matter of prestige, for example, children from many middle class families up until very recently had to dance and sing in one of the well-known academic folklore ensembles when they entered university.[15] Another component that was important for reproducing

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[11] The popularity of *Janošík* is still very much alive. Under the Slovak-Czech-Polish co-production, in 2002 started to be filmed its fourth version. The first one appeared in 1921, the others in 1936 and 1963 (www.sme.sk, 18.10.2002).

[12] The Slovak military folk music named *Jánošík* is known even in the NATO headquarters in Brussels. The players are recruited among the diplomats and military representatives of Slovak Republic to NATO (www.sme.sk, 17.11.2002).

[13] The *valaška* is a special slender axe reportedly used by sheep shepherds and log cutters in the mountains. Due to its unpractical use in the everyday life, this axe is rather artificial construct of folklorists and writers than a real working tool.

[14] The folklore festivals are still very popular in Slovakia. The 37th folklore festival in Detva organized in July 2002, for example, visited approximately twenty thousand people including the Prime Minister, ministers, members of parliament and most popular political parties (www.sme.sk, 14. 7. 2002).

[15] The best known are *Lúčnica*, *Ekonóm*, *Technik* based at Bratislava universities. Many others, however, work in the cities and towns across the entire country.

folklor elements in Slovak nation was a musical instrument called *fujara*.[16] It is a symbol of pastoralism, a symbol of central Slovakia but also a symbol of the Slovak nation. According to musicologists, there have never been so many producers of *fujara* in Slovakia than there are today.[17] This instrument has penetrated into the towns, and the *fujara* is produced and played by more doctors, engineers, technicians and teachers, than by people with the original types of rural employment (Mačák 1999). Pastoralism and the countryside more broadly – and whatever it implied in the sphere of language, food-production, folklore, everyday life – was invented as an important element of Slovak identity.[18]

Although people gave up wearing folk dresses of their parents - in the 1980s just the oldest generation in villages wore them - the rural phenomena re-entered people's everyday life. *Ľudové izby* (folk rooms) became very popular and representative in private houses and public places, hotels or restaurants. They were – and they still are – furnished with home made wood furniture, surrounded by pastoral and hunting artefacts, folk ceramics and wood and ceramic folk hollow ware. Another symbol has appeared during the last fifty years: *salaš* (sheep-fold) – typical Slovak restaurants for motorists along the highways – as well as folk-like Slovak Restaurants in bigger cities. Today, as elsewhere in Europe this symbolic repertoire has started to be incorporated into the tourist industry, but its usefulness for politics has not yet been forgotten.[19]

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[16] The *fujara* is a large cylindrical duct flute, derived from the bass model of the family of three-hole flutes. It originated about the beginning of the 18th century in the area around the cities of Zvolen, Detva and Banská Bystrica in central Slovakia (Mačák 1999).

[17] *Fujara* began to be seen as representative of Slovak folk musical instrument already in the 19th century. After the establishing of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993 (and even before), however, *fujara* is given as an official gift to politicians visiting Slovakia. In 1994-1998, members of parliament and especially the speaker of parliament often publicly played *fujara* (Mačák 1999). The current Slovak president is well known by folk gifts he hands over to colleagues in office. The *Fujara* belongs to the most important artefacts from his repertoire.

[18] For example, the most popular theatrical performance in the history of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava (est. 1920), continually played since the 1970s and finishing several hundreds reprises is the musical inspired by the *Jánošík* tradition (*Na skle maľované*).

[19] The most popular party of the 1990s Slovakia, *Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko* (HZDS) of Vladimír Mečiar, had a new party logo for the parliamentary elections in 2002. It was a boy dressed in folk costume which had on its chest the honey gingerbread heart with the Slovak tricolour (blue - white - red) and with the words "I love S" ("S" is an emblem of HZDS). The creator of the logo said that he was inspired by the fact that HZDS is a popular (*ľudová*) party and this is why he dressed his boy into folk costume. According to him, the gingerbread heart also symbolises Slovak folk (www.sme.sk, 7.8.2002).

Slovak national identity has survived various shocks during the twentieth century. However, its main component, rural inhabitants who have village consciousness even though they have lived in the capital, has remained. Peasants formed the bulk of voters in the Slovak part of Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1939) and their interests determined political mobilization at that time. Rural, organic nationalism was employed during the Slovak Republic under Nazi tutelage (1939-1945). Later on, one of the aims of communist modernization policy was to diminish the gap between the city and countryside. Although certainly a good goal to eliminate social inequalities as the source of instability, this policy, however, meant that rather than the countryside being urbanized, the converse occurred: everyday life in the newly emerged city districts was accompanied by the same symbolism, rituals and village consciousness as were known to people from their rural settlements.

The concept of civil society and urban identity were born among intellectuals in the late 1980s. At that time, 1920s and 1930s city culture began to be studied, and the new images of urbanity that served as confirmation of the urban, middle-class and western origin of Slovaks were invented and publicly celebrated. Especially after 1989, Slovak urban identity was stressed above all in the 'liberal' media, which brought stories about the good old days in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Some naive ethnographies of 'urban romanticism' were published and people became engaged by the monarchist pictures, petty bourgeois life style and Jewish symbolism.[20]

Pre-war 'good old days' probably really existed, but keeping in mind the selective nature of any commemoration I would maintain certain scepticism. The fact is, however, that this was the first time, when a significantly growing part of the Slovak elite – though naively and by contesting with those believing in the peasant tradition – systematically stressed the urban environment in the Slovak context. This was possible, I believe, mainly because peasants as an actual social stratum have vanished. On the other hand, an emergence of this 'urban romanticism' filled the gap made by communist cultural policies: it became a reaction to the communist silence about the urban culture recognized as hostile to Marxist-Leninist ideology (i.e. bourgeois).

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[20] As it is the case of entire Central Europe, the Jewish heritage and symbolism became very popular after 1989. Apart from the silence about Jewish history during communism, the popularity of this imagery was strengthened by the fact that Jews in this region embodied urban and petty bourgeoisie life style most visibly.

Therefore, although all streams of Slovak intelligentsia have had strong rural roots, some of them were inspired by this urban ideal construct. Together with experiences of rural nationalism of the third government of Vladimír Mečiar, this new ideology re-shaped Slovak nationalism, making it more citizenship-oriented and putting it onto a European scale where moderate nationalisms of other nation-states already defended fuzzy national interests against the EU superstructure.

Unlike the followers of this third development project – that of civil society and liberal capitalism – I think the celebrated secular and urban public sphere has never existed in towns and villages of agrarian Central Europe. This does not mean, however, that some kind of domestic civil society did not work. It did, but it looked rather differently than the one characterized by civil society missionaries. Some other features changed during the last decades, however, and they are more important for this debate. When communism departed in the 1950s, it changed society's social structure. Rural poverty of the pre-war period was overcome by the 1970s and 1980s and compared to the past, impressive levels of education, occupational specialization, secularisation and even urbanization were achieved. It is a matter of discussion to what extent these changes worked in favour of a particular political project (such as that of liberal democracy). One thing, however, is certainly right: there were better structural conditions for the western-like civil society in the 1990s than there were in 1930s. Nevertheless, although I do not want to omit the role of the winning class of transformation after 1989 for the change in pattern (new managers, people with a degree from western universities, advisors of current politicians and/or western banks and investors, IT experts, all predominantly English speaking males under forty), I still think for large part of the population the only stable structure remains the one I call post-peasant family, which is characterized by primordial loyalties and rural nostalgia.

Surviving peasant family?

In Slovakia today more than forty per cent of people live in the settlements that are inhabited by no more than five thousands inhabitants. (Krivý, Feglová, Balko 1996). The culture of villages and small towns dominates across the landscape. After his studies of villagers in the Tatra Mountains, Peter Skalník noted that each change of

political regime at the state level 'demanded from the villagers, and especially their leadership, an ability to read these changes (or their promises) well, in order to reap benefits for the village community and the survival of the same leaders' (1993, 221). Carole Nagengast (1991) presents an argument that the reintroduction of capitalism in Poland after 1989 was not the logical and inevitable victory of a superior system (the liberal, modern, western one) but it rather reflected continuities in earlier, class-based social relations that masqueraded as socialist relations for the four and a half decades of communism. Focusing on elites, authors Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley (1998) call the processes that followed 1989 in Central Europe, 'making capitalism without capitalists'. They characterise it as a distinctive new strategy of transition adopted by the alliance of technocratic and intellectual elites in societies where no class of private owners existed prior to the introduction of the market. As a special mechanism for this installation of capitalism, the most important was the reproduction of various forms of capitals based on status, prestige, skills and social ties which the elites held and reproduced despite all the regime changes. Operationalising these remarks, I incorporate the communist years into one continuum of selectively reproducing resistance by local communities to macro-changes. Although socialist and post socialist rules caused very painful ruptures (collectivisation and de-industrialisation were probably the strongest ones), the level of continuity and perseverance of 'traditional' relations and practices among the population was extremely high.

According to the logic of currently ongoing westernisation, nepotism, clientelism and exchange of services, all the ties and practices related to agrarian populism, should vanish when advanced capitalism accommodates. Why are they, however, still in the centre of EU reports (not only) on Slovakia? First of all, although indistinguishable from the transformation processes, these 'traditional' parts of people's lives could be found elsewhere, including the advanced West. In post communist conditions their overwhelming presence is rather linked to the weak states, than to communist heritage itself. Nevertheless, and this is the second point which makes the difference, because these practices and relations particularly in central and eastern Europe have very much more to do with pre-modern cohesion of a kin group and egalitarian ethic of a village community – what one could call populist structures and cultures - they should be analysed more precisely.

Peasant past and present

The peasant communities continued to dominate and survived in most of central and eastern Europe up to the introduction of communist industrialisation in the 1950s. They were characterised by the central importance of the family farm as the basic unit of social organization (Shanin 1966; Shanin 1971; Hann 1995).[21] As explained by some social historians and ethnologists (Mitterauer 1995), the family in the pre-capitalist or early capitalist era differed in rural societies in terms of the mode of employment.[22] In the mountains, large extended families worked much more often as an ideal self-subsistent peasant unit. In the lowlands, however, more market-oriented labour relations were established and day-labourers were employed (Mitterauer 1995; Švecová 1997). Although significantly diverse, in Slovakia before 1950s, the low lands were typically grain and wine-producing regions, employing the highlanders and rural proletariat as seasonal workers. The major part of the country consists of mountains, however, and there cattle raising was the main source of livelihood. The consequences for family structure were obvious – the extended families employing farmhands throughout the whole year were much more prevalent in the mountains than in the lowlands. In relation to that, instead of primogeniture inheritance, the land between the Baltic and the Balkans was divided in the next generation equally among all the inheritors. Apart from the enormous pauperisation and rural overpopulation, these factors strengthened the unifying role of the broad family and village and permeated into the towns and cities.

As described in Mediterranean Europe (Gellner and Waterbury 1977 and others), initially, when the state was not strong enough to change the stable community rules, the classical patron-client relationships evolved with the ability of local chiefs to

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[21] Land was the main source of livelihood, directly providing the major part of people's consumption needs. There was a specific 'traditional' culture related to the way of life of small communities and the peasantry was broadly dominated by outsiders. Inheritance of land from generation to generation; low productivity due to archaic technology; small (if any) social differentiation; and self-sufficiency as an exclusive sector of the economy characterized the peasant life. Apart from that, the cycle of wealth and poverty (in which the rich became poor in the next generation and vice versa), the predominance of village identity and solidarity through reciprocity during agricultural works as well as ceremonial events were typical of this era (Hann 1995).

[22] Farmhands participate in all activities of family life. Day-labourers, on the other hand, were characterized by short contracts. Although these ideal types could not be found in their pure form, there was nevertheless a remarkable correspondence between family economies with farmhands and cattle raising, on the one hand, and day-labourers and viniculture, on the other. The various ecotypes of grain farming had a position between these two. Unlike viniculture or grain farming, cattle raising does not have seasonal peaks that cause a sharp demand for labour.

facilitate the growing interconnectedness between the state and peasant community. Later on, better-organized party brokerage was developed. This reached its peak during the fascist corporate state (1939-1945), which often used Catholic hierarchy, institutions and ideology for its patronage practices. During the communist system – without the Church's assistance – highly developed party brokerage became the rule. This all became important during the unprecedented privatisation after 1989. Its obvious unfairness was presented as free competition – i.e. hard working, initiative, skilled and educated people should gain a major part of wealth as well as power. In a far less ideological reality the party brokerage remained crucial and family clans became the new class.

Family under Communism

The most rapid social and economic changes in Slovakia came into being in the middle of twentieth century. Many peasants began to be employed in rising heavy industry, but many of them, however, stayed in their villages. Consequently, the peasant worker (*kovoroľník*) became a typical phenomenon. During the day, he/she worked in the factory and in the evenings and weekends in his/her private backyard.[23] The number of people that were not employed in industry gradually decreased and these people remained working mostly in co-operatives, or found a place in the growing service sector (education, social and healthcare). This particularly affected the gendered division of labour. The socialist state introduced a specific gender regime, which to a large extent tried to contest the traditional peasant and Catholic understanding of gender roles. However, this new regime did not bring the liberation of women as it claimed to do because, on the one hand, it was still too difficult to change selectively persistent peasant social practices and relations (with the woman as mother and housewife) and on the other hand, the communist implementation of the formal equality of sexes was rather artificial.[24] Due to the workforce demands of

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[23] As explained by Hraba, McCutcheon and Večerník (and many others), one spouse worked at cooperative or state farm while the other travelled for a job to the nearby manufacturing plant, and both gardened a piece of private land. Rural households with working children (and working grandparents in some cases) expanded the pattern, with a member or two working on the farm and others, in town (Hraba; McCutcheon; Večerník 1999).

[24] As described by Verdery, the socialist state, for example, provided strong pro-natality policy. The direct support for families and mothers, broadly accessible public health-care, paid maternity leave and family allowances were some features of this policy. On the other hand, however, the state fostered the cult of heavy industrial production whose hero workers were male, while agricultural production and activities related to consumption, including employment in the service sector, tended to be symbolized

industry, and subsequently, in the service sector, women's labour became extremely exploited in order to encourage the extensive growth during socialism.

Although an enormous urbanisation was taking place, the unavailability of housing in the cities partly meant that people remained in the villages using the public transport network for travel to work. As advanced socialism was approaching in the 1970s and 1980s, it became more beneficial to live in the villages and at the same time have many advantages of an urban life (state subsidies, availability of services, social and health care, etc.). From the late 1960s, large rural households occupied the top of the Czechoslovak income distribution (Hraba; McCutcheon; Večerník 1999). A significant number of people, therefore, voluntarily stayed in the countryside and the rest also remained partly dependent on the countryside. People from the cities obtained their food-resources through money-less exchanges with the countryside. For example, help from bureaucratic state-sectors (i.e. to obtain a state subsidy for house building, pension, to enter the higher education for their children, vouchers to the spa, or just to obtain a luxury) offered by 'urbanities' were exchanged with agricultural supplies produced by villagers (meat, fruits and vegetables, wine). They also were still very much connected in terms of kinship ties with the village from which the new urbanities derived their identity.

As observed by many anthropologists, because the planned economy would not supply what people needed, they struggled to do so themselves, developing a huge repertoire of strategies for obtaining consumer goods and services in the 'second' or 'informal' economy (Verdery 1996). The family and community networks were for these practices inevitable. In the countryside itself, people originally worked in agriculture, but later on, when agricultural activities became less important because of the industrial production of food, it mutated to include mutual help especially in house building – as the most prestigious symbols of rural community, they altered the land holding from pre-communist era (Podoba 2000) – as well as to various reliefs connected with the needs of one's family in the shortage economy. As described by Podoba (2000), during communism, many people moved from tiny peasant houses to

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as female. The state apparatus was overwhelmingly masculine. The bureaucracy itself, heavy industry, the army, and the apparatus of repression were almost whole male. In the state bureaucracy women usually held clerical and secretarial functions (Verdery 1996).

large buildings with several rooms, bathrooms and modern kitchens. At the same time, however, the core of everyday lives of all generations remained concentrated around the little summer kitchen near the main house building where grandmothers cooked for the whole family. Even relatives from the cities came to have their weekend meals in the village and enjoyed the warm atmosphere at generational dinning tables.

Since the 1950s up to 1989 – and especially in the 1970s and 1980s – the whole of Slovakia was in an age of (public and private) construction. The state extensively supported this boom and as usual, people's activities adapted to this. The capacities of factories and cooperatives to provide mechanisms and technical equipment that was needed for building private houses became the technical part of the mutual support network. Ceremonies and gift-exchanges, during *rites de passage* for instance, remained reciprocal, as they had been before communism. Moreover, they were also extended to previously unknown exchanges. Especially during late socialism, all this became much more based on cash supply. Parents, grandparents and the broader family were able to accumulate huge amounts of money. Apart from cars and house equipment, many parents built large houses for their heirs and financially subsidised the needs of their children as well as personally helped with the raising of grandchildren. Although the state provided impressively low interest loans and cooperatives were additionally willing to help, supporting practices reminiscent of the traditional rule of customary law – that of the compulsory contribution of an 'old' family to the young one, if this moved from the more generational family household to its own – even strengthened family solidarity. This continued because apart from building and improving houses and cottages (*chalupárenie*), or creating limited food production in private backyards, there was not much to do during socialism. When the family achieved a certain level of welfare – a house, a car, and a cottage – it could not use its wealth or invest the money, which had been saved (Možný 1991). Travelling abroad was restricted, luxury goods were unavailable, and consumption opportunities of an individual were limited.

The peasant consciousness in socialist Slovakia was reproduced also from 'above' through the publicly underlined importance of agriculture (e.g. the food self-sufficiency of the nation which had to be maintained). Also, the harvest achievements

– together with the news from industrial manufacturing – were among the top news items on television and in the newspapers everyday. All this was supported by the ideologically created alliance between industrial and agricultural workers, an actual version of Marxism-Leninism. Unlike situations in which the Leninist form of Marxism used the peasants as the class most important for the success of the revolution, promising them land but then humiliating them in favour of the heavy industry (Mitrany 1951), in Czechoslovakia (and particularly in less developed Slovakia where the central redistribution was extremely beneficial), the peasants and their heirs were (after the furious 1950s) rather corrupted by state-socialist policies. The main recipients of the corruption schemes were families, which remained with a composition and consciousness very much like the traditional peasant social units. In this way the structural basis receptive for populist mobilization was successfully reproduced.

Post-socialism

After 1989, de-industrialisation became acute in large areas: the majority of rural inhabitants faced the first industrial depression ever. As analysed by Jeff Pratt in Yugoslavia, the communist industrialisation programs drew people from a rural environment to the cities and the formal economy. 'When the motor seized up and quite suddenly all forward momentum was lost, there was a kind of involution in economic and political life. The rural hinterlands became once again a source of livelihood for many who had moved away, ... , the informal economy and clientelistic systems of allocation became more prominent' (Pratt 2000, 770-771). The decline in Central Europe was not as dramatic as that in the Balkans, but many formerly prosperous areas and subsidized sectors of the economy still collapsed.

Soon after 1989, cheap agricultural imports flooded the country (mostly from the EU), agriculture was not at the top of the transformation agenda and rural residents reported a withering of village social life. Also, bus connections were reduced, local roads were no longer maintained either by the state or cooperative, and shops closed (Hraba; McCutcheon; Večerník 1999). Apart from the agonizing factories and cooperatives, the main source of livelihood for many became low state benefits combined with 'illegal' work (i.e. work criminalized by the state). Some people also

returned to the land, to the part time self-subsistence they never fully left. Just as before, conditions of adaptation for which a wide family network is helpful, were very important. The well-connected regional as well as communal leadership also facilitated access to scarce state resources, which were distributed from the centres of power by ruling political parties (in which membership was very easily exchangeable as soon as the party in power changed). The independence of local communities was limited by their political connections. As occurred before 1989, party-based brokerage remained important. The sustainability of extended families and the understanding of their role in the society – the almost ritual role of service exchanges and general distrust towards formalized politics – formed the structural basis when the populist practices were employed in politics.

At the same time, the broad family also softened the negative consequences of economic crisis and supplemented the poor state welfare system. Searching for employment, travelling for a job, or help with social benefit were usually connected with a kin network. As a result of these transitional ruptures, the majority of inhabitants faced significant insecurity and crises of identity. For them, the return back to pure 'tradition' – religion, family and organic nation – as advertised by the populists, appeared automatic.

Religion and transformations

Post 1918, an important connection between the peasants and new nations developed - religion. Although in the past religion already had helped to define nations, only with the appearance of nation-states did this became fully visible. The Roman Catholic Church was perhaps most openly united with former St. Stephen's Hungary, but after 1918, however, the same Catholicism was invented as a distinction-making category. During 1920s and 1930s Slovakia, Catholic intelligentsia strengthened the idea that Slovak and Catholic should be congruent. This stream of national feeling became the decisive one in Slovak Republic (1939-1945) when the official ideology was Christian (i.e. Catholic) nationalism. In addition, in the duration of the Czechoslovak Republic rule (before and after the war), Catholicism was used as an identification of

Slovaks, especially in opposing the Czechs and their alleged protestant secularism, as well as atheist socialism.[25]

The proper inventors of the Slovak nation were in fact predominantly Protestant (Lutheran) priests and village teachers who started to think about Slovaks as a distinct group towards the end of the eighteenth century. The role of Protestants in the 'Slovak National Renaissance' in the 19th century was later (in the 20th century) suppressed. Their role among the contemporary representatives of the national idea has died away because the Catholic majority started to become more decisive in the definition of 'Slovakness'. Some members of the Protestant minority identified more easily with secular modernity. It is usually described as the product of the influence of a kind of 'Protestant ethic', but their self-perception as a forefront minority following the European nation-state ideology should also be taken into account. This orientation toward influences from the West also logically contributed to the strengthening of a deep historical division of Slovaks – into Catholics and Protestants. Even today it is possible to roughly distinguish two elite groups: on the one hand there exists a more cosmopolitan group, which continuously aims to modernize 'backward' Slovakia; and on the other hand, there is another more conservative, Catholic and nationalist group, which aims to preserve the 'moral traditions' of the nation.

The strength of religion during nationalisation was emphasised by the fact that the only people able to successfully mobilise peasant societies were Church employees. Not only were they speaking in the vernacular but also almost always their social origin was rooted in the lower social strata. As a result of the Church's higher hierarchy being mostly Hungarian (especially in political sense) and in contrast, the deprived Church proletariat of Upper Hungary being predominantly Slovak by mother tongue, the 'Slovak' Catholic clergy participated in the establishing of a new high culture after 1918. During this process, the Church was Slovakised and new saints

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[25] It is important to note that Masaryk's invention of Czech (Czechoslovak) identity as secular-protestant, democratic, full of humanity and working virtues - apart from being a myth - was not congruent with Slovak Catholic understandings and even not with Slovak modernist approaches. Many members of Slovak modernist intelligentsia perceived themselves as different from both the Czechoslovak construct and Catholic identity representatives however they perceived the Czech 'culture' as modern and superior to the Slovak one.

were found or (re) invented.[26] This contradicted the interests of Masaryk's project and weakened his Czechoslovak construction. The situation of Protestant priests and the Protestant Church was quite different from Catholics because the Lutheran reformation was predominantly based on Slovak language and ethnicity (Hungarian-speaking Protestants were predominantly of Calvin's confession). This is probably why it was initially easier for Protestant elites to adapt to the new Czechoslovak high culture than for their Catholic counterparts.[27]

Religion under socialism

After 1945, however, everything Catholic began to be perceived as anti-Czechoslovak (anti-Czech) and after the Communist party came to power in 1948, Catholic religion (and religion in general) was officially presented as anti-communist. Nevertheless, the connections between Catholicism and nationalism remained very close and through everyday Church practices, Catholic dissent circles and Catholic ideology very much based on agrarian ideology persisted, and were fully re-invented after 1989.[28] After 1989, it became clearer that nationalism had not frozen before the fall of communism, but that communist ideology – except Catholicism – adopted almost everything that supported nation narrative: peasant roots, national freedom, working diligence and

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[26] Apart from Virgin Mary of the Seven Pains – the Patron of Slovakia, the most important Saints became Cyril and Method. Their name-day is the 5th of July and this became in the 1990s also a bank holiday (together with the 15th of September which is the Fest of Virgin Mary). The importance of Cyril and Method was strengthened after the 1918 as a counter-tradition to the Hungarian state saints, and especially to Saint Stephen. According to the historical facts, the brothers from Byzantium were missionaries among the Slavs in Great Moravia in the 9th century AD. They also invented the first Slavic alphabet and translated some of the Holy Books into this language. Students of Cyril and Method were later expelled from Great Moravia and their influence did not take a long time. Their life story, however, and their enlightened mission (script, faith, Church administration) was after centuries successfully invented as a part of (not only) Slovak national ideology. The story of two brothers and their expulsion fitted very well into the construction of foreign complots against Slovaks and to the imagination of thousand years of Slovak slavery. In addition, for nationalists, the legacy of great historical empire of old Slovaks before Hungarian invasion connected with Cyril and Method confirmed historicity of their constructs. As a typical utilization of this myth today is the Preamble of Slovak constitution.

[27] The Czechoslovak nationality was officially proclaimed in 1918 and a separate Slovak nationality was neglected; in official censuses and statistics they refused to allow a distinction to be drawn between Czechs and Slovaks. The Czechoslovaks comprised 64,1% of the total population and the Slovak minority estimated at 16% of the total (Bakoš 1999).

[28] The symbolical role of the Pope (himself of the nationality which is for Slovak Catholics the closest 'in the soul' to their own), his visits in Czechoslovakia, and especially Slovakia (his third visit after 1989 took place in September 2003), as well as the role of Vatican diplomacy and Catholic hierarchy during the 1990s has not been fully investigated yet. However, their eventual role in Slovak (as well as Croat, Lithuanian, etc.) separatist nationalisms is important to remind.

moral virtue of the population, importance of the family (with more children for economic growth), and so on.

Industrialisation, urbanisation, technical modernisation etcetera, together with state-managed atheisation meant that from the 1950s to the beginning of the 1990s, Church membership became increasingly unimportant for one's own identity, even if some religious rituals (funerals and baptisms) still remained part of people's everyday lives. Indeed, although the importance of baptisms and funerals continued, the younger generations were slowly yet significantly reducing their visits to Catholic Mass and Protestant services.

Prior to 1948, two important tools for social reproduction of religion were the Church's schools and religious education in the public schools. During the communist regime these were expelled from the school system and religious education for the younger generations became strictly the private arena of the family. For the middle class Christian families (initially the vast majority of intelligentsia), however, this atheisation was particularly difficult to overcome. If they showed their religious affiliation, they usually faced heavy sanctions in the workplace. It was impossible for a teacher to enter the Church, for example. Nevertheless, many people travelled from the cities to villages where religious life was much less restricted and more private – there they baptised their children and attended services.

The relaxed political situation in the second half of the 1960s allowed religion back into the public sphere. Religious education was introduced in schools once again, and new churches were built. However, after 1968 the normalization period again criminalized people's religiosity. In contrast, religious affiliation of the Catholic youth in the 1970s and 1980s gained some strength. This was to some extent a resistance towards the communist regime. Youth associations began to work illegally or semi-legally in the parishes, and they were fully revived after 1989, very often accompanied by the beliefs in the rebirth of the nation.

Rebirth of a nation in Europe

Following the changes after 1989, Slovak national identity was lacking some components. Therefore, religiously painted national symbolism experienced a revival, especially before and after Czechoslovakia was set apart on 1st of January 1993. Shortly after 1989, religious identification became more visible, both politically and socially.[29] Apart from the introduction of religious freedom, religiosity and religious identity became increasingly important due to the following reasons: firstly, it was coupled with the worsening of living standards due to the economic transformation; secondly, because nationalism and the construction of Slovak Catholic national identity began to coincide very effectively; and thirdly, due to the structural similarity of communist secular religion and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church. For example, former male communists discovered their religious allegiance and the most well known is the current Slovak president who very often mentions his devoted Catholicity during his long-term activity in the highest communist party structures. However, among ordinary communists this revival trend is visible as well.

Catholic social doctrine based upon pre-modern myths and rural imagery helps to create an enemy, a wealthy capitalist and/or godless socialist society (the coexistence of both is possible). This enemy is embodied in the lifestyle of capitalist consumption in the West. After its liberation from 'devilish' communism and in the best tradition of pan-slavic romanticism, even the 'spiritual' Orthodox East seemed to be more accepted by many Catholics than the West. According to these anti-modern ideas, the destructive western capitalism promotes an egoistic culture of death i.e. one of abortions and euthanasia, homosexuality and prostitution.[30] As much as EU integration became a cause for concern, this anti-enlightenment ideology also offers a salvation for the West.

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[29] According to the census in 2001, from the whole population of Slovak Republic, 84,1 % of citizen consider themselves as to have a confession, out of which 68.9% are Roman-Catholics, 6.9% has Evangelic a.v. (Lutherans) confession, 4.1% are Greek-Catholics (Uniats) and 2% are from the Reformed Church (Calvinist). To the other minority confessions belong 2.2%. The rest, 15.9% of population belong to no religion, or are of unknown confession (www.statistics.sk). Comparing to the census from 1991 the number of people who claim they belong to some confession increased from 72,8 % in 1991 to 84,1 % in 2001. The highest increase (from 60,4 % to 68,9 %) registered the Catholic Church.

[30] The discussion of priests and theologians on the public Slovak Radio (*Slovensko 1*) on the late morning on the 27th of December 2002 used these ideas and similar vocabulary openly. At the meeting with Catholic youth before the visit of the Pope in Slovakia, Archbishop Ján Sokol prophetically mentioned that the attacks against the Church particularly from liberal-secular positions will became much stronger than they were during communism and Catholics should be prepared for that (www.sme.sk, 31.8.2003).

Ultimately due to the fact that the West is not pious enough and will possibly face a decline very soon, it has to accept spiritual help from east European Catholicism. As in many other Catholic peripheries of contemporary Europe - remarkably observed by Mitchell (2002) in Malta, for example - EU integration – if not rejected at all - is by many Catholics perceived as a Christian project. What Mitchell explains as ambivalence towards modernity - EU symbolises affluence and stability, whilst at the same time it threatens 'traditional' morality - in central and eastern Europe often emerges in politics as populism. If its social basis - the continual presence of pre-modern social structures (post-peasant families, for example), practices and relations (patronage or brokerage) and Catholic agrarian ideology - is cumulated by the effects of transitional insecurity (post-1989; the encroaching EU project might be a breaking point especially if it does not work successfully soon after magic May 2004), populist movements may emerge with even greater intensity.

Conclusions

In the fast changing environment of twentieth century central Europe, the traditional understanding of the nation, family and religion among populations seems to be quite stable. This entails a set of practices hostile to some aspects of (western) modernity. In this sense, pre-modern images, social practices and relations common more for an agrarian past than for late modernity still survive although the actual peasantry has died away. From this point it is clear that communism and its fall did not in many respects cause a rupture, it rather provided continuity. On the one hand, in building a new socialist man, the cultivation of rural identities and collective constructions from the pre-communist era continued. On the other hand, it was the communist type of modernization policy that innovated some features of social structure, relations and practices known from pre-communist era (class relations, modes of domination and subordination, patronage, extended family importance, etc.). In this way, the mid-war populism was actually reproduced. First of all, it was the imagination of the nation that kept many agrarian features – folklore, working diligence of simple people, religiosity and moral constitution of population. Excluding religion, communism reproduced everything that was essential for the re-appearance of mid-war populisms. Secondly, when the post socialist transformation was coupled with a worsening in living standards, the family support networks – so well employed in peasant and

communist shortage economies – remained inevitable. Particularly the privatisation of former state property confirmed that continuities on the micro-level are much more important than discursive fashions at the level of the nation state. Because the weak states were not able to provide what people needed, they did it themselves and employed practices and relations, which held throughout all the regime changes. Thirdly, because Catholic religion as a victim of state atheisation became one of the winning ideologies of post socialism, it enriched the understanding of the role of 'traditional' family and already established stereotypes of rural nation to an even greater intensity. In this sense, post socialism went hand in hand with religious revival and that was usually celebrated as a rebirth of the nation. Village egalitarianism and primordial loyalties, upon which a pre-modern populist ideology and practices are based, was essentially reproduced in these ways.

Therefore, populisms after 1989 were not new phenomena in Central Europe. The structural conditions – role of the family, clientship, economic shortages – and the actual conditions – friction between metropolis and provinces, widening of regional differences, modernist ideologies opposed to the people's rural identities, etc. – were similarly positioned after the fall of communism as they were in the 1920s and 1930s. Populist parties, therefore, gained significant support among voters. Some elite-manipulated schemes connected with naively defined neo-liberal modernity followed in 1990s and widened the gap. In these discourse schemes, Europe could be seen as modern and urban - the East as rural and backward. Therefore, most groups of people mentioned in this paper simply did not exist for the forward-looking transformation ideologies, and populists exploited that. Due to this coincidence, I expect populism is far from even close to vanishing from a part of Central European politics even when the respective countries reach the EU harbour.

Beyond these continuities, slightly different populisms also emerge as a result of the transition ruptures. The people's insecurity related to this, fuels the nostalgic imagination of a different nature. Such a transitory anti-modernist nostalgia is more vulnerable to political mobilizations as well as less predictable. The combination of the two types of populisms – stemmed in continuity and rupture – causes the ideological peasant (term used by Nairn 1997) to be resurrected despite the fact that

the whole of Central Europe seems to be as westwards orientated as it has never been in the past.

This touches upon my next argument: that populism is not exclusively an eastern and central European phenomenon, as is implied by those who are in favour of the 'orientalisation' of post-socialism (all the intellectuals who draw sharp differences between the rational and advanced West and backward and tribal rest). Populism rather links the west and east of Europe together. The current rise of xenophobic nationalisms across Europe is one of such examples when the conditions for successful populist mobilization are fulfilled i.e. when there are people that feel underrepresented; and when the people are in disadvantageous positions, aware of being on the periphery, etc. The static ideology of the good old days, the defence of 'untouched' traditions, national characteristics and alleged rural morality, offers a guide of how to leave the misery. This guide is not just politicisation from 'above'. Peasantism is also embedded in Europe's structural background. As profoundly remarked by Nairn, even EU institutional modernity 'remains deeply weighed down by the ball and chain Common Agricultural Policy … [EU] remains deeply compromised by the very ruralist inheritance which has in the past so often nourished ethnic nationalism' (1997, 124). Obviously, as emphasised by Pratt, rural inhabitants elsewhere in Europe have already experienced modernisation in the sense that a huge majority of them were employed in industry, lived in the city blocks, and received a wage. If they eventually returned back to their villages, they simply would not return to the past (Pratt 2003, 190-191). Therefore, applying Pratt's findings on populism, the problem is not that some peasant practices and relations are still alive, but the complex way rurality is invoked in populist discourse as well as how post-peasants themselves are incorporated into populist and national movements. The division line between peaceful symbolism of the rural world and its potentially destructive mobilisation for political purposes is more fragile than many experts on politics would expect.

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