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The Little Czech and The Great Czech Nation *Ladislav Holy*

Introduction

Most of the sociological and political-scientific writing on Central and Eastern Europe is still grounded in a sociological universalism (Kapferer 1988: 3) which treats this region as a politically, economically, and, to some extent, even culturally undifferentiated whole. Various Central and Eastern European countries up to 1989 had essentially the same political and economic system and at present are undergoing what is again seen as essentially the same kind of transformation from a totalitarian political system to democratic pluralism and from a centrally planned to a market economy. Although various countries of the former Eastern bloc displayed many common features which made it possible to perceive the socialist system as radically different from the capitalist and liberal-democratic systems of the free world, there were also considerable differences among them. In so far as Western observers and commentators paid attention to these differences, they explained them by reference to pre-socialist history and political culture (Brown and Gray 1979; Rothschild 1989).

Social equality was an important aspect of the ideology of all former socialist countries, but in Czechoslovakia it was realised in practice to a far more significant degree than anywhere else in Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia eliminated the private sector to a much greater extent and had a more egalitarian income policy than the other states of the socialist bloc. The political system in Czechoslovakia also had its specific features even under communist rule, particularly in retaining the office of president of the republic (Taborsky 1961: 167-72, 182-95),

The 'velvet revolution' of November 1989 which abruptly ended communist rule in Czechoslovakia differed significantly from the way in which the communist system was overthrown in other Eastern European countries. The political change in Czechoslovakia, in contrast with, for example, the Soviet Union or Bulgaria, was not instigated by the ruling elites and largely accepted below, but brought about by the open revolt of the population. Perhaps the most significant feature of the 'velvet revolution' was that it was initiated by students, actors, and other intellectuals, whose publicly expressed opposition to the communist regime was swiftly followed by the masses. Although the creation of a post-socialist social order in Czechoslovakia and in what became the independent Czech Republic in 1993 has many similarities with the process which is now under way particularly in Poland and Hungary, it too has its unique features.

The differences in the form of the socialist system, in the way in which it ended and in the process of political and economic transformation which is now taking place in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, are the result of the different historical development of these countries and of the different cultures which are the product of this development. The aim of this book is to investigate the specific ways in which Czech cultural meanings and in particular the notion of Czech identity and the accompanying nationalist sentiments have affected life under communism, its overthrow, and the political and economic transformation of post-communist society.

Culture and politics; discourse and text

In discussing the role of cultural meanings in the post-communist transformation of Czech society, I make a distinction between culture and discourse. Following the line of thought developed, among others, by Geertz (1973), Schneider (1976, 1980), and Spiro (1982), I understand culture as a system of collectively held notions, beliefs, premises, ideas, dispositions, and understandings. This system is not something that is locked in people's heads but is embodied in shared symbols which are the main vehicles through which people communicate their worldview, value orientations, and ethos to one another.

Politics has for the most part not been the subject of study as a cultural system. It is still often conceptualised as governed by strictly rational considerations of a purely utilitarian kind, of which considerations of costs and benefits are a classical model. Numerous books by historians and political scientists on the political history of the Czechoslovak state are informed by this conceptualisation of the political, and many anthropological studies of politics have also been grounded in it. Anthropologists have examined politics as a give-and-take in which people follow their material interests as consumers in the market of benefits, rights, duties, and privileges. For many, politics is about interest groups, economic forces, and power relations.

I do not conceptualise politics simply as the pursuit of group and sectional interests independent of any particular culture. My assumption is that politics is an aspect of the overall cultural system and every political action is embedded in a wider cultural context. Thus cultural presuppositions and values which in themselves would not be seen as political (in the strict sense of the term) inevitably influence political action (in the narrow sense of the term). In referring to specific political events I pay less attention to particular policies than to the various symbols through which people make sense of the political process.

A similar conceptualisation of the political has been suggested by those anthropologists who see political action as first of all symbolic. In their view, symbolic action is the main form of interaction of political elites with the public and with each other when they are in public view; it is used to assert the legitimacy of power and to bolster the rulers' authority. Symbols are widely used to arouse emotions and enthusiasm for politics. They are used to express identification with particular policies or political forces and are the main means by which people make

sense of the political process, which presents itself to them primarily in symbolic form. All in all, attitudes are shaped more by symbolic forms than by utilitarian calculations (Kertzer 1988). The potency of symbols in political processes derives from the fact that they are vehicles for conception, as Geertz expressed it (1966: 5). In my discussion of specific political events in recent Czechoslovak history, I concentrate on the myths, symbols, and traditions which make possible the identification of people as members of the Czech nation and create Czech national consciousness.

The shared cultural notions underlying and giving meaning to events are invoked not only in symbolic form but also in specific discourses as either implicit or explicit assumptions which underlie their logic or are their explicit subject. The term 'discourse' derives from many different sources and scholarly traditions and in social scientific practice carries different meanings which are often purposely vague (Scherzer 1987: 296). For many writers it is employed in reference to a particular view, model, definition, argument, or even relation. In a more rigorous usage the term has two different senses. Whereas linguists tend to see discourse as units of language that exceed the limits of a single sentence and are produced in everyday communication (see, e.g., Halliday 1978: 109; Halliday and Hasan 1976: 10), anthropologists and some discourse analysts, following the usage shaped largely by Foucault (1972, 1979), tend to see it as a corpus of 'texts' taking spoken, written, iconic, kinesic, musical, and other forms (Seidel 1989: 222) and produced in a variety of contexts (see, e.g., Fairclough 1989: 24; Fairclough 1992; Seidel 1989; Milton 1993). Adopting the latter view, I take discourse to be socially constituted communication which leads to the production of a set of 'texts'. These need not be written or oral but may be constituted through other modes of expression, for example, through the representational or performative arts. Even in their written or spoken form they need not be restricted to a single genre, 'Culture' I take to be a system of notions, ideas, and premises which is not exclusive to any particular discourse but underlies a multiplicity of them.

My discussion concentrates on discourses which gained prominence in Czech society after the fall of the communist regime, and either could not have emerged under communism or had been driven underground and restricted to a narrow circle of dissidents: discourses on the market economy, various forms of ownership, democratic pluralism, civil society, the environment, gender relations, individualism and nationalism, modern Czech history, and Czechoslovak and Czech statehood, among others. These are all public discourses concerned with issues which the fall of communism and the post-communist transformation of society brought into prominence. In limiting myself to the consideration of this type of discourse I do not imply that they are the only ones which currently exist in Czech society.

Linguistic anthropologists have examined the ways in which grammatical categories are used in poetic, magical, and political discourse and reflect culturally specific ways of expressing meaning and the unconscious patterning of thought (Scherzer 1987). Their insight that to 'study culture we must study the actual forms of

discourse produced and performed by societies and individuals' (Scherzer 1987: 306) has, however, been hampered by the fact that they have concentrated mainly on 'the formal patterning principles that organize forms of oral discourse' (Bauman 1986: ix). In focusing on structure they have largely overlooked the fact that discourse also always says something about something (J. B. Thompson 1984: 8, 100; J. B. Thompson 1990: 287ff.). In my analysis of Czech discourses I concentrate not on their structure but on their content. All of them creatively seize on and make explicit what can be seen as basic premises of Czech culture. This is not, however, the only reason I consider discourse an important entry into Czech cultural meanings.

The concept of culture as an ideational system has often led anthropologists to consider culture as a product or object, 'a unitary code of meaning that passes down over time without fundamental alteration and that operates apart from individual or collective action' (Fox 1985: 154).

More often than not, this conceptualisation of culture has limited our insight into the dynamics of cultural processes, particularly the simultaneous processes of continuity of tradition and constant cultural change. An adequate conception of culture must account for the mechanisms which produce both continuity and change. As many discourse analysts have pointed out, discourse is the locus of such mechanisms (Halliday 1978: 124-5; Scherzer 1987: 296, 306; G, Urban 1991: 17). In discussing contemporary Czech discourses I pay particular attention to the way in which what Czechs consider their time-honoured traditions and deep-rooted cultural notions are reproduced and thus perpetually re-created in the present. These discourses are the locus of "a management of meaning" by; which culture is generated and maintained, transmitted and received applied, exhibited, remembered, scrutinised, and experimented with (Hannerz 1987: 550). As Czech culture, like any other, is continuously re-created in contemporary discourses, it is 'always in the making' (Fox 1985: 137, 199) and always a 'work in progress' (Hannerz 1987: 550). Czech themselves are able to see it as an enduring and unchanging tradition because any particular discourse is always constructed in opposition to some other (Thomas 1992). The post-communist transformation of society is a situation of dramatic social change. The discourses which have emerged in this situation either have explicitly invoked discourses current in pre-socialist Czech society or have been constructed in conscious opposition to the official discourses current during the socialist period. In either case, by referring to previous historically situated discourses, they keep alive and, in a new historical situation, make relevant the notion expressed in them and thus create the impression of an unchanging cultural tradition. At the same time, because the current discourses are always conceived of as in contradistinction to past ones, they also foster the impression of change. These two seemingly contradictory impression; form the background for my discussion of the notion of Czech identity.

Czechs and Slovaks

National identity, like all other identities, is always constructed in opposition to those perceived as the Other (Cohen 1974; Grillo 1980; Heiberg 1980; Schlesinger 1987). During their nineteenth-century 'national revival', Czechs constructed their identity in conscious opposition to the Germans with whom they shared geographical, political, and economic space within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their pursuit of national sovereignty culminated in 1918 with the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic as one of the successors of the defeated empire. Although established on the principle of every nation's right to self-determination, Czechoslovakia was in fact a multinational state. Most importantly, it had a sizeable German minority. The Czechs did not feel numerically strong enough to assert themselves against the German element, and therefore the new state was conceived as that of the Czechs, until then part of Austria, and the Slovaks, until then an ethnic minority in Hungary. The inclusion of Czechs and Slovaks in a common state was to the advantage of both. For Czechs it meant the achievement, together with the Slovaks, of an indisputable majority in a multiethnic state. For Slovaks it meant the preservation of their national identity, which had been under constant and ever-increasing threat.

Although Czechoslovakia was a multiethnic state, the Czechs identified fully with it, considering it the restoration of their statehood after three hundred years of Habsburg rule. A growing number of Slovaks were, however, dissatisfied with the dominant role of the Czechs and began to perceive the new republic as replacing their former subordination to Budapest with subordination to Prague. Uneasy Czech-Slovak relations eventually led to the declaration of an independent Slovak state under Nazi tutelage in 1939, the constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic as a federal state in 1968, the confirmation of the federal structure after the demise of communism in 1989, and the eventual separation of Czechoslovakia into independent Czech and Slovak states in 1993.

There were only three federated states among the former socialist countries whose political systems were divided along national lines; the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. All three disintegrated in the aftermath of the fall of the communist system amidst increasing national tensions. The upsurge of nationalist sentiment in Czechoslovakia did not take the violent form that it did in Yugoslavia and parts of the former Soviet Union but manifested itself in prolonged constitutional crisis and political paralysis. The prevailing feeling in the Czech lands - Bohemia and Moravia - is that the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993 was the result of Slovak nationalism, anti-Czech sentiment, and Slovak separatism.

This book is not a study of Czech-Slovak relations but a study of Czech national identity. In it I try to formulate what it means to be a Czech to those who describe themselves as such. The reason I pay some attention to Czech-Slovak relations is that since the expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia in 1945, Czechs have been constructing their national identity mainly in opposition to Slovaks,

perceived as their most significant Other. In discussing Czech-Slovak relations, I describe them solely from the Czech point of view. As I lived and worked only among Czechs, I can talk only about how Czechs see the Slovaks but not about how Slovaks see the Czechs. I suggest, among other things, that against Slovak nationalism stands what may be called Czech nationalism: awareness of a separate Czech identity, the deep-rooted conviction of the existence of a Czech nation, and an explicit or tacit identification with it. This Czech nationalism tends to be overshadowed by the manifest Slovak nationalism even for many Czechs, who, paradoxically, manifest it through its vehement denial. This is because it is the nationalism of a dominant nation which, unlike the Slovak nation, had in its own view already achieved sovereignty in the Czechoslovak Republic.

Czech national identity

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia is generally seen as one instance of a general process of transformation taking place in the former communist countries whereby the ideology of communism is replaced by that of nationalism. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, accompanied by the rise of an often violent nationalism, as well as the peaceful disintegration of Czechoslovakia along national lines, reinforces the image of nationalism as 'the last word of communism' (Alan 1992; 8). According to this image, the disintegration of the 'communist empire' is accompanied by the proliferation of nation-states.

However, the image of the rise of nationalism as an ideology which has filled up the ideological vacuum created by the demise of communism is to a great extent an illusion. Verdery (1993) has argued that the roots of ethno-national conflict in the former socialist societies are not to be sought primarily in 'age-old enmities' and that it would be a mistake to imagine that ethnic and national conflicts had been simply suspended and held in 'cold storage' under socialism. On the contrary, national ideology and thinking in national terms were fostered by the political economy of socialism itself, particularly by its 'economy of shortage'. Although this particular explanation does not fit the Czechoslovak case, Verdery is right to point to the presence of nationalist sentiment under socialism, in spite of the suppression of its political expression. As far as socialist Czechoslovakia is concerned, hand in hand with the officially proclaimed ideology of 'proletarian internationalism' went the recognition of the national principle in the organisation of communist society and the communist state. In fact, the importance of this principle pre-dates the communist state. A constitutional decree of August 1945 deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship all Germans except those who had officially adopted Czech or Slovak nationality before the war. Until then, Germans and Hungarians living on Czechoslovak territory had formally been Czechoslovak citizens, although, except for active anti-fascists, they had been considered 'unreliable' ones. The decree automatically confiscating their property took into consideration only their nationality. Consciousness of national identity and membership of a nation have in many other ways been

strengthened by official policy. Post-war Czechoslovakia declared itself the common state of Czechs and Slovaks officially conceptualised as two equal nations. The federation of 1968 was a federation of two republics created on a national principle. The parliament - the Federal Assembly - included both the Chamber of the People and the Chamber of Nations, the deputies of which were representatives not of the citizens but of their respective nations. People were made aware of their nationality and reminded that it mattered in the occasional population censuses and in the inclusion of nationality on their identity cards.

The national principle in politics and the division of the political scene along national lines remained in place after the revolution of 1989 in spite of the new political rhetoric emphasising the ideals and values of civil society. The constitutional law of 1991 stipulated once again that the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic was a voluntary union of the two equal republics of the Czech and Slovak nations based on the right of self-determination of each. The post-communist state retained the pre-war system of separate Czech and Slovak political groupings. The most important political organisation to emerge from the 'velvet revolution' was the Civic Forum, operating in the Czech lands; its Slovak counterpart was the Public Against Violence. All but one of the newly established political parties were either Czech or Slovak. The single exception was the Civic Democratic Party, a Czech party that in the 1992 elections campaigned and fielded its own candidates in Slovakia as well. However, the feeling of Czech political commentators was that the party began presenting itself as truly 'federal' too late in the campaign, and because of this failed to gain the 5 per cent of the popular vote in Slovakia necessary for representation in the Slovak National Council (the Slovak parliament).

Verdery (1992) points to various other causes of the rise of nationalist sentiment and xenophobia which are now observable in all former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Among other things, she mentions that nationalism provides a convenient answer to the question of who is to blame for the economic and political backwardness of the former socialist countries in comparison with their Western counterparts. The idiom of national difference has become a convenient means of assigning blame to others. In post-1989 Czechoslovakia, Slovaks habitually blamed the Czechs and Czechs blamed the Slovaks for all the ills of their common socialist past. According to opinion polls conducted in 1991, most Czechs and most Slovaks felt that they were financially subsidising the other nation (*Respekt*, 1991, no. 16: 1).

Because Czech nationalism since the creation of the republic in 1918 has been for the most part the nationalism of a dominant nation, Czechness has not needed to be openly asserted. This has led to the view, expressed some fifteen years ago in the discussion in Czech émigré circles about the meaning of Czechness, that the Czech nation no longer existed - that all that was left was a Czech-speaking population. Awareness of being Czech is tacit (Macura 1993: 11). It is grounded in an implicit awareness of the common historical fate of the collectivity spoken of as 'we', but is seldom the subject of an explicit discourse. It becomes such either in situations which

are perceived as national crises or when what is tacitly taken as the Czech way of doing things is threatened by those perceived as the Other. In my exploration of Czech identity I concentrate on certain such recent situations which are of special methodological significance because they represent moments of explicit symbolic manipulation. Just as this manipulation makes assumptions about shared national identity transparent to its participants, it makes them transparent to the observing anthropologist. This is in no small measure due to the fact that in such situations symbols are often contested, verbally interpreted, and in numerous other ways explicitly linked to the values, notions, and ideas for which they stand. For these reasons, I use as my main ethnography a few selected events from recent political history, which I discuss more or less in the order in which they unfolded in historical time: the demonstrations in Prague in 1988 and 1989 which preceded the 'velvet revolution' of November 1989 (chapter 1), the events of November 1989 and the discussion surrounding the beginning of the transformation of Czechoslovak economy (chapter 5), and the political negotiations over the structure of the post-communist state and the discourse about the independent Czech state (chapter 6).

Examining the first public demonstrations against the communist regime in 1988 and 1989 and the overthrow of the communist system in 1989, I argue that the opposition to the communist system was carried out in the name of the nation and was construed as the nation's rising against what was generally perceived as foreign oppression. The rise of nationalist sentiment, far from being a result of the fall of communism, in fact preceded it and stemmed from the perception of socialism as an alien, Soviet imposition which had ruthlessly destroyed the traditions and values which people saw as 'theirs'. The opposition to this alien system was construed and understood as 'us' (the nation) standing against 'them' (the alien system embodied in the socialist state), and the overthrow of socialism took the form of a national liberation. Since then, national awareness has been nourished by the pro-European rhetoric of those advocating privatisation, a market economy, and democracy, which has a long history in Central Europe (on Hungary, see S. Gal 1991) and has been instrumental in constructing the dichotomy between culturally specific (i.e., national) and universal (i.e., European) values.

In all the recent political events and situations which constitute my main ethnography, frequent references were made to Czech history, and for the participants themselves what happened became meaningful because of their shared historical knowledge. To understand these events and situations in the same way as they were understood by their participants requires some degree of historical knowledge, and to provide it one could begin the discussion of Czech identity with a brief outline of Czech history. This history is not, however, a straightforward narrative of everything that happened in the past but a selection of certain past events which are ascribed specific meaning because they are understood as contributing in some significant way to the shaping of the present. Just as any other history is constructed from the point of view of the present-day understanding of its subject,

Czech history is a narrative of past events constructed from the present-day understanding of what it means to be a Czech. In other words, what is understood as Czech history is a construction which makes possible the understanding that 'we are what we are today because this or that happened in our past'. It is a construction which is an integral part of the discourse which perpetually constructs and reconstructs Czech identity. If one began the discussion of Czech identity by offering any particular outline of Czech history, rather than analysing this discourse, one would be constructing it or participating in it. This is what Czech intellectuals are doing when they construct the narrative of the Czech past or 'at last tell the truth about our history'. And this is also what ordinary Czechs are doing when they either accept the intellectuals' constructions as valid, reject, reinterpret, or simplify them, or select from them what they see as significant for understanding who they are.

To be able to analyse rather than shape the discourse, I cannot therefore begin with an outline of Czech history. Instead, I start my exploration of the cultural construction of Czech identity by describing the sharp separation between the public and the private domains brought about by the almost total abolition of the private ownership of the means of production in socialist Czechoslovakia (chapter 1); I then move on to an analysis of the symbols invoked in the events which eventually culminated in the 'velvet revolution' of 1989 (chapters 2 and 3). Many of these symbols are meaningful only in terms of what is understood as having happened in the past and as having particular significance for the present. Like the symbols themselves, these past events are often contested and endowed with different meanings by various participants in the events, who nevertheless understand the events in which they are taking part as the result of a certain course of history. To be able to interpret what it means to be a Czech, I often refer to what this course of history is understood to be. Czechs, of course, argue among themselves over which understanding is right, truthful, or correct and which is false and incorrect. It cannot be the anthropologist's job to arbitrate the actors' dispute. What I see as my main task is to explain why different understandings of the past exist, what contemporary interests generate them, and how they shape the ongoing discourse about Czech identity (chapter 4).

Czech culture

Our understanding of culturally specific meanings is always the result of either explicit or implicit cross-cultural comparison (Holy 1987: 10-11). My understanding of the basic aspects of Czech identity is also the result of comparison. I was born in Prague and lived in Czechoslovakia for the first thirty-five years of my life. Having left Czechoslovakia in 1968, I revisited it for the first time in 1986, having by then lived fourteen years in the United Kingdom. My anthropological interest in Czech culture began in 1989, and I spent six months in Czechoslovakia from July 1992 to January 1993 collecting most of the data on which my account is based. Czech is my first language, and unless I was driving my British-registered car, people who did not

know me did not suspect that I was not a Czechoslovak citizen until I told them. Most Czech customs and ways of doing things were familiar to me, but others struck me as distinctly odd as the result of my constant comparison of the situation in Czechoslovakia with that in Britain. My renewed exposure to Czech culture and the Czech way of life generated a peculiar sense of both familiarity and strangeness. I am sure that the problems on which I concentrate in my account are the result of my comparison of the two cultures - Czech and British - to which I have been intensively exposed during my life and that someone with different experience would probably identify quite different ones.

Given my middle-class background, it is not surprising that most of my 'informants' in Czechoslovakia were persons with whom I would normally associate if I lived there: middle-class, university-educated men and women, many of them my old friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. To eliminate the danger of presenting exclusively a view of the educated Czech middle class, I did some of my fieldwork among the workers in a locomotive depot in Prague and among farmers and workers in a small village in northern Bohemia. Although most of my fieldwork was conducted in particular communities, my account deliberately moves beyond the conventional framework of the community study. An anthropological focus on social and cultural processes operating beyond the local community has long been called for (Boissevain 1975; Crump 1975; Cole 1977; Grillo 1980; Wolf 1982), and my account is meant to be a contribution to such an endeavour. It aims at the description of Czech culture, by which I mean that complex of tacit knowledge, ideas, and notions expressed through the shared system of signs and symbols that enables Czechs to communicate meaningfully with each other.

Czech society is stratified in terms of economic and educational status, differentiated along the urban-rural divide, and increasingly embraces a wide variety of political orientations. The social, economic, and political differences are paralleled by cultural differences. The culture of a small farming village or a small market town is in many ways different from the culture of Prague, the political and cultural capital of the country, or that of other large towns. The culture of manual workers is considerably different from the culture of farmers, on the one hand, and the culture of university-educated elites, on the other. Nevertheless, in spite of this cultural diversity, Czechs recognise a common level of cultural identity and in numerous contexts talk about themselves as an undifferentiated community sharing a single culture. This feeling of cultural commonality is much stronger among Czechs than it is, for example, in Britain. The shared system of cultural notions which makes it possible for Czechs to make sense of each other's attitudes and actions is to a great extent the creation of the 'discursive practices of intellectuals' (Foster 1991: 235) and is effectively reproduced through the mass, public, compulsory, and standardised education system characteristic of modern industrial society (Gellner 1983). The school system disseminates not only knowledge and awareness of the national high culture in the sense of literature, drama, music, and art but also the shared cultural

meanings which enable people to make sense of the world in which they live, of their interactions, and of the constantly changing events in which they are involved.

The book is aimed at analysing these shared cultural meanings. By situating my account on this level I certainly do not intend to imply that all Czechs have appropriated Czech high culture to the same extent or that no differences in cultural awareness exist among them. Such differences, correlated with level of education and/or socio-economic status, manifest themselves in the degree of clarity, explicitness, or coherence with which particular individuals express shared cultural meanings. But a shared core of basic assumptions about the world underpins them and this book is concerned with elucidating these assumptions. Even so, however, my account is inevitably selective. The core of shared cultural assumptions and meanings is itself too vast to be comprehensively treated in a single book. I concentrate on those assumptions and meanings which were invoked in symbolic form during the political events which I describe or explicitly in the discourses which emerged in connection with the fall of the communist system and the post-communist transformation of Czech society. In particular, I concentrate on the relations between nation and state and between individualism and collectivism.

I also discuss Czech notions of egalitarianism and freedom and the images which Czechs have of themselves as individuals and as a nation. I tease these cultural conceptualisations out of the symbols invoked during the first public demonstrations against the communist regime which I describe in chapter 1; in chapters 2 and 3, I discuss them in detail. The images which Czechs hold of themselves as a nation are expressed in terms of what they see as their national traditions: the tradition of culture and good education, and the tradition of democracy. In chapter 4, I argue that it is the existence of these traditions that makes it possible to imagine the nation as a whole which transcends the individuals who constitute it, and that nationalism both makes history a necessity and generates thinking in historical terms. Nationalism is a discursive agreement that history matters without necessarily agreeing on what it is and what it means. In this chapter, I describe the two constructions of the national past which underlie the Czech historical discourse. In chapters 5 and 6, I concentrate on the role played by Czech national traditions and other premises of Czech culture in giving meaning to recent political events. In chapter 5, I describe how the images of the democratic and well-educated Czech nation became the effective rallying force for the political mobilisation of the masses during the 'velvet revolution' and in support of the radical economic reform on which the post-communist government embarked.

In the final chapter, I discuss the way in which Czech cultural notions underpinned the discourse about Czech statehood which preceded the peaceful disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the creation of an independent Czech state. The selection of the premises of Czech culture on which my discussion concentrates was determined by the nature of the symbolic manipulation or of the particular discourses which accompanied the events described. During these events, the Czechs invoked

their shared cultural meanings from different perspectives, and I do likewise. Although my narrative follows the historical sequence of events from 1988 to 1993 in its broad outline, my discussion of the Czech cultural notions in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of necessity draws on events which I then describe in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6 as well as on events which pre-date the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia and the post-communist transformation of Czech society.

Because I was concerned with cultural meanings shared by different strata and sections of Czech society, only some of the data could be generated through participant-observation and discussions with particular individuals. Many of them come from the writings of various Czech intellectuals, who of course are themselves contemplating the problems to which I address myself, as well as from newspapers, magazines, television, and radio broadcasts. There is a reason for this mixture of data, unusual in anthropological monographs. Besides the school, television, the press, and other mass media are nowadays the main means of communication of shared cultural meanings. Those who produce television and radio programmes and write and publish newspaper articles are intellectuals, but their production is 'pitched to the cultural common denominator' (Herzfeld 1982: 647). Television and newspapers are of course not the only settings for the production of texts in which particular topics are discussed and which at once draw upon and reproduce the 'collectively held dispositions and understandings' (Foster 1991:235) that constitute Czech culture. However, in aiming to reach the widest possible audience, they resort to the 'lowest common communication factors' (Parkin 1984: 353) and thus concisely reflect the twists and turns of orally produced discourses. For this reason, I draw on them quite extensively in my discussion.

This does not mean, however, that the views which I describe are exclusively the views of the politicians and intellectuals who make pronouncements on television and the radio and write articles for newspapers and magazines. The period following the fall of the communist system and preceding the dismantling of Czechoslovakia was politically highly charged, and virtually all Czechs participated in the various discourses it produced in one way or another. People talked about the ills of the communist past and the way communist rule ended, debated the process of privatisation, discussed the latest developments in the negotiations between Czech and Slovak politicians, commented on the latest political events and pronouncements, and expressed their views on the overall situation in the country at all possible times and in all possible settings: during their coffee breaks, at parties, in pubs and shops, at bus stops, on trains, or at family dinner tables. They read newspapers, watched television, and listened to the radio, and commented on what they saw, heard, and read.

The anthropologist who writes about the common culture of a society as large and diversified as the Czech one faces a problem not experienced by those who write about clearly bounded local communities or fairly homogeneous 'primitive' societies. I have often been forced into formulations which may seem unjustified

generalisations, particularly when they describe attitudes of Czechs in general to issues on which there are obviously differences of opinion among the various sections of the population. All such generalisations are meant to point to significant trends emerging from conversations with a number of people in various fieldwork settings. Opinion surveys conducted by professional Czech and Slovak sociologists - for example, the Institute for Public Opinion Research, the Centre for Empirical Research, and the Agency for Independent Social Analysis - served for me as an indication of the extent to which the trends I detected among the people to whom I spoke and listened were in fact representative of the Czech population as a whole.

A national culture has not so far been the subject of much anthropological research. Perceived as a level of reality that is not susceptible to investigation by standard anthropological methods of participant-observation, it has become almost exclusively the preserve of historians or political scientists. It is, however, a level of reality that is becoming increasingly important in a world divided into nation-states which nowadays affect more aspects of their subjects' lives than ever before. In my view, it is an area of reality on which anthropologists should have something useful to say, and this book is a modest attempt at grasping this reality by specifically anthropological methods.

3. Self-stereotypes and national traditions

The most obvious expression of the search for the essence of national identity is the images people have of themselves and of other nations. When reflecting on themselves as a nation, Czechs refer either to certain national qualities or dispositions or to what they consider to be their national traditions. The self-images expressed through the characteristics which they ascribe to themselves and through the traditions which they claim as their own differ considerably. This raises the questions of why this should be so and how it can be cognitively tolerated and managed.

The ultimate source of the Czech egalitarian ethos is the belief in the equality of individuals in nature. It is acceptable to ascribe an individual's failure to a lack of effort or hard work but bad form to ascribe it to a lack of intelligence, for this would amount to the admission of inherent inequality, which is culturally denied. We may not all be good at everything, but each of us is good at something, which proves our natural equality. I do not think that anyone was sorry when IQ tests disappeared in communist Czechoslovakia, having been declared an invention of bourgeois pseudoscience; the illusion of equality in nature could thereafter be maintained without being openly challenged.

The little Czech as the typical representative of the Czech nation is the embodiment of ordinariness and healthy common sense. Whatever else he may lack, he does not lack intelligence. Hence the unresolved problem which has not ceased to

occupy the imagination of literary critics and the population at large: was the Good Soldier Schweik actually a simpleton, or was he an intelligent man? Did he really believe in what he was doing, or did he only pretend to believe (a sign of his shrewdness and natural intelligence)? However tenuous, tortuous, and unconvincing the proofs may be, the consensus tends to be that Schweik was an intelligent man who simply put up a great show. It could hardly be otherwise: Schweik was a Czech and therefore he must have been intelligent. Those who say otherwise virtually brand themselves as national traitors.

The little Czech has 'golden Czech hands' - an expression one continually hears uttered with pride - that manage to cope with everything they touch: he is talented, skilful, and ingenious. The ascription of stupidity is the main device for constructing the Other. The stereotype of the Slovak is of a dim-witted shepherd, and the most popular jokes circulating in pre-November Czechoslovakia portrayed policemen - admittedly the representatives of the state but certainly standing outside the nation - as idiots.

The generalisations about national character which widely exercised the imagination of nineteenth-century scholars have long since ceased to be seen as a legitimate topic of academic concern, but they remain a part of the popular discourse of every nation and, indeed, of any group which sees itself as different from others. Czechs are no exception in this respect. They too have more or less clearly formulated ideas about their characteristic traits, which often compare unfavourably with the traits which they ascribe to others. Such comparisons have re-emerged since the overthrow of the communist regime, when encounters with foreigners from Western Europe, of whom most ordinary Czechs had had no prior personal knowledge, became part of their experience. The renewed contemplation of national characteristics was, however, the result not only of this new personal experience of individuals but also of the change in political culture and ideology. The official communist ideology emphasised the socialist character of Czechoslovak society. Any characteristics which might have been perceived as typical of Czechs were seen as unimportant; what were emphasised were the characteristics of the new socialist man, which Czechs were not only encouraged to embrace but presumed to share with people everywhere who were building socialism. International sport remained the only possible field in which nationalist feelings could be expressed, and it is significant that the last major anti-Soviet demonstration after the suppression of the Prague Spring by Soviet troops broke out spontaneously in Prague in April 1969 after the Czechoslovak national ice hockey team defeated the Soviet team,

Apart from commenting incessantly on the rude behaviour of officials, waiters, shop assistants, nurses, and anyone else who is ostensibly employed to serve the public (see, e.g., *Lidové noviny* 28 December 1990; 14 March 1991) and comparing the politeness which permeates the public sphere of life in the West with the rudeness and haughtiness typical of Czechs in public (see, e.g., *Vlasta* 45 (1991), no. 43: 12), the Czech press provides numerous other insights into the way in which Czechs see

themselves. The images which emerge are quite distinct from the Czech intelligence, talent, skill, and ingenuity that are emphasised when Czechs construct the boundary between themselves and others:

The Czechs are envious and grudging beyond belief; they are capable of envying others even their chastity... We are our own enemies in our discord.

(Forum, 1990, no. 35:3)

The other day I was watching the television discussion group *Netopýr* on the phenomenon called Czech national character - our national subaltern tutorship, our regional and intellectual inferiority, our magnificently justified mediocrity, our shrewdly circumvented off-the-peg morality and lack of any high vision, and everything that has made us (and, although we do not like to admit it, still makes us) 'an open-air museum of idiots in the heart of Europe'.

(Tvorba, 1990, no. 42)

Everybody here is almost neurotically dissatisfied with everything. (I sometimes suspect that this characteristic of ours is pretence; I wonder if it does not mask the fact that people are in fact content but do not want to admit it lest someone should envy them. Maybe our people would be missing something in life if they did not envy and grumble. This masking of the real state of affairs is also our second nature, conditioned by a disconsolate history.) And moreover; dissatisfaction also suggests that we are people of great wants and not easily satisfied with just any thing. Dissatisfaction is part of our national *bon ton* and apparently also the origin of the Czech critical attitude, which undoubtedly has its intellectual advantages. It usefully dissolves anything stagnant and laughs at it satirically; however, it mostly manages to dissolve even itself and probably contributes to the fact that our development is always bumpy, full of discord and quarrels. (Smetana 1991: 9-10)

In contemplating the Czech attitude toward talented people, Smetana - along with many other commentators - stresses envy as the most typical trait of the Czech character:

A hero in Bohemia faces many more difficulties than anywhere else because he is confronted - sooner or later - with malicious petty-mindedness and envy.

With us, this envy is the obverse... of popularity. A proud, sincere, and truthful person is a thorn in the side of the people of Bohemia, whether he is a politician, an entrepreneur, or an artist. Since time immemorial, democracy with us has degenerated into a kind of egalitarianism which is intolerant of authority, rejects responsibility, and dissolves everything with doubts and slander, as if our people did not believe that greatness is indeed greatness, noble-mindedness is noble-mindedness, and truth is truth...

And in Czech political and social life this traditionally manifests itself as extraordinary discord, quarrelsomeness, and intolerance, selfish haggling, and all this even at times when it would be more useful to pull together in the same direction (1991:98).

Until our hero changes into a martyr, the nation is not satisfied.

(1991: 97)

Similarly, Arnošt Lustig said in an interview for a Czech newspaper during one of his visits to Prague,

Škvorecký once explained some of the least pleasant traits of the Czech nature to me in the following way: when a Czech has a goat, his neighbour does not want to have one as well but rather wishes his neighbour's goat to die.

(Nedělní Lidové noviny, 11 January 1992: 3)¹

The above selection of quotations from the Czech press accurately represents the views of the Czech population at large. According to a sociological survey of stereotypes of Czech character conducted in January 1992, a full 76 per cent of the traits most often mentioned by Czechs as characteristic of themselves were distinctly negative ones. The most prominent among them were envy (mentioned as the most characteristic trait of Czechs by 28 per cent of respondents), excessive conformism (mentioned by 15 per cent), cunning (mentioned by 15 per cent), egoism (mentioned by 11 per cent), laziness (mentioned by 8 per cent), and, in descending order of frequency of mention cowardice, quarrelsomeness, hypocrisy, haughtiness, and devotion to pleasure and sensuous enjoyment. When it comes to positive characteristics, the respondents mentioned that Czechs were hardworking (17 per cent) and skilful (8 per cent), and had a sense of humour (8 per cent). One-third of the respondents maintained that the Czechs had no special characteristics, were unable to think of any, or argued that it was possible to ascribe characteristic traits only to particular individuals, not to the nation as a whole. A similar survey had been conducted in October 1990, and between the two surveys there emerged a distinct polarisation between the positive and negative characteristics which the Czechs ascribed to themselves. The percentage of respondents in the two surveys who considered certain traits typical is summarised in table 1.

The little Czech is an ambivalent character. On the one hand he is seen as talented, skilful, and ingenious, on the other as shunning high ideals and living his life within the small world of his home, devoting all his efforts to his own and his family's well-being. By some people he is seen as the salt of the earth, with a character that has made it possible for the Czech nation to survive its frequent and often lengthy periods of oppression and foreign domination. Many others consider him to embody all the negative Czech self-stereotypes. One of my informants aptly characterised the little Czech as 'someone on to whom all Czechs project the characteristic traits which they possess but do not want to admit it'. Some of my informants, in response to the question of who the little Czech was, said 'ninety-nine per cent of Czechs' or 'most

¹ This is a common Czech parable which I have heard in different variants: when a neighbour's field has a better crop, the farmer does not wish his field to yield as well as his neighbour's but prays for his neighbour's crop to be seized by blight, When a neighbour's wife buys a new fur coat, my wife does not wish to have one as well but wishes her neighbour's to be eaten by moths.

Table 1. Traits ascribed by Czechs to themselves (percentages), 1990 and 1992

Trait	1990	1992
<i>Negative</i>		
Envious	12	28
Conformist	9	15
Cunning	7	15
Egoistical	10	11
Lazy	3	8
<i>Positive</i>		
Hard-working	4	17
Skilful	3	8
Having a sense for humour	3	8

Note: The eight traits are those most frequently mentioned by respondents in the 1992 survey. Percentages are those of respondents who mentioned one of the eight traits. The replies in the 1992 survey add up to more than 100 per cent because the respondents could mention as many traits as they wished.

Source: *Aktuálné problémy Česko-Slovenska*, January 1992: 74-6.

Czechs'. Characteristically, although all the people I spoke to could name specific others who were, in their opinion, little Czechs, none of them considered themselves to belong to this category. Indeed, people often said, 'I sincerely hope that I am not one.' Czechs often see the negative self-stereotypes as typical not of the little Czech but of the *čecháček* (a pejorative diminutive of 'Czech'). Apart from petty-mindedness, *čecháčkovství* ('being a *čecháček*) includes intolerance to views, attitudes, and conduct which differ from one's own, envy, and a conviction that whatever one does or thinks is best and that those who deviate from it should be reminded in no uncertain terms of the error of their ways. The image of the little Czech or the *čecháček* is the main image into which can be collapsed the various negative characteristics which Czechs consider typical of themselves. Another image is expressed in terms of what they consider to be their national traditions,

When Czechs talk about their traditions, they do not mean presumably time-honoured but in fact often newly invented customs (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) such as the various public ceremonies. Tradition for them is an attitude, characteristic, or proclivity of a particular collectivity which its members assume they share and which each generation transmits more or less unchanged to the next. Any group or category of people, from a family, a kin group, or a local community, to a state or a nation, can, and probably does, have its own traditions in this sense. When

Czechs talk about their national traditions they have in mind specific historically determined proclivities and attitudes which they see as typical of themselves as a nation. The image of the Czech nation which is most frequently invoked when Czechs talk about their assumed national traditions is the image of a democratic, well-educated, and highly cultured nation, and this image is, in numerous contexts, a distinct source of national pride. In much scholarly writing it is accepted as an objective fact. In the introduction to a sociological study of social stratification in Czechoslovakia, for example, it is stated that Czechoslovakia is a 'small, relatively industrially developed Central European country with a great tradition of spiritual culture and democratic and national political movements' (Machonin *et al* 1969: 9). Again, it has been invoked as an explanation of the Prague Spring, described as 'the manifestation of the cultural strength and democratic traditions of the Czech nation, a movement to overcome the totalitarian system by utilising its own resources, a movement which occurred even within the Communist Party' (R. Štengl in *Respekt*, 1991, no. 35: 2). A number of political analysts, both Czech and foreign, pointing out that Czechoslovakia was the only democratic country in Central Europe between the two world wars, have stressed the democratic tradition as an important part of Czech political culture.

This highly positive image of the Czech nation and the distinctly negative image of Czechs are of course contradictory. Czechs see themselves as envious, resentful, conformist, cunning, and egoistic and yet consider themselves to be members of an inherently democratic nation in which they take distinct pride. They see themselves as petty-minded, intellectually limited, and mediocre, and yet consider the Czech nation highly cultured and well educated. The coexistence of the two images poses constant dilemmas. A favourite occupation of Czech intellectuals is considering such topics as 'the greatness and pettiness of Czech history' and contemplating the nationally parochial and the cosmopolitan aspects, or the inward and outward orientations, of Czech art, literature, or music. Dvorak's music is considered by some to be inferior to Smetana's because it is too cosmopolitan and not Czech enough; Smetana's music is considered inferior to Dvorak's by others because it is too parochially Czech. Contemporary Czech newspapers again provide examples of this Czech dilemma:

Let us listen to ourselves for a while: we are wretched, unreliable, immoral, envious, vile, greedy, inept, full of complexes, resentful and full of the residues of totality... We compensate for feeling powerless and untalented with a ridiculously pompous and pretentious messianism: we are the navel of the world, and we have to teach the world how to do it. We are the geniuses and all others are idiots. We do not let any business in here; it would destroy our grand world culture... We flutter here and there, from inferiority to inflated self-importance.

(Respekt, 1990, no. 40:3)

Considerably helped by the mass media, we constantly persuade each other that we are not what we necessarily must be after fifty years of systematic brainwashing: a horde of lazy ignoramuses and hateful and envious cowards. Instead, we persuade ourselves with

characteristic megalomania that we are hard-working and intelligent people whose 'gentle' revolution was watched with envy by all Europe.
(Forum, 1990, no. 44: 4)

We are extremely touchy on the question of national traditions and cultural heritage. Our national pride easily becomes uncritical enthusiasm - usually shortlived. When faced with difficulties and reverses, we equally quickly sink into passivity and scepticism. In this lack of steadiness and balance which moves us constantly between two extremes - between overestimating and underestimating ourselves, between enthusiasm and depression - I see the problem of our national character, formed by the constant pressure to which a small nation has been exposed in the midst of a large world.

This lack of balance - to remain with examples from the sphere of culture and arts - has its further disastrous side: we like to love and celebrate our artists subsequently, as it were *ex post facto*, when they are dead. At the time when they were creating and struggling we were deaf and blind, indifferent as hardly anywhere else in the world.
(Smetana 1991:34-5)

How can these two contradictory images coexist? To answer this question we have to bear in mind that they not only differ in content but also are generalisations of different experiences, constitute different models, and have different carriers.

Self-images as generalisations of experience

The characteristic traits which Czechs attribute to themselves are generalisations of particular individuals' 'lived experience' (E. P. Thompson 1981), of the conduct of other Czechs they know, or of their perception of the differences in behaviour and attitudes between Czechs and non-Czechs. As people's experiences differ, so too do their perceptions of the typical Czech character. Although some characteristic traits are seen by most Czechs to be typical, agreement on them is far from absolute. The generalisations which particular people offer are thus individual and not necessarily universally shared. As they are individual opinions, they cannot rely on self-evidence and, when necessary, have to be demonstrated by pointing to the conduct or attitudes of particular selected individuals and declaring them typical of others, including those of whom the speaker has no personal experience. The Czech self-image expressed in terms of assumed characteristic traits does not go beyond the limits of experiential data and the deductive associations linked with them.

Czech national traditions, in contrast, are not generalisations of particular individuals' own experiences. It is true that between the two world wars Czechoslovakia was the only country in Central Europe with a democratic political system, but the democratic form of government ended in 1938 following the surrender of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany as a result of the Munich agreement. Even many Czechs doubt to what extent the short period between the end of World War II and the Communist coup d'état in 1948 can be seen as fully democratic. In its history since 1918, Czechoslovakia has enjoyed a democratic system of government for twenty or at best twenty-three years. For more than twice as long - a full forty-six years - it has had a totalitarian form of government. But totalitarianism has not

created a tradition; it is the democratic tradition which is constantly being acknowledged and invoked.

If we assume that those who actively participated in the political life of pre-war Czechoslovakia must have been at least twenty years old, it follows that nowadays only people over the age of seventy, a very small minority of the total population, have ever had any personal or 'lived' experience of a democratic form of government. This does not mean, of course, that a democratic form of government has been obliterated from the social memory of the Czechs or, as some historians and anthropologists would express it, from their experience. For example, E. P. Thompson distinguishes 'perceived experience' from 'lived experience' (1981), and, accepting this notion of experience, Collard, for example, in formulating her notion of 'social memory', suggests that "history" can be said to work through experience' (1989: 91).

Lumping together 'lived' and 'perceived' experience not only contradicts the common-sense understanding of 'experience' but also conflates two different cognitive processes. Admittedly, there is no 'pure' experience. What we experience is determined by our culture - our system of classification and our criteria of significance and relevance. What we call our experience of the world is the result of our observation of this world through living in it and our evaluation of what we observe in terms of our culturally given criteria and their accompanying values. Two processes seem to be involved in 'lived' experience: observation of or, more precisely, witnessing (itself culturally determined) events through participating in them; and evaluation in terms of the culturally given criteria of significance. These two processes can result either in a confirmation of the observation in terms of the existing criteria or the revision of these criteria as a result of what has been observed. The latter process results in cultural change as a change 'in men's ideas and their values, argued through in their actions, choices, and beliefs' (E. P. Thompson 1978). Cultural change is tantamount to change in 'lived' experience. Minor cultural changes such as this occur all the time and we witness them whenever someone says, 'That has not been my experience.'

'Perceived' experience replaces personal participation in events with a mediated account of them. The difference between 'lived' and 'perceived' experience is the difference between life and text. If 'perceived' experience is experience at all, it is experience of stereotypes and images which, unlike 'lived' experience, lacks any basis for their redefinition. A mediated account of events certainly constitutes awareness or knowledge of them and thus makes it possible for them to become part of social or historical memory, but it is a knowledge which is cognitively distinct from the knowledge of events one has participated in or witnessed. It is of necessity impoverished, filtering out the multiplicity of meanings which events may have had for their participants and making possible a single, usually officially asserted meaning. Commonsensically, we would deny people any experience of the United States who know it only from television, films, novels, or news reporting. Although they have

knowledge or awareness of the United States, they have experience only of its images. What applies in space applies in time as well. However, beliefs and attitudes can be transmitted from generation to generation even if no one has personal experience of the events and actual practices motivated by them. Personal or 'lived' experience of a phenomenon is not a necessary condition for its being seen as a tradition, and a phenomenon can be seen as constituting a tradition even if no one whose tradition it is has any personal experience of it. A tradition can be characterised as a text which is unquestionably accepted as valid and authoritative. The amount of personal experience with a democratic form of government is about the same in present-day Czech Republic as it is in Poland or Hungary, which the Czechs consider to lack democratic traditions.

Unlike generalisations about character traits, a national tradition is by definition collective, shared by all members of the nation, supraindividual, and intergenerational. However, it is not a discourse which relies on self-evidence. The validity of a tradition needs to be demonstrated, and there are standardised ways of doing so. The existence of the Czech democratic tradition is demonstrated not only by pointing out that Czechoslovakia was the only democratic country in pre-war Central Europe but also by interpreting this fact as a specific manifestation of the tradition. Tradition of course implies continuity, and only something that has always been done or has been done for a long time in a certain society constitutes that society's tradition. Thus, it makes sense to speak, for example, about a parliamentary tradition in Britain or about a tradition of neutrality in Switzerland.

Czechs too understand tradition in this sense of continuity resulting from a particular reading of Czech history. The canonical text of this reading which was accepted by most subsequent Czech historiography and thus 'made history' (Stern 1992: 36), is Palacký's *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* (1836-54). Palacký's was the first history of Bohemia to be based on the study of primary sources. For Palacký, the very beginning of Czech recorded history is characterised by the 'old-Slavonic democratic spirit', standing in sharp contrast to German feudalism. What later came to be seen as his 'philosophy of Czech history' is his view of that history as the continuous realisation of the nation's libertarian, egalitarian, and democratic spirit in the constant struggle against German autocracy. The Hussite movement of the fifteenth century in particular is viewed from this perspective as the culmination of 'the unending task of the nation on behalf of humanity as a whole'. Palacký's 'philosophy of Czech history' provided the basis for Masaryk's politics and for his belief that the Czechoslovak nation should pursue the ideals of the Hussite reformation, which became the official ideology of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic and the source of the most important state symbols.

With Masaryk's authority behind it, Palacký's view dominated the republic's official historiography (Stern 1992: 36). It also dominated the official historiography of the communist period, which found in Palacký's emphasis on the Czech-German struggle a convenient ideological validation for its presentation of German

revanchism and the international imperialism of NATO (in which Germany played a prominent role) as a perpetual threat to the socialist order. Palacký's emphasis on the positive aspects of the Hussite movement was also positively evaluated in socialist historiography, which de-emphasised its religious aspect and emphasised its social, egalitarian, and revolutionary aspects. In fact, the Hussite movement became the main source of the communist regime's symbolism; for example, the heraldic shield of the state's official coat of arms was replaced by the Hussite shield, with the lion of the Bohemian kings adorned by the red star.

Part of ascertaining the continuity of the democratic tradition is not only emphasising the parliamentary democracy of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic but, pointing to the active communal and club life characteristic of nineteenth-century Czech society, arguing that the Czechs of the time were much more democratic than any other nation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Critical Czech historiography has debunked these views, emphasising that the political parties of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic were autocratically governed by their leaders (Podiven 1991: 540) and that nineteenth-century Czech society was very authoritarian. Treating the Austro-Hungarian state as a foreign imposition which they wanted nothing at all to do with, Czechs made no attempt at any democratisation of the existing political system (Podiven 1991:134,161).

Similarly, the tradition of high culture and education is routinely demonstrated by listing world-renowned Czech composers, musicians, writers, poets, and playwrights such as Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Martinů, Kubelík, Čapek, Kundera, Seifert, or Havel. Any nation can come up with such names, however, without necessarily seeing itself as exceptionally cultured, and therefore Czechs go on to invoking names of similarly outstanding individuals from the past. Constant reference to Czech history is part not only of much political commentary but also of much everyday political discourse. Czechs tell themselves who they are by projecting contemporary ideas and values onto the narrative of the past, which in turn is invoked as their legitimation. In this respect history functions as a myth which is truly a charter in Malinowski's sense. One of the important myths which the Czechs create in narrating their history is the myth of a nation whose leading personalities have always been intellectuals; the 'father of the country', King Charles IV, is remembered first of all as the founder of the oldest university north of the Alps, and the most important Czech martyr, Jan Hus, was its professor. Hus's death inspired the Hussite movement mainly because the Czech people were led by preachers with more knowledge of the scriptures than the pope himself. A tiny group of Czech intellectuals kept the Czech language alive and managed to bring the Czechs into the fold of modern European nations. Masaryk, a university professor, Beneš, a high school teacher, and Štefánik, an astronomer, were the founding fathers of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. The specific historical events which the Czechs invoke when telling themselves their history attest to the high standard of learning and education among Czechs in the

past. Every Czech schoolchild is reminded of the seventeenth-century papal nuncio's assertion that any Czech woman knew the Bible better than many priests.

Even Petr Pithart, prime minister of the first post-November Czech government and a political scientist and historian who is otherwise highly critical of the tendency to glorify the Czech past, repeats the popular image according to which 'our ancestors had an exceptional respect for the written word, for a book, Illiteracy was eradicated relatively early, and the Czechs have become a nation of readers' (1990b: 23). He sees the problem of the Czech nation as the 'problem of a cultured nation without politicians and in fact without full-fledged politics... and hence as the problem of the political responsibility of intellectuals' (Pithart 1990b: 16). The tradition of the highly cultured nation, like the democratic tradition, can thus also be traced to the radical politicisation of culture in the nineteenth century (see Stern 1992: 37; Gellner 1987: 131). In general, the Czechs substantiate their image of themselves as an exceptionally cultured and well-educated nation by a specific reading of their history in which they construct a close relationship between culture and politics. A rather succinct version of this construction was offered by Eduard Goldstücker in an interview for the Czech cultural weekly *Tvorba* in 1990:

The Czechoslovak Republic was... a highly cultured state even before World War II. It was a rather unique case. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Czechs lost the leading strata of their society, their nobility and their wealthy and educated burghers. When the national revival arrived, the middle class had to be created anew; the success or failure of the national revival depended on it. Because the nation had lost its leading strata, their place had to be taken by intellectuals, who literally had to fill the gap and at the same time to play the role of national leaders. A case like this, in which the intellectuals become the leaders of the nation, does not exist anywhere else - from Palacký to Masaryk and beyond. The intellectuals gave a humanistic programme to the movement of national revival which achieved realisation in the exceptional moment of the year 1918.

In answering the question of whether contemporary culture should devote itself exclusively to politics or aim at awakening truly democratic and humanistic values among the people, Goldstücker argued that

it is impossible to separate these two things because in Bohemia, where culture has traditionally been put in a position where it has to be a representative of national interests, in other words, to take the place of the politicians, every cultural act has its political implications. Inevitably, it heightens self-awareness, a critical attitude, etc.
(*Tvorba*, 1990, no. 7: 7)

What this reading of modern Czech history indicates is that the Czechs are a cultured nation because of the political role which culture plays among them. This role of culture is also expressed in the Czech metaphor of the writer as the conscience of the nation.

Self-images as models

The characteristic traits which Czechs attribute to themselves are generalisations of particular individuals' own experiences, and their existence can be proved by simple ostension. National traditions are not generalisations of particular individuals' own experiences; they are asserted beliefs, and their existence ultimately cannot be either proved or disproved because any possible proof of a tradition presupposes the existence of that tradition. Presumed national traditions can best be seen as condensed myths. Whereas a typical mythical narrative is a sequence of images which in their totality convey the meaning of the myth, a tradition condenses the narrative into a single simple and unambiguously meaningful image. What it shares with myth is that the truth of the meaning conveyed is taken as a dogma whether or not it corresponds to experienced reality.

Because the character traits which Czechs attribute to themselves are generalisations of particular individuals' experiences of the behaviour and attitudes of themselves and others, they are seen as reflecting reality at least as it has been experienced by particular individuals at particular times. As models, these traits are, in Geertz's term, 'models of'. Most of the character traits which Czechs attribute to themselves are ascribed a negative value; they are certainly not ideals which everyone is expected to emulate.

National traditions are not generalisations of trends distilled from the totality of events constituting the nation's history. On the contrary, the events of the past which are quoted as standardised proofs of traditions are always highly selective. If anything, the actual historical events would in fact point to other traditions: one of the absence of a democratic system (at least as far as the twentieth century is concerned), of a recurrent threat to the building of democratic structures, of frustrated attempts at establishing an enduring democratic system of government, of democratic development recurrently interrupted by its collapse under the onslaught of totalitarianism. Historical periods and events which are negatively valued are not obliterated from historical memory but declared to be anomalous discontinuities in Czech history and, as such, are excluded from the construction of national traditions. Czechs certainly do not imagine themselves as a nation with, for example, a long tradition of totalitarianism (as the Russians now do) or of cheating at work. In relation to the actual course of history, the prevailing images expressed in terms of national traditions are idealisations or formulations of ideals perpetually thwarted and never permanently achieved. In Geertz's terminology, they are 'models for'. They are assigned a highly positive value and considered to shape people's attitudes to life, to guide their behaviour, and to formulate a set of shared principles and values as the basis of existence.

The carriers of self-images

The behaviour and attitudes which Czechs consider characteristic of themselves are attributable to specific individuals. They are spoken of as typical of the Czech

nation when they seem so prevalent as to apply to most Czechs or at least to most Czechs that the speaker knows. Their carriers are particular individuals who if need be can be specified. The people now alive in Czechoslovakia who have had any personal or 'lived' experience of a democratic political system are too few to be effective carriers of a democratic tradition which is not only *theirs* but that of the whole nation, of which they are only a small part. Particular individuals cannot be the carriers of a democratic tradition if they have no 'lived' experience of democracy or carriers of the tradition of good education if they themselves have had only the most rudimentary education and are oblivious of the products of high culture which are a manifestation of the Czech nation's exceptional *kulturnost* (a noun derived from the adjective *kulturní*, 'cultured'). The carrier of these traditions is the nation as a whole, not any of its particular members. This means not only that the ideals which the national traditions embody can persist even if most people do not live up to them, but also that the nation can be imagined as a whole which is not divisible into its individual parts and which is more than the sum of its parts. The very notion of national traditions makes possible the imagination of the nation as a truly supraindividual entity.

This is, however, not the only effect of the assumed existence of national traditions on the process of imagining and conceptualising a nation. In the next chapter I shall return to the role of the notion of national traditions in this process. Here I want to discuss some other aspects of Czech self-images in general and of Czech national traditions in particular to which I have so far only briefly alluded.

Self-images and self-criticism

The negative character traits attributed to Czechs are always mentioned disapprovingly as something that they ought to overcome. National traditions are also invoked in the context of a critical attitude toward existing everyday practices. Because of its generality, a tradition can serve as a measure of any particular behaviour. At the same time, it provides a sense of empowerment for those who invoke it, making it possible for them temporarily to occupy the moral high ground. When the ideal embodied in the tradition is contrasted with the perceived real situation, the hollowness of the ideal is of course revealed, but the ideal is not rejected; instead, the discrepancy between it and the real situation is used to stress the urgency of a more determined effort to secure it.

It is particularly the taken-for-granted self-image of Czechs as a cultured and well-educated nation which is used in this way. According to UNESCO statistics, expenditures on education in the 1980s put Czechoslovakia into seventy-second place in the world, with Nepal in seventy-first. One of the students' slogans during the 'velvet revolution' was a pun on the well-known Czech folk prognostic: *Na nový rok o krok dál, dostanem se před Nepálem* ('One step further in the New Year, we shall leave Nepal behind'). This was not a denial of what every Czech accepts as a self-evident

truth - that the Czechs are a cultured and well-educated nation - but a criticism of the government for not treating such a nation as it should.

In so far as the tradition of the Czechs as a cultured nation is routinely substantiated by invoking the names of present and past Czech artists and intellectuals, culture is understood in the sense of 'high' culture (literature, drama, music, arts). Understanding culture in this sense, the Czechs can demonstrate to themselves their *kulturnost* by pointing to the number of theatres and bookshops in their country, which is certainly greater in proportion to the population than, for example, in Britain, or to the great number of books which can be found even in the households of workers and farmers. When Czechs - mostly of the educated middle class but short of foreign currency - began travelling to Vienna with the reopening of the borders after the fall of the communist system, they flocked to the museums and galleries instead of to the supermarkets as the East Germans, with newly acquired Deutschmarks in their pockets, did. This was reported with astonishment in the Austrian press and taken by the Czechs as a clear sign of their *kulturnost*. In January 1990 an actress expressed on television her approval of applying market principles to the sphere of culture by saying that now theatrical performances would at last be attended by people who understood and enjoyed the theatre instead of being 'sold out' through the trade union's distribution of free tickets to people from the country for whom a free bus ride to Prague to attend a theatrical performance was primarily a free shopping trip. Her remark inspired numerous letters protesting her denial of their authors' *kulturnost*.

But 'culture' is understood not only as 'high culture' but also as the 'culture of everyday life',² and the discourse in which the notion of Czech *kulturnost* is invoked plays on both its meanings. When this notion is being invoked critically in an attempt to make people live up to the ideal expressed in the national tradition, it is always the culture of everyday life which is found wanting. When the astonishment of the Austrians at the Czech passion for museums and galleries was replaced by hastily prepared notices in Czech informing the customers in Austrian supermarkets that shoplifting was a criminal offence, the articles and letters in Czech newspapers invoked the Czech national tradition critically by asking, 'Are we really a cultured nation?' In reading Czech newspapers and magazines I came across the invocation of the image of Czechs as a cultured nation in the context of a critical attitude toward such varied aspects of everyday life as cruelty to animals (*Forum*, 1990, no. 44; 3), the proliferation of pornographic magazines and intolerance of the views of others (*Rudé právo*, 13 January 1990), the defacing of the walls of underground stations with

² When workers in an industrial plant in a small town in eastern Bohemia were asked for their understanding of the expression 'cultural standard', 39.8 per cent mentioned participation in and appreciation of 'high culture' and 22.9 per cent mentioned 'culture of everyday life', including conduct and manners (13.7 per cent), equipment of the household (3.3 per cent), and ways of spending one's leisure time (7.2 per cent) (Maříková, Klus, and Malina 1987: 157).

posters and notices and the renaming of streets and public places (*Rudé právo*, 9 February 1990), the rudeness of people toward each other in public, the lack of cleanliness of lavatories and the general untidiness of public places, and cheating or overcharging of customers.

The critical edge was always underpinned by the question 'Is this a sign of a cultured nation?' This critical attitude to many aspects of everyday life does not deny the existence of the national tradition of culture and education: the tradition persists in spite of repeated demonstrations that individual Czechs fall short of the ideal which it embodies. Demonstration of these shortcomings does not lead to the rejection of the tradition but forms the basis of a critical attitude toward actual behaviour. 'Are we really a cultured nation?' is a rhetorical question. As with the characteristic traits which Czechs attribute to themselves, the aim of the critical attitude toward behaviour perceived as not being consonant with a national tradition is to make it approximate the ideal. The critical attitude stresses that to achieve its full meaning this tradition needs to be realised not only in the sphere of high culture but also in the culture of everyday life. The ultimate moral of the critical attitude is that only when we change our ways will we really be what according to our national traditions we should be - a cultured nation (see, e.g., *Svobodné slovo*, 23 June 1990) which has a right to claim its place in a Europe which values cultured and civilised behaviour.

The asserted democratic tradition too is invoked, although not as frequently as that of the cultured and well-educated nation, in the context of criticism of existing practices. The critical assessment of the real situation by the yardstick of the ideal expressed through tradition is used here again to reveal the hollowness of the ideal. The aim of the criticism is to bring the practice in line with the ideal. In the case of the ideal of the democracy of the Czech nation, if is usually Czech egalitarianism which is seen as hindering its realisation.

The pre-war custom of holding balls in the opera house was revived after the revolution of 1989, and the first charity ball was held in Smetana's Theatre in Prague in February 1992. The tickets were cheap in comparison with those for similar charity events elsewhere in the world but very expensive by Czech standards and out of reach of ordinary people. The proceeds from their sale went to the fund for the restoration of the theatre. Members of the Czechoslovak Anarchistic Association and the Left Initiative, who considered the ball an unacceptable provocation by the rich, shouted slogans about dirty money and the vampires' ball, pelted the participants with rotten tomatoes and oranges, and distributed 'vegetarian soup to the poor'. A few guests at the ball suffered slight injuries, and five demonstrators were detained by the police for breach of the peace. A comment printed a few days later in the daily *Lidové noviny* seized on the contradiction between the asserted democratic tradition of the Czech nation and Czech egalitarianism:

It is surely easier to throw a rotten tomato than to make a lot of money. It is easier to hit a successful person with a rotten orange than to be successful oneself. The demand of equality in

poverty is deeply rooted in us, having been carefully watered for fifty years with a nutritive ideological solution.

However, the real cause of this peculiar state of mind probably lies deeper. For years the Czech nation has been suffering from constantly burnished superstition about some deep democratic traditions which, nobody knows exactly why, are supposed to have their root in the area between Aš and Znojmo.³ These traditions have never been at home here, unless, of course, we confuse democratic traditions with plebeian traditions. The Communists were well aware of this, and they polished up the plebeian traditions to the sparkling lustre of socialist democracy. An obscure booklet by Zdeněk Nejedlý, 'Communists: Heirs of the Best Traditions of the Nation', is the basic text in this respect. Other building blocks of 'democratic traditions' are still with us: anyone else's success is immoral; we all have the same stomachs; education is parasitism.

We want to be democrats, or at least so most of us say. In no way will it be easy. Each of us will have trouble overcoming the plebeian habit of equality in poverty. I admit that it is difficult for us to tolerate wealth of almost Babylonian proportions, accustomed as we are to an undemanding life secured, as it were, through being homebodies and through our provincialism. We have to tolerate the success and wealth of others. We have to return a proper value to education, for education is one of the necessary, albeit not always sufficient, conditions of success...

We are not heirs to the democratic traditions which include listening to the opinions of others, tolerance, and the wish for success. We are heirs to the 'best traditions of the nation'. If we were not, we would be interested in one thing only about the ball in Smetana's Theatre: how many crowns, Deutschmarks, or dollars it raised for the restoration of the building... The demonstrators helped the theatre with rotten tomatoes. It is not difficult to recognise which is more helpful.

(*Lidové noviny*, 11 February 1992)

This is just one example of a more general negative evaluation of individual Czechs resulting from the comparison of their conduct with the ideals embodied in national traditions. What this negative evaluation expresses is the recognition of their failure to live up to these ideals. It is an explicit or often only tacit recognition of the fact that the traditions are indeed only ideals, expressing what Czechs would like to be, but are not or are not yet. The recognition of the fact that individual members of the nation constantly fail to live up to national ideals creates the ever-present tendency to see them in a negative light.

Envious and intolerant Czechs

Because traditions are invoked to mobilise people for the achievement of highly desirable goals, the self-image of the nation which is embodied in them has to be, and indeed is, highly positive. This positive image is not at all adversely affected by the fact that individual Czechs tend to see themselves in a distinctly negative light, I would suggest that the coexistence of these two contradictory images is the result of

³ Aš is the western-most town in Bohemia; Znojmo is a town in southern Moravia close to the Slovak border.

the way in which the nation is constructed in the nationalist discourse - not as a collectivity of heterogeneous individuals but as a supraindividual entity which exists in its own right. If the nation were seen as a collectivity of individuals, these individuals too would have to be ascribed positive characteristics, for their characteristics would affect the nation as a whole. However, although this construction makes it possible to ascribe negative characteristics to individual Czechs, it does not make it necessary; the positive image of the nation would not be challenged if its individual members too were ascribed positive traits.

The two most often mentioned negative characteristics of Czechs are envy and intolerance. The selection of these two particular characteristics - like the selection of the assumed traditions of the nation - is not arbitrary and is ultimately determined by the logic of the cultural construction of the individual as part of the nation. This construction inevitably engenders egalitarianism. When national identity is seen as the primary identity of every individual, the identities of individuals are derived from their membership of a collectivity united in purpose irrespective of any differences in class or rank, occupation, level of education, lifestyle, or regional characteristics. The culturally constructed primary identity is derived from the membership of a collectivity which surpasses and ultimately negates any vertical or horizontal stratification. As parts of a whole which recognises no internal differences, individuals are identical and equivalent units. In practice, the appearance of ideologically asserted equality is disrupted by social stratification and particularly by the existence of individuals whose achievements are seen as beyond the capabilities of the majority. Given the cultural premise of equality of all members of the nation, the role model cannot be an overachiever or an exceptionally successful or gifted individual. It can only be an individual whose achievements are accessible to all: an underachiever or at best an average performer. This is recognised in the saying 'Our strength is in the average', sarcastically commented upon by Voskovec and Werich in one of their plays: 'The author of the saying was most probably himself below average so that he would profit even on that average.' As it is practically impossible for the majority to emulate the successful minority in achievements, conduct, and lifestyle, the successful and exceptional individual has to be brought down to the average level of the majority if any semblance of inherent equality among the members of the nation is to be maintained in behavioural practice. This is widely recognised as a typical characteristic of Czechs and incessantly commented upon. Smetana, for example, sees Czech art criticism as belonging to

that kind of noisy and opinionated journalism which ostensibly subscribes to heightened criticism, even to national pride, but which gains its spurs and its pay by making everything dirty; the more outstanding the personality whom the reviewer noisily attacks and rubbishes, the more God-like he feels. 'It is grist to the mill of one negative Czech characteristic', complained the singer Karel Kyncl. 'When something is pure, let us rubbish it as much as we can - not to rise with someone but to pull him down to our level.'

(1991: 93)

It may appear incongruous that, in a nation which prides itself on being exceptionally cultured and well educated, 'You intellectual' is a common term of abuse. It is, however, just one of the manifestations of the effort to maintain an assumed and expected equality. The various stratagems employed to maintain this semblance of equality among people who see themselves as ideally equal parts of the transcendent whole which is the nation have been perceived as manifestations of envy and intolerance. The pejorative use of 'You intellectual' does not mean that intellectuality is universally negatively valued in Czech culture. Its negative aspects derive from contravening the expected equality of all Czechs generated by the nationalist discourse's construction of individuals as part of the nation and as emanations of collective Czech nationhood. The nationalist discourse is of course not the only one which creates and re-creates Czech cultural values and premises. It is in competition with the discourse which espouses the ideology of individualism and values intellectuality as a sign of individuality. In their discourse on individualism, Czechs construe intellectuality as a positive characteristic. As I shall suggest in chapter 5, most Czechs are distinctly proud of the intellectuality of their past and present leading personalities, whose individuality is used to evidence the ideal embodied in the national traditions. Seen as part of a specific discourse, intellectuality - like individuality - is a constant value which competes with egalitarianism and the denial of the individuality of the members of the nation for its moment of legitimate expression. In situations perceived as national crises, the values espoused in the nationalist discourse come to prominence whilst those espoused in the competing discourse on individualism may be temporarily submerged, but in fact both sets of values feed into the premises of Czech culture.

The creation of tradition

The fact that a specific attitude or mode of expected and approved social conduct has become established as the characteristic response of a collectivity in a certain historical period is not in itself sufficient for perceiving it as that collectivity's tradition. A tradition can be, and indeed is, substantiated by pointing to a few selected historical events which, because they function as standardised proofs of the existence of the tradition, are made to stand out from the regular flow of ordinary historical events and constituted as significant. Their significance does not derive from any possible impact they may have had on the course of history; on the contrary, it is the assumed present traditions which provide the prism through which events are selected and constituted as significant. This means that for this process of proving the tradition to work, the tradition has to exist, as it were, independently of the way in which its existence is proved. In other words, it has to be perpetually re-created in the present.

Awareness of a nation's tradition, as of any other aspect of national identity, crystallises only in relation to another nation perceived as different. During the national revival, Czechs defined themselves as a nation in conscious opposition to the

Germans, who were culturally, politically, and economically the dominant element in Bohemia. The conscious aim of the revival was the development of the Czech language, which, as a language of literature, science, and philosophy, became the main instrument for creating a Czech culture equivalent to German culture in every respect. The *kulturnost* of Germans has never been denied by Czechs (at least Czech intellectuals). The first generation of revivalists wrote in German and began writing in Czech as an outward sign of their Czech identity only gradually and, at first, with great difficulty (Macura 1983: 144-5). Even after the Czech language had become established as the language in which they communicated among themselves and as their literary language, they remained bilingual or at least fluent in German. German literature, science, and philosophy were their main sources of stimulation. Their success in creating Czech literature and science in a short time became proof of the *kulturnost* of the Czech nation; Czechs had proved that they were as cultured as Germans.

The notion of Czech *kulturnost* based on the perception of Czech cultural achievements as fully equivalent to those of the Germans is perpetuated by the authors of these achievements. For ordinary Czechs, the image of the German is not that of a scholar or philosopher but that of an aggressor and oppressor or a warrior. Many ordinary Czechs today view with distaste the penetration of German capital into Czech industry, the proliferation of German firms, the growing quantity of German goods on the Czech market, and in particular the appearance of advertising slogans and inscriptions in German. They express their fear that, having failed to subjugate the Czech nation militarily, the Germans will succeed in subjugating it economically.

Although intellectuals and ordinary people differ in their perception of Germans, they share the idea of a cultured and well-educated Czech nation. For ordinary people the source of this image is not so much the perceived similarity between Czechs and Germans as the perceived difference between Czechs and Slovaks. To appreciate fully how this difference is perceived and expressed it is necessary to examine Czech-Slovak relations as they have unfolded throughout the modern history of the Czech nation. This discussion serves two purposes. First, it illustrates the specific ways in which the Czechs perpetually re-create the image of themselves as a cultured and well-educated nation with a deep-rooted tradition of democracy. Secondly, it provides the necessary background for understanding the significance of the Czech nationalist sentiments which have accompanied the demise of communism in Czechoslovakia and the creation of independent Czech and Slovak states which was its most important political outcome.

Czechs and Slovaks

The Great Moravian empire, considered by both Czech and Slovak historians to be the first historically documented state in Central Europe, collapsed at the beginning of the tenth century. Slovak historians tend toward the opinion that

Slovaks were its dominant element and see it as the first Slovak state. Czech historians tend toward the view that it was the first common state of Czechs and Slovaks. Whatever its ethnic composition, during its existence a new political centre emerged in Levý Hradec⁴ and later in Prague, which became the centre of the Bohemian kingdom. After the collapse of the Moravian empire, Slovakia became part of the Hungarian state, in which it remained without any autonomy as an integral part of St Stephen's crown until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918.

The population of Slovakia spoke several dialects which were closely related not only to each other but also to the various dialects of Bohemia and Moravia. By the end of the sixteenth century the language of the first printed Czech Bible (1579-94) became established as a literary language not only in Bohemia but also in Slovakia. Some of the leading personalities of the national revival in the first half of the last century, for example, J. Kollár, P. J. Šafařík, and F. Palacký, were active in both Bohemia and Slovakia or at least familiar with the culture, history, and contemporary political situations of both of these countries. One of the questions which was hotly debated during the national revival was whether Czechs and Slovaks were one nation or two closely related but separate ones. The view that Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Upper Hungary (i.e., Slovakia) were all part of one Czech region, expressed, for example, by Dobrovský in 1792 (Pražák 1929: 27), began to be articulated during the nineteenth century in terms of the common ethnic identity of this region. Its inhabitants began to be referred to first as Czechoslavs (Pražák 1929: 28) and later as Czechoslovaks - a nation speaking a single Czechoslovak language and bound together by common history, tradition, and culture (Pražák 1929: 56-70). However, efforts to create a common Czechoslovak national identity binding together the inhabitants of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Slovakia were paralleled by efforts to assert a separate Slovak identity.

These efforts were motivated by two considerations. The first was uneasiness about the Czech linguistic and cultural dominance expressed in the image of the common nation drawn, for example, by Kollár, for whom the Czechs were the trunk and roots of the common Czechoslovak tree of which the Moravians, Silesians, and Slovaks were branches and twigs (Pražák 1929: 57). The second was the strong Czech Protestant tradition, viewed as alien to the deep-rooted Catholic faith of most ordinary Slovaks. The decisive act in establishing a separate Slovak identity in relation to the Czechs was the creation of a Slovak literary language. The Catholic priest Antonín Bernolák published a Latin treatise about the Slovak language in 1787 and a Slovak grammar based on the dialect spoken in western Slovakia in 1790. He thus laid the foundation of the Slovak literary language used since then by Slovak Catholics.

⁴ Levy Hradec, on the northern outskirts of Prague, was the site of the oldest his torically documented Christian church in Bohemia, built by Wenceslas's grandfather Bořivoj in the second half of the ninth century.

Slovak Protestants continued to write in Czech until 1844, when, under the leadership of Ľudovít Štúr, they adopted the central Slovakian dialect as their literary language. Their argument against the Slovak language of Bernolák was that it was based on a dialect too close to Czech ones. Štúr's Slovak language then gradually became the literary language even for Slovak Catholics (Agnew 1992).

The creation of a Slovak literary language became the subject of a discussion among both Czech and Slovak intellectuals which lasted for almost a hundred years. The nationalistically oriented Czech intellectuals called it the 'language schism' and considered it a hindrance to the common struggle of Czechs and Slovaks for cultural and political autonomy. Some of them explained it as a move triggered by the increasing threat of Magyarisation of the Slovaks. Attempts to resolve the language schism were made by both Czechs and Slovaks. On the Slovak side the most important among them was Hurban's unsuccessful effort to return to the use of literary Czech in the 1870s; on the Czech side there were numerous appeals to the Slovaks in the 1890s and at the beginning of this century to return to the literary Czech language and thus to strengthen the awareness of a common national identity and increase the numerical strength of the common nation.

After the creation of the Slovak literary language, the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation speaking one language, embraced by most nationally minded Czech intellectuals in the first half of the nineteenth century, began to be replaced by the idea of a single nation speaking two languages or having two branches. These ideas and images acquired political significance shortly before World War I and particularly during the war itself, when Czech and Slovak politicians began to consider seriously the possibility of creating their own independent state following the defeat and the expected disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

During the war, the Czech and Slovak political émigrés in the United States who were campaigning under the leadership of T. G. Masaryk for the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia referred in their various documents, memorandums, and speeches not so much to Czechs and Slovaks but to either the Czech or the Czechoslovak nation. For example, Masaryk's memorandum 'Independent Bohemia', written for the British foreign secretary in 1915, envisioned the Czech state as a monarchy in which the 'Slovak regions in northern Hungary' would be linked to the Czech lands. The memorandum mentions explicitly that 'Slovaks are Czechs in spite of using their dialect as a literary language.' The 1915 memorandum of the Czech Committee Abroad, which later became the Czechoslovak National Council, spoke of the struggle for sovereignty of the *Czech* nation and demanded the creation of an 'independent Czechoslovak state'. The so-called Washington declaration of 18 October 1918 talked on the one hand about the 'Czechoslovak nation' and on the other hand about the right of Czechs to be united with their 'Slovak brothers in Slovakia'. In Bohemia, a declaration of Czech members of parliament in 1917 demanded 'the unification of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation in a democratic Czech state also containing the Slovak branch of the nation'. In June 1917 the

representatives of the Czech Social Democrats in Stockholm similarly demanded the unification 'of all members of the Czech nation who inhabit a continuous territory, that is, also the Slovaks' (Z. Urban 1988: 23-4). Other documents could be mentioned which in their rhetoric clearly expressed the idea of a Czechoslovak nation insisting on exercising its right to national self-determination by creating its own state. On the one hand, this rhetoric was motivated by the image of the Czech and Slovak branches of a single nation, which crystallised during the period of national revival and was shared by most Czech intellectuals in spite of the efforts of some Slovak intellectuals to establish a separate Slovak identity. On the other hand, it was determined by pragmatic political considerations, aimed at creating the image of a future Czechoslovak state which, though containing German, Hungarian, and other ethnic minorities, could nevertheless be seen as a proper nation-state in that the majority of its inhabitants were of a single ethnic stock.

Talk about the Czech or Czechoslovak nation was sometimes the conscious strategy of Czech and Slovak diplomats in their effort not to confuse the politicians of the Alliance, who were expected to be unfamiliar with the history and ethnic composition of Central Europe. Describing how the name of the Czechoslovak National Council (*Conseil National des Pays Tcheques*) was chosen, Beneš says, The Slovak Štefánik defended the expression "des Pays Tcheques" - of the Czech lands - because, given the Allies' complete lack of knowledge of Slovak matters, he did not want to complicate our political struggle by accentuating the Slovak question. He was afraid that it would not be understood and that our adversaries might even use it against us' (Beneš 1935; 117). The rhetoric was thus aimed at alleviating the Allies' fears of balkanisation of Europe and defusing their possible objections to the Czechs' and Slovaks' creating a new state in Central Europe which in its ethnic heterogeneity would, on a smaller scale, resemble the Austro-Hungarian Empire which they were determined to dismantle.

Among themselves, Czechs and Slovaks had to determine the form of their coexistence in a future common state. During the war Czech and Slovak politicians signed various agreements which the Slovaks later invoked as justification for their demands of greater autonomy within Czechoslovakia or outright political separation from the Czechs. The most important of these were the Cleveland agreement of October 1915 and the Pittsburgh agreement of May 1918. The Cleveland agreement, signed between the Czech National Assembly in America and the Slovak League, mentioned the future coexistence of 'the Czech and Slovak nation in a federative union' and proposed the 'full autonomy of Slovakia, with its own assembly, own administration, and Slovak official language'. The Pittsburgh agreement similarly mentioned separate Slovak administration, assembly, and courts and Slovak as the official language in the Slovak part of the independent state of the Czechs and Slovaks (Z. Urban 1988; 22).

At first, the diplomatic campaign of the Czech and Slovak politicians for the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of a Czechoslovak

state met with an ambiguous response from the Allies, who were much more concerned with the Polish and Yugoslav questions. But from the beginning of 1916, when Czech and Slovak diplomatic efforts were being centrally coordinated by the Czechoslovak National Council, the Czechoslovak rhetoric began to have its effect. Toward the end of the war, when the Polish and Yugoslav political organisations were facing difficulties in gaining recognition by the Allies, the Czechoslovak National Council and later the provisional government were recognised without any serious objections, and the Czechoslovak question became part of the official diplomatic negotiations even before the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state. This gave a strong voice to the Czechoslovak political representatives at the Versailles peace conference.

Czechoslovakia, as Czechs never failed to remind themselves, became 'the darling of the Allies' - an exemplary state emerging from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although the officially embraced principle for the creation of new nation-states in Central and Southern Europe was the self-determination embodied in Wilson's declaration, Czech demands for the constitution of their new state within the historical borders of the Bohemian kingdom were accepted by the Allies. The result was that the new Czechoslovak Republic contained some three million ethnic Germans. The Allies also recognised as legitimate the demand that the borders of the new state be defensible in the event of any future armed conflict. As a result, the southern border of Slovakia did not follow the Slovak-Hungarian ethnic divide but was drawn farther south along the Danube River, leaving a three-quarters-of-a-million-strong Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia. Apart from the Germans and Hungarians, there were half a million Ukrainians and about a hundred thousand Poles living in the new state.

Czechoslovakia was thus clearly a multiethnic state. Numerically, the strongest ethnic group was the Czechs, of whom there were about seven million. The second largest was the Germans, who with their three million considerably outnumbered the Slovaks, with only two and a quarter million. The Germans, as a defeated nation, were expected by the Czechs to be hostile to their state-building efforts. Immediately after independence, the Hungarians were politically even more of a problem for the new Czechoslovak government. Mihály Karolyi's Hungarian government tried to save the integrity of pre-war Hungary at the cost of granting autonomy to Slovakia. Through incessant propaganda it tried to awaken Slovak nationalism and to persuade the Slovaks that they would lose their national identity in a single state with the Czechs (Chaloupecký 1930: 72). The Czech political elites felt that treating the Slovaks as an ethnic minority and granting them cultural and political autonomy might play directly into the Hungarians' hands. By constructing the Czechoslovak nation as a *státotvorný národ* ('state-forming nation') (Felak 1992: 143) of which the Slovaks were an integral part, the Prague government tried to defuse any possible separatist tendencies in Slovakia. The notion of a single Czechoslovak nation also played a significant political role in relation to the ethnic minorities in the country. It

ensured the numerical majority of the Czechs and Slovaks against all other nationalities in the state, particularly the Germans (Leff 1988: 35). Internationally, it made it possible to preserve the image of Czechoslovakia as a nation-state in spite of its ethnic heterogeneity.

Thus, although building on a strong sense of cultural and linguistic proximity, the construction of a single Czechoslovak nation or of the Czechs and the Slovaks as two branches of one nation was primarily determined by pragmatic considerations of the Czech, and also some Slovak, political elites both before and after the creation of Czechoslovakia. The idea that the Slovaks did not constitute a separate nation from the Czechs - that they spoke a language which was only a dialect of Czech or, bluntly expressed, were Czechs speaking Slovak - forms the basis of the ideology of Czechoslovakism (Leff 1988: 133-40) which became the official state doctrine of the new republic. The construction of the Czechs and Slovaks as one 'Czechoslovak nation' was enshrined in the Czechoslovak constitution of 1920. As a branch of one Czechoslovak nation, the Slovaks were part of the state-forming nation and not an ethnic minority like the Germans, Hungarians, Ukrainians, or Poles. Unlike them, the Slovaks did not need either cultural or political autonomy.

In the light of Herder's notion that language is the defining phenomenon of the nation, which was fully adopted by the nineteenth-century Czech nationalist movement against Bolzano's territorial conception of the nation (see Stern 1992: 29-43; Pynsent 1994: 185) and has been entertained ever since, the language schism between the Czechs and Slovaks was regrettable. It would have helped the construction of a single Czechoslovak nation if this schism could have been overcome, and until the late 1920s the view was still being expressed by Czech scholars and leading politicians that Czech and Slovak were in fact a single language. For example, Pražák wrote in 1929 that 'literary Slovak is not a definitive value in spite of its eighty-five years of history... Its definitive existence is still a question' (1929: 130). At about the same time, Masaryk wrote that the 'Czechs and Slovaks are one nation and have one language. The Czechs, who were more free, developed their language more intensively than the Slovaks. So it happened that the Slovaks preserved their older dialect' (1928: 13).

One of the important functions of the ideology of Czechoslovakism was to hide the fact that the Czechs considered Czechoslovakia their state and to mask their dominant role in it by creating the illusion that it was both Czech and Slovak. The dominant role of the Czechs manifested itself both on the symbolic level and on the level of social action, and the Slovaks eventually began to object to both these forms of domination (Felak 1992).

The dominant role of the Czechs in public administration, education, health service, and the administration of justice in the new state was at first a necessity resulting from the different levels of development reached in Slovakia and in the Czech lands before World War I. Especially after the federalisation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, when the Slovaks began to be directly administered from

Budapest, they were exposed to a Magyarisation much stronger than the Germanisation of the Czech lands of the Austrian part of the empire. The Magyarisation of the Slovaks culminated before the outbreak of World War I. Seton-Watson, attempting to raise European consciousness on behalf of an unknown and endangered nation, estimated that there were only about a thousand Slovak-speaking intellectuals left (1931: 30). According to some estimates, by 1918 there were only ten Slovak doctors and twelve high school-teachers.

As the Slovaks were unable to provide even a skeleton administration, they did not demand the fulfilment of the Pittsburgh agreement, and even future Slovak autonomists such as Juriga and Hlinka supported the Martin declaration of 30 October 1918, which pronounced the Slovak nation to be 'part of a linguistically and cultural-historically united Czechoslovak nation' and demanded for the latter 'an unlimited right to self-determination on the basis of complete independence' (Greco 1947: 111-12). The Czechs undertook the tasks of building the new state, which were seen to be beyond the ability of the Slovaks, and Czech educators, doctors, judges, policemen, railway and postal workers, and so on, moved to Slovakia as state employees. Whilst according to the Hungarian population census of 1910 there were only 7,556 Czechs in Slovakia, by 1921 their number had increased to 71,733 (compared with only 15,630 Slovaks in the Czech lands) and by 1930 to 120,926 (Rychlík 1988: 19, 33). The image of Czechoslovakia as the Czech state and the legitimisation of this image by the ideology of Czechoslovakism were also reflected in the ethnic composition of the central government institutions and of Czechoslovak political representation itself. Of the 1,300 employees of the Ministry of Defence in the 1920s, only 6 were Slovaks, and of the 131 generals in the Czechoslovak army only one was a Slovak. There were only 4 Slovaks among the 417 employees of the Ministry of Education in Prague. There were 94 Czechs and only 68 Slovaks in the Slovak branch of this ministry in Bratislava (Beránek 1988: 73). Only 2 of the 17 ministers in the cabinet formed in 1919 were Slovaks, and there were only 40 Slovaks among 254 members of parliament (Faltan 1986: 57).

This situation gradually began to be resented by many Slovaks. Already in the 1920s, for example, Slovak railwaymen demanded that only Slovaks be employed on Slovak railway lines, and when rumours spread that the state administration was planning a reduction of clerks and state employees, voices were raised in Slovakia that no Slovak should be dismissed while a single Czech retained employment in Slovakia (Nosková 1988: 9).

However much Czech administration of Slovakia was considered necessary in the 1920s owing to the lack of qualified Slovak personnel, it was difficult to justify it in the 1930s. By 1937 the number of Slovak university graduates had increased threefold since 1920 (Beránek 1988: 73). Although more Slovaks found jobs as state employees in Slovakia and in the central state institutions, the overall ratio of Czechs to Slovaks decreased only marginally. Given the higher rate of unemployment in Slovakia than in the Czech lands during the recession years of the 1930s, it is understandable that

Slovak aversion to the Czech presence in Slovakia increased. Also resented was the fact that many Czechs in Slovakia used Czech as the official language of administration. This was made possible by a 1920 law stipulating that the official language in the Czech lands would usually be Czech and that in Slovakia usually Slovak. The word 'usually' made it possible for Czechs in Slovakia to use Czech in administration and Slovaks in the Czech lands to use Slovak. However, as there were many more Czechs in Slovakia than Slovaks in the Czech lands, in the 1920s administration in Slovak in the latter was rather exceptional whereas administration in Czech was quite common in Slovakia. In the 1930s, even though Czechs remained in many administrative posts in Slovakia, their use of Slovak as the official language increased dramatically not only because of their linguistic assimilation but also because of official pressure to use Slovak as a means of defusing Slovak resentment (Rychlík 1988: 19-20, 33).

However, as Kertzer has argued, people make sense of the political process mainly through its symbols (1988: 6). That the Czechs were the politically dominant element in the new Czechoslovak Republic and that they saw the new state as the revival of the historical Czech state was for ordinary people symbolised not only by the fact that the capital of the republic was Prague, the capital city of the former Bohemian kingdom, but also by the fact that all the symbols of the new state had clearly Protestant overtones. Some 90 per cent of Slovaks were Catholics, and, especially among ordinary Slovak villagers, the Catholic faith played a more significant role than among the religiously lukewarm Czechs. From the outset Catholic believers in Slovakia, led by their bishops and village priests, objected to the celebration of 6 July - the day of the death of Jan Hus - as a national holiday on the ground that Hus had meaning only for Czechs. In the words of one village priest, 'he corrected their orthography and taught at their university; for the Slovaks he has no meaning whatever and remains a heretic'. The Slovak Catholics often disturbed the celebrations of Hus's anniversary by Czechs living in Slovakia, demonstrated against them, or celebrated the anniversary of Cyril and Method⁵ in protest (Nosková 1988: 10-11).

All these various strands of resentment were politically articulated by the Slovak People's Party under the leadership of Andrej Hlinka, which campaigned for Slovak autonomy and regularly attracted the electoral support of almost a third of Slovak voters (Felak 1992). After the Munich agreement of 1938, when Czechoslovakia had to surrender to Germany the third of its territory in which Germans constituted the majority of the population, Hlinka's party, supported by other Slovak political parties, formed an autonomous Slovak government, which was recognised by the Czechoslovak parliament. Slovakia began to function as an autonomous part of the state, now officially designated Czecho-Slovakia. In 1939 the Slovak leader Jozef Tiso

⁵ Cyril and Method came as missionaries from Salonica to the Great Moravian empire to spread Christianity in 863. They originally conducted mass in a Slavonic language, but Latin became the liturgical language in 873.

yielded to Hitler's pressure and declared Slovakia an independent state under the official protection of Nazi Germany. The Slovak government soon became a puppet regime and pursued Nazi-inspired policies including the forced transfer of Slovak Jews to Nazi concentration camps. Slovak opposition to Nazi rule culminated in 1944 in a national uprising which aimed to free Slovaks from Nazi control and to reunite them with Czechs in a single Czechoslovak Republic. The uprising was eventually crushed by German military forces, but it laid the basis for the autonomous role of Slovakia in post-war Czechoslovakia. An agreement reached in 1945 by the Czechoslovak government in exile in London and the rival communist faction in exile in Moscow confirmed Czechoslovakia as a state of two equal nations and accepted that the Slovak National Council, which had inspired and led the uprising, would be the supreme legislative Slovak organ in independent Czechoslovakia and the Slovak government its administrative branch.

The Czech National Council established during the 1945 uprising in Prague was dissolved by the Czechoslovak government which assumed power after the war. The result of this decision was the creation of an asymmetrical model, with a central Czechoslovak parliament and government ruling the whole country and a Slovak National Council and government in Bratislava. There was no corresponding Czech council and government in Bohemia and Moravia. This model, which existed until 1968, was thus the result not of Slovak demands for equity but of the power ambitions of the Czech-controlled Czechoslovak government. To most Slovaks it indicated once more that Slovakia might well belong to the Slovaks but Czechoslovakia belonged to the Czechs (Pithart 1990b: 109).

Once in power after 1948, the Communist Party increasingly subjected Slovakia to centralised rule. The legislative power of the Slovak National Council was in practice limited to certain aspects of cultural and educational policy, and the Slovak government was fully subordinated to the central government, with the Slovak ministers acting only as deputies to the ministers in Prague. The 'socialist constitution' of 1960 abolished the Slovak government and even further reduced the role of the Slovak National Council. All this, as well as the earlier fate of Slovak Communist politicians such as Vladimír Clementis, the former foreign minister, who was executed in 1952, and Gustáv Husák, who was imprisoned in 1951 on charges of 'bourgeois nationalism', contributed to increasing dissatisfaction among Slovak intellectuals.

During the 1960s, opposition to the centralising tendencies of the existing political system grew stronger even within the Communist Party in Slovakia. It was not accidental that when the process of liberalisation gained momentum in 1968 a Slovak - Alexandr Dubček - was chosen to lead the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Alongside economists and writers, the Slovak Communists represented the most important opposition to the bureaucratic centralism of the communist system. But while the main aim of the Czech intellectuals was the democratisation of the whole system of government and economic reform, the Slovak opposition aimed first of all

at achieving recognition of the equality of Czechs and Slovaks and the institution of a federal system of government. Eventually, the constitutional law creating a Czechoslovak Socialist Federal Republic consisting of Czech and Slovak republics was the only result of the reform movement of 1968. Each republic had its own government and legislative body (national council) empowered to pass legislation which did not contravene the constitution of the federation. The legislative organ of the federation became the Federal Assembly, consisting of the Chamber of the People and the Chamber of Nations, in which the Czechs and Slovaks had the same number of deputies. The voting system in the Chamber of Nations, which had to approve legislation passed by the Federal Assembly, ruled out the possibility of an automatic majority of one nation over the other (Henderson 1993: 25). Whilst the federal state retained central control over foreign policy, defence, internal security, and economic planning, considerable powers were granted to the governments of both republics, particularly in the spheres of social, educational, and cultural policy (Skilling 1976: 49-56; Kusin 1971: 69-75; Leff 1988: 121-8; Rupnik 1981: 117-21; Wolchik 1991: 30).

During the period of 'normalisation' which followed the crushing of the Prague Spring, power was once again concentrated at the centre through various subsidiary legislative acts as well as in practice, leaving Slovak autonomy preserved only in its formal aspects. The result of two decades of this 'normalisation' was bitter disillusionment among many Slovaks (Leff 1988: 245-52).

Czech images of Slovaks

According to an opinion poll conducted in 1946, 65 per cent of Czechs maintained that Czechs and Slovaks were two branches of the same nation and only 21 per cent that they were separate nations. This view did not change much during the forty years of communist rule, in spite of the fact that the 'bourgeois' ideology of Czechoslovakism was vehemently denounced and vigorously replaced by the construction of two brotherly nations harmoniously coexisting in a common state. More than half of Czechs supported the idea of one Czechoslovak nation in an opinion poll conducted in October 1990. Nevertheless, 66 per cent of the Czechs in 1946 were, and according to my estimate many more today are, of the opinion that Slovaks differ considerably from Czechs in many respects (Timoracký 1992:70-1).

This difference is expressed from numerous perspectives and in terms of various images. 'Slovak' frequently evokes the image of a well-built lad in folk costume - wide white trousers, a wide leather belt with strong brass buckles, and a short linen shirt which leaves his bare stomach exposed -brandishing an ornamental long-handled axe and singing a mournful folksong. This image is the creation of a whole range of artists, film-makers, and journalists, many of them Slovaks, aimed at demonstrating their appreciation of ordinary Slovak folk. However, among many Czechs it perpetuates the belief that if it were not for their own civilising efforts, the Slovaks would still be walking around with their bellybuttons exposed. In this imagery, the

Slovak is an exotic Other living in a traditional and picturesque mountain village, and Slovakia is an exotic and unspoiled wild country epitomised by the rocky mountains of the High Tatra, slivovitz, and ethnic dishes made of sheep cheese.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the writers and journalists who created this image were joined by professional ethnologists and folklorists, whose emphasis on the antiquity of Slovak culture was part of an attempt to reconstruct the image of an original society and culture for each particular nation. The traditional folk culture - even in its isolated remnants, whether vernacular architecture, folk costumes, or folksongs - was for them the main building material for such reconstructions. Their description of the traditional way of life and culture of the Slovak peasant penetrated into the consciousness of the general public through their publications, which were widely read, and through articles in encyclopaedias.

In their purely visual form, the images of the Czech lands and Slovakia are collapsed into straightforward images of culture and nature: the Czech lands are symbolised by the image of Prague, and the silhouette of the Hradčany Castle is the most common visual image of Bohemia; Slovakia is symbolised by the Tatra Mountains. These images were drawn upon in a newspaper article pleading for the preservation of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks: 'what unites us is certainly more than a large slice of bread. The pride of Slovaks in mother Prague of the hundred spires is equal to the pride of Czechs in the clear peaks of the Tatra Mountains' (Marie Mandelíková in *Lidové noviny*, 23 November 1990).

The image of the healthy Slovak lad in his folk costume correlates not only with an image of an exotic Other but also with an image of youth and connotes a more general image of the young Slovak as against the old Czech nation. In spite of their perceived differences, when asked which nation is most similar to them, most Czechs without hesitation mention the Slovaks. Not only have most Czechs been to Slovakia but almost a quarter of them have relatives of Slovak origin, almost half count Slovaks among their personal friends, and a third have met Slovaks regularly in the course of their work. These personal contacts are even stronger among the Slovaks: 31 per cent have relatives who come from Bohemia or Moravia, 57 per cent have personal friends among Czechs, and 30 per cent have been in regular contact with Czech colleagues in the course of their work (Timoracký 1992: 83), Czechs see Slovaks as their 'brothers'. However, this kinship metaphor does not express feelings of equality. Not only is the expression 'brother Slovaks' very often intended ironically - as is made clear by quoting from the text of the Slovak national anthem and rendering the word 'brother' in Slovak - but the basic notion of inequality in spite of close kinship is expressed through the image of the Slovak as the Czech's younger brother. Like most other images, this image dates back at least to the period of the political aspirations of nineteenth-century Czechs and Slovaks to create their own common state. The implications of the image of a younger brother were explicitly stated, for example by Karel Kálal who wrote several articles and books about Slovakia at the turn of the century:

The Czech is the elder and the Slovak the younger brother. The younger brother is usually inclined to believe that the elder aims in his advice only at his own advantage. He rejects your helping hand, he kicks you. . . And what about you, elder brother? Your duty is to look after the younger brother even more carefully, to make sure that when alone he will not lose his way or drown.

(1905:143)

These notions of the wisdom and mature rationality of the elder brother and the consequent paternal responsibility and of the youthful irresponsibility, immaturity, lack of experience, and recourse to emotions rather than to rational calculation of the younger have been variously implied whenever the image of elder and younger brothers has been invoked (see, e.g., Vaculík in *Literární noviny*, 3 May 1990).

Most ordinary Czechs have hardly any factual knowledge of the history of Slovakia. Nevertheless, they are aware that Czechs have a rich history during which they have often played a decisive role in European politics, whereas Slovakia has always been just a mountainous region of Hungary which has been bypassed by history. Even more than the image of a rural community in which the traditional culture and way of life remain preserved, the image of Slovakia as a land without history is the creation of historians, often themselves Slovaks. Motivated by their nationalist aspirations, they have refused to treat Slovak history as part of Hungarian history. The result is a simple periodisation of Slovak history, the first example of which is perhaps the work of the Slovak revivalist Čerwenák published in 1844. He emphasises the period of the Great Moravian empire of which the Slovaks were allegedly the main component, and then hesitantly describes the period between the eleventh and the eighteenth centuries in which he pays attention only to Matúš Čák Trenčianský (see Pynsent 1994: 166), for him the model of the power and glory of the true Slovak leader. He then describes in detail the activities of the protagonists of the Slovak national revival in the nineteenth century. This periodisation of Slovak history, more or less embraced by the whole of Slovak historiography (see Pynsent 1994: 62), led the Slovak writer V. Mináč to express the view that 'we have no history, and what we have is not our own' (1970).

The image of Slovakia as a land without history is also created through the usage whereby Bohemia and Moravia are described as a single entity as an alternative to the expression 'the Czech Republic'. These are lands which were part of the Bohemian kingdom and are referred to as 'the lands of the Czech crown'. In relation to Slovakia, they are habitually referred to as 'the historical lands'. The contraposition of 'the historical lands' and Slovakia denies Slovakia any historicity. Czechs are quick to point out that, because the Slovaks have no history, they have never produced any important historical personalities and that the only state they have ever had was the Czechoslovak Republic. Only 21 per cent of Czechs are of the opinion that the Slovaks had no alternative but to create their own state after the Munich agreement; most believe that in doing so they betrayed the Czechs and the common Czechoslovak cause (Timoracký 1992: 81). The Czechs consider laughable the claim

of some Slovak politicians that Slovaks are the oldest European nation because they were the main element of the Great Moravian empire, which was the first historically documented state in Central Europe. A consequence of the perception that the Slovaks have no history is the prevailing Czech view that they have no significant national culture. Allusions to Slovak writers, com posers, playwrights, and scholars are easily dismissed by pointing out that none of them has ever become internationally famous.

In comparison with Slovaks, Czechs see themselves as part of a cultured and civilised Europe from which they were only temporarily excluded while under communist rule, and quite a number of them are willing to blame the Slovaks even for that. Shortly after the November 1989 revolution, an overwhelming majority of the Czechoslovak population supported radical economic reforms and there appeared to be no significant differences in attitude between Czechs and Slovaks. However, according to an opinion poll conducted in March 1990, 63 per cent of Slovaks but only 48 per cent of Czechs advocated a slower rate of economic transformation. During 1990 two different attitudes toward economic reform became apparent. The first, predominant among Czechs, supported reform in the form in which it was being carried out, while the second, predominant among Slovaks, critically pointed to its negative social consequences, the most important of which was the increase in unemployment and the loss of basic social security. Whereas in the Czech lands economic reform was considered the most important aspect of the post-communist transformation of the society, in Slovakia the most important task was seen as the solution of its social aspects. This was interpreted by the Czech media as a Slovak preference for an economy with socialist elements (Timoracký 1992: 85-7). This view was strongly reinforced by the 1992 election results in Slovakia and eventually led to the view that it was predominantly the Slovaks who were responsible for the excesses of communist rule in Czechoslovakia. According to an opinion poll conducted in October 1990, 70 per cent of Czechs considered the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic an exemplary democratic state, and 62 per cent were of the opinion that the Slovaks had managed to survive as a nation only because of the republic's existence. Fifty-eight per cent thought that most Slovaks had adapted well to the communist regime after 1968 and presented no effective opposition to it. The view that the Czechs had suffered more from 'normalisation' than the Slovaks was shared by 60 per cent of Czechs (Timoracký 1992: 81-2).

As most Czechs now tend to see socialism as an alien system imposed on them by the uncultured Asiatic East, they also tend to see the boundary between the 'historical lands' and Slovakia as the boundary between Western rationalism and Eastern emotionality (Timoracký 1992: 72) or, even more explicitly, as the boundary between the cultured West and the uncultured East. This is not a new view; in the 1950s I heard Czechs jokingly express the view that Asia began immediately east of Luhačovice (a town in eastern Moravia). Nowadays, however, it is not so masked but made respectable by the tone of numerous articles in the press and the discussion on

Czech television. For example, an article which argued for the necessity of dividing Czechoslovakia into separate Czech and Slovak states was published in 1992 in *Respekt*, the recipient of a 1991 award from the World Press Review for the 'deepening of world understanding, defence of human rights, and journalistic professionalism'. The article was entitled 'On Our Own into Europe, Together into the Balkans'. *Lidové noviny* printed the opinion that Slovakia 'has never belonged economically and politically to Western Europe' and that 'the contemporary reality of the Slovak political scene echoes the Balkan-oriented trends' (9 April 1991). The right-wing *Metropolitní telegraf* expressed the view that

the acceptance... of the constitution of the Slovak Republic moved Slovakia back into its traditional space. It meant that the eastern part of Czechoslovakia lost its connecting link with the Central European region and it is gradually becoming a part of Panonia.

(5 September 1992)

Český deník commented that

Slovakia differs from the Czech lands in its historical development, which is directed more toward the East than the history of the more Western-oriented Bohemia... We should not be indifferent as to whether the Commonwealth of Independent States or the Balkans or both would begin across our (i.e., the Czech State's) new border.

(1 September 1992)

By holding certain images of the Slovaks which contrast with images they have of themselves, the Czechs ascribe certain attributes to themselves as a nation. These contrasting images can be set out in a classical table of binary oppositions (table 2).

Table 2. *Czech images of Czechs and Slovaks*

Czechs	Slovaks
Modern society	Traditional community
History	Lack of history
Statehood	Lack of statehood
Progress	Underdevelopment
Adult	Young
Culture	Nature
Rationality	Emotions
West	East

Every term in the set associated with Czechs carries positive connotations in relation to the corresponding term associated with Slovaks. This explicit comparison, carried out through a number of fixed images of the Slovaks, perpetually re-creates the tradition of the Czechs as a cultured nation.

The self-perception of the Czechs as an inherently democratic nation is also continually re-created through the comparison and juxtaposition of the political processes in Slovakia and in the Czech lands. In post-1989 Czech political rhetoric, 'democracy' is one of the most often used terms. In particular contexts it stands for a multiplicity of specific political and social arrangements, practices, and attitudes, of which the ones most often invoked are the recognition of civil rights, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, and the rule of law which guarantees these various rights and freedoms. When employed rhetorically, the meaning of 'democracy' is not circumscribed by any one of these political and social arrangements, practices, and attitudes. Neither is democracy defined as a specific form of government, political process, or political culture. The term is employed rhetorically as a symbol which gains its meaning in relation to what is perceived as its opposite or its negation: totalitarianism (*totalita*). Although 'totalitarianism' itself is, in certain contexts, defined as state control over ideology and economy or over most aspects of citizens' lives, in most political rhetoric it is also employed as an overarching symbol whose meaning derives from its opposition to 'democracy'. Both democracy and totalitarianism are thus symbols which allow the possibility of a discourse without any necessary agreement on the meaning of the symbols which it employs and at the same time creates. The existence of this discourse is made possible by its underpinning by a shared notion of communism and fascism as tokens of totalitarianism.

A Czech publicist aptly characterised the popular conceptualisation of democracy as an understanding that 'the Communists should not govern and certainly not alone and forever' (František Schildberger in *Lidové noviny*, 22 June 1992). Democracy is construed as the opposite of totalitarianism or of any of its concrete tokens not only in popular opinion but also in the rhetoric of professional politicians: 'Democracy must be understood not only in its moral dimension but as a set of measures in the functioning of society which make any return of totalitarianism impossible' (Ladislav Dvořák, chairman of the Czech Socialist Party, *Svobodné slovo*, 20 February 1992). The statements of various Czech and Slovak political leaders during the negotiations about the future form of Czech-Slovak political relations have been widely reported on television and in the Czech press, and have of course significantly contributed to the image of Czech and Slovak political cultures as radically different.

However, the perception of this difference is even more significantly nourished by what the Czechs see as clear symbols of totalitarianism in Slovak political culture.

One of these symbols is the independent Slovak state declared on 14 March 1939. According to an opinion poll conducted in October 1990, of the 69 per cent of Slovaks who had an opinion about the character of the independent Slovak state, half saw it in a positive light and half negatively. However, 47 per cent were convinced

that the existence of the Slovak state fulfilled Slovak desires for independence. In contrast to Slovak ambivalence, 66 per cent of Czechs are convinced that the independent Slovak state was unambiguously fascist in character (Timoracký 1992:81-2).

For many Slovaks, the period of Slovak independence in 1939 represents a time when they were for the first and last time masters of their own destiny. In post-communist Czechoslovakia the independent Slovak state became a powerful symbol invoked in demonstrations expressing a Slovak desire for sovereignty. This desire was first articulated by the Slovak National Party and gradually embraced by both the Christian Democratic Movement and the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, the strongest political party to emerge from the Public Against Violence. The most important of these demonstrations were the 14 March celebrations. During the demonstration held in 1990 in Bratislava, the crowd shouted slogans such as 'Independent Slovakia!', 'We've had enough of Prague!', and 'We've had enough of Havel!' The demonstration was reported on Czech television and in the Czech press and widely commented upon. With their attitude to the Slovak state, Czechs saw the demonstration as a clear sign not only that the Slovaks were proudly celebrating their fascist past, of which they should be ashamed, but also that the political scene in Slovakia was again acquiring a distinctly fascist character. This view was reinforced by the fact that the slogans shouted at the demonstration included 'Hungarians across the Danube!' and 'Jews to Palestine!' For many Czechs it was evidence that the Slovaks were unable to distance themselves from their fascist past that Jan Čarnogurský, then prime minister of the Slovak Republic, objected to the preamble of the new Czechoslovak-German treaty affirming the legal continuity of Czechoslovakia after the Munich agreement on the ground that this continuity had been interrupted by international recognition of the independent Slovak state between 1939 and 1945.

The straightforward conclusion of many Czechs that the Slovaks were fascists was reinforced by many other events in Slovakia. One of them was the next celebration of the anniversary of the declaration of the Slovak state in Bratislava in March 1991, when President Havel was verbally abused and physically assaulted by the demonstrators. On 28 October 1991, during the celebration in Bratislava of the anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, demonstrators threw eggs at him, whereupon he left the platform and the celebration ended. Other events which reinforced the Czech view of Slovaks as fascists were the commemorative celebrations of the birthdays of Hlinka, the founder of the Slovak People's Party, who died before Slovakia gained its independence in 1939 but whose party was the ruling party in the Slovak state, and particularly of Tiso, the president of the Slovak state, tried and sentenced as a war criminal. Strong disapproval on the Czech side was also expressed when Čarnogurský attended the burial of Gustáv Husák, the Communist boss of post-1968 Czechoslovakia. The prevailing Czech feelings were summed up in a reader's letter to the daily *Český deník*:

I admire the Czech representation - Mr Klaus and others. They have to deal with people who one day go to pay their respects to the memory of and to give homage to the fascist criminal Tiso and a few weeks later go to pay their respects to the memory of the Communist criminal Husák. Even the Slovak citizen can surely imagine the fate of an active politician in Germany who celebrated Hitler or some other Nazi criminal.

(8 September 1992)

Not only what are perceived as fascist tendencies in Slovakia, but also all the signs of Slovak political culture reminiscent of the political culture of the communist regime, are seen by Czechs as indications of Slovak totalitarianism. Prominent among these are acts and statements which Czechs see as attempts to curb the freedom of the press in Slovakia, first manifested when the Slovak weekly magazine *Kultúrny život* published an allegedly blasphemous story and the minister of culture of the Slovak Republic, a member of the Christian Democratic Movement, refused the magazine any further government subsidy. The founding of For the True Image of Slovakia, an organisation of Slovak journalists - in fact a response to Slovak prime minister Vladimír Mečiar's exclusion from his news conferences of journalists whose reporting he saw as 'hostile' to his government and damaging to Slovak 'legitimate interests' - was interpreted by the Czech media as an attempt to curb the freedom of the press in Slovakia. Disapproving comments were also made on Mečiar's criticism of Slovak television, which in his view was unwilling to grant him the right to inform the public regularly about his and his government's views. His appeal in September 1992 to Slovak journalists to print only 'objective news' and to respect, in the interest of Slovakia, 'the rules of ethical self-regulation' was the subject of debate on Czech television; comments on it unanimously denounced it as a call for self-censorship. Under the title 'Is Jakeš the Example?', a Czech newspaper expressed the view that

attempts to introduce censorship manifest themselves clearly in Slovakia today. It makes no difference under what mantle censorship hides itself, whether the former (communist) Office for Press and Information or today's association For the True Image of Slovakia . . . pressure from a political party official on the publisher or editor and efforts to differentiate between journalists who may attend press conferences and those for whom there is 'no more room' in the conference hall or at important events are nothing other than political censorship.

(Lubomír Kohout in *Metropolitní telegraf*, 5 September 1992)

Such views were echoed by a great number of Czech intellectuals. Ordinary people were more sensitive to rhetoric reminiscent of that of representatives of the communist regime. Thus Mečiar's talk about opposition parties, journalists, and newspapers critical of the Slovak government as 'enemies' of the government or 'hostile' to the Slovak nation was not only commented upon in Czech media but also the subject of people's comments in their discussion of contemporary political events. In the course of this discussion, political process in Slovakia came to be perceived as a 'totalitarianism (*totalita*) of one person, one opinion, and one way of thinking', as Štefan Hrib expressed it in *Lidové noviny* (2 September 1992). A similar reaction on the Czech side followed the public vote of the deputies of the Slovak

National Council on the Slovak constitution in September 1992, when the deputies stood up, announced their names, and declared whether they were for acceptance or rejection of the proposed constitution. This was viewed by the Czech press and public as undemocratic, being against council rules requiring a secret ballot and an intimidating tactic of the Slovak ruling party (the Movement for Democratic Slovakia), which was seen as assuming a 'leading role' reminiscent of that of the Communist Party.

Any signs of Slovak political culture reminiscent of the political culture of the communist regime are noted and critically commented upon by Czechs. Even more than the similarity in rhetoric, the televised images of Slovak political culture remind people of communist practices. After the television transmission of the ceremonial session of the Slovak National Council at which the Slovak constitution was signed by the prime minister and the chairman, many Czechs with whom I spoke commented with disapproval on the applause which followed. The tone of these spontaneous comments was summed up in the following description of the incident:

The chairmanship of the Slovak National Council stood up as one prime minister and collectively started applauding themselves in a rhythm conspicuously reminiscent of 'Long Live the Communist Party'. It was moving to see those eyes turned with a dog's affection to the prime minister to see whether he had stood up (and when he stood up, all did so as if on command), whether he was still applauding ... or had he already stopped? And if he had not stopped, they would still be applauding there now. (Vladimír Just in *Respekt*, 1992, no. 36:14)

All these various signs which the Czechs observe with disapproval in Slovak politics reinforce their view that 'the virus of nationalism accompanied by the signs of totalitarianism is the Slovak reality' (Štefan Hrib in *Lidové noviny*, 2 September 1992) and that 'in Slovakia, [communist] totalitarianism driven out through the door returns through the window dressed up in "national costume"' (F. Gál 1992: 27). During the last months of the existence of the Czechoslovak federation, the Slovak political scene was habitually characterised as a 'totalitarian regime pursued by the national-socialist government' (*Metropotitní telegraf*, 5 September 1992); many Czechs saw Slovakia as 'an explosive mixture of nationalism, communism, and authoritarianism' (Jirák and Šoltys 1992: 56). Such attitudes were to a great extent refractions of comments appearing in the Czech press. The comments published in *Český deník*, a daily with ties to the Civic Democratic Party, can serve as an example of the reporting typical of much of the press at the time:

Slovakia is governed by a dangerous neo-Bolshevik faction which is capable of anything and for which the supposedly democratic institutions [the Slovak National Council] serve merely as a screen from domestic and foreign public opinion.

... a thousand-year old dream of the Slovak nation is fulfilled in the post-communist neo-Bolshevik national regime whose godfathers are Lenin, Mussolini...

... the problem of the Czechs is that they inhabit, at least formally, a single state with this red-brown clan.

(Josef Mlejnek Jr in *Český deník*, 27 August 1992)

This perception of the Slovak political scene leads to the construction of the 'velvet revolution' as primarily a Czech endeavour which the Slovaks at best joined but certainly did not initiate. The view that it was Czechs and not Slovaks who instigated the end of the communist regime derives from the belief that the former had more reason to be dissatisfied with it. This is reflected in the perceived difference in the opposition to the communist regime between the Czech lands and Slovakia. Václav Benda, chairman of the Christian Democratic Party represented in the post-1992 ruling coalition, articulated this Czech view in the following way:

whilst (the opposition) in Bohemia was a civic opposition in which various Christian associations also of course played a significant role, civic opposition in Slovakia was quite marginal. Opposition trends manifested themselves primarily within the Catholic church, and their political articulation was only individual and insufficient.

(*Lidové noviny*, 1 September 1992)

In the Czech view, these deep-rooted differences manifested themselves in the result of the 1992 elections:

In the Czech Republic, the democratic forces won a victory over the non-democratic crypto-communist left. . . But in the Slovak Republic, 85 per cent of mandates were won by nationally or even separatistically oriented, predominantly left-wing, and strongly anti-reformist parties.

The election results confronted us basically with the decision of whether we want another relapse of socialism in a common state or a democratic development in an independent Czech Republic.

(Václav Benda in *Lidové noviny*, 1 September 1992)

Like Czech *kulturnost*, the deep-seated democratic tendencies which give credence to the asserted democratic tradition of the Czech nation are continually re-created through the comparison and juxtaposition of the political processes in Slovakia and in the Czech lands. The Czech democratic tradition is confirmed and thus perpetually re-created by rejection of the totalitarianism which most Czechs see as dominating the Slovak political scene. This rejection manifested itself most vividly in the change of attitude of the Czech government to its Slovak counterpart which emerged from the 1992 elections and in its efforts to terminate the existing federation and create a separate Czech state. Rhetorically, this effort was presented as an effort to safeguard the Western-style democracy of the Czech lands threatened by political development in Slovakia. Most Czechs understood it as an effort consistent with the democratic tradition of the Czech nation.

5. National traditions and the political process

A tradition is an asserted belief. This does not mean, however, that it is arbitrary. We can begin to appreciate this when we move beyond the description of its form and structure to consider how it is reproduced in social praxis and in whose particular interest it is formulated and invoked. Although a tradition is ostensibly invoked to make sense of the past, it is always invoked either from the standpoint of the present objective or from the standpoint of some future objective. It is the present or the future which determines certain presumed attitudes and characteristics to be 'our traditions'. A tradition is thus, on the one hand, invoked to legitimate or to alter the present state of affairs and, on the other, to mobilise people to pursue some envisaged ideal state of affairs in the future. The present is thus made sense of, or the envisaged future is seen as desirable, in terms of the past. Conceptualised as evidence of the past, the tradition is at the same time seen as a historical force continuing in the present or 'logically' pointing the way to the society's historically predetermined future. One of its important functions is to link past, present, and future.

Neither a democratic tradition nor the tradition of a cultured and well-educated nation was invoked under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, when the traditions of revolutionary struggle, sympathy with the movements of national liberation from colonial oppression, and the long history of friendship with other peoples building socialism were part of the official political rhetoric. This is the reason the socialist period is seen as yet another anomaly and discontinuity in Czech history and the reason the assumed traditions of democracy and culture which form an important part of Czech nationalism became a powerful motivating force during the November 1989 revolution which toppled the communist regime. This is also the reason that numerous Czech politicians and journalists talk about the end of the communist system as 'the return to history' and the whole post-communist transformation of society is seen as 'undoing' the wrongs of the socialist period.

The 'velvet revolution'

As all revolutionaries worth their salt know, the precondition of a successful revolution is the widespread dissatisfaction of the masses, who can then be politicised and encouraged to act in the name of the envisaged change for the better. By this textbook formula, Poland in the 1980s and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s were probably in a more revolutionary situation than Czechoslovakia ever was before November 1989. However one interprets Šimečka's 1988 diary, from which I have quoted earlier (see p. 27), one can hardly read it as a description of politicised masses ready for revolutionary action. The leading dissidents themselves remained sceptical, until the very last moment, about the chances of overthrowing the communist system. The essay Petr Pithart wrote in August 1989 (Pithart 1990a: 345-61) depicts the communist regime in Czechoslovakia as extremely stable and Czechoslovak society as distinctly passive. A few days before the events of

November 1989, Václav Havel said that he expected political changes in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1990 and that the changes would not be connected with public demonstrations.

Yet, a few days later a revolution took place. When the students who demonstrated in Prague on 17 November were brutally beaten by the police, they declared an indefinite strike, in which they were immediately joined by actors and musicians. The day after the demonstration not a single theatre was open in Prague, and very soon thereafter theatrical and concert performances came to a halt throughout the country. The declaration of the students' and actors' strikes was followed by a week of daily mass demonstrations in Prague in which an estimated 750,000 people participated (in a city with a population of 1,200,000). The demonstrations soon spread to other cities and towns. Ten days after the students and actors in Prague went on strike, there was a general strike in protest against the rule of the Communist Party. According to a published survey, about half of the population actually stopped work for two hours on 27 November, and another quarter of the population joined the demonstrations which took place in cities and major towns throughout the country. Ten per cent refrained from participating in the strike in order to maintain essential services, and only 20 per cent did so either because they did not want to take part or because they were afraid of dismissal or other reprisals threatened by their superiors and by local party secretaries.

Two days after the strike the Federal Assembly abolished the article of the Czechoslovak constitution which enshrined the leading role of the Communist Party, and the Communist chairman of the Federal Assembly resigned. The new cabinet formed on 3 December consisted of fifteen Communists and five non-Communists. New mass demonstrations followed, and under the threat of another general strike the new government survived for only seven days. On 10 December the Communist president swore in a new government of national understanding which consisted of nine Communists and eleven non-Communists and then resigned. In January the prime minister and one of the deputy prime ministers resigned their party membership, reducing the number of Communists in the cabinet to seven out of twenty. On 28 December Alexandr Dubček was elected chairman of the Federal Assembly, and on 29 December the Federal Assembly elected Havel president of the republic (Wheaton and Kavan 1992). Allegiance to socialism was omitted from his constitutionally prescribed oath by agreement of all concerned. In contrast with Poland and Hungary, where reform-minded Communist leaders negotiated the end of communist rule in discussions with the opposition which stretched over several months, the communist system in Czechoslovakia fell within a few days.

A number of Western political commentators viewed this revolution led by actors and a playwright as a kind of absurd theatre in itself. Yet the change which it brought about was not only faster than the change anywhere else in Eastern Europe but also, with the possible exception of that in East Germany and Hungary, much more radical. Early in 1990 the People's Militia, the armed wing of the Communist Party,

was dissolved, and the activities of the Communist Party in workplaces, the army, and the police were banned by law; most party property was put to new uses. Elections held in June 1990 involved twenty-three political parties and movements which covered the whole spectrum from ultra-right to radical left and resulted in the formation of a coalition government of the Civic Forum and Christian Democrats which began to pursue vigorously a policy of privatisation and transition to a free market economy.

How then do we explain the paradox that the most successful revolution in Eastern Europe was one which defied all textbook formulae - one which was started by students and led by intellectuals who had no support of the masses when they embarked on their political gamble? I want to argue that this paradox disappears once we begin to see 'polities' as an aspect of the cultural system. To sketch the role of Czech national traditions in giving shape to the course of political events known as the 'velvet revolution', I want to consider two questions: why the revolution was started by students, actors, and other intellectuals and why their public opposition to the communist regime was so swiftly followed by the masses.

An important instrument of communist propaganda was the unceasing comparison of the achievements of socialist Czechoslovakia with those of the pre-war capitalist Czechoslovak Republic. In this comparison socialist Czechoslovakia was far ahead: it had full employment, and basic education, medical care, and old-age pensions were available to everyone. It was also (naturally) winning hands down on the number of cars, bathrooms, radio sets, and other gadgets per family, not to mention television sets, of which there had been none at all in pre-war Czechoslovakia. Figures which were not to the advantage of the socialist system, such as the number of hospital beds in relation to the population or the average speed of passenger trains, were simply not mentioned, and pictures of Prague from the 1930s, portraying a lively and cosmopolitan city hardly resembling the drab and dilapidated Prague of the 1960s and 1970s, were nowhere to be seen.

This elementary trick of comparing the past with the present and presenting it as a comparison of one contemporary social system with another worked mainly because there were still enough older people around who could enliven the statistics with narratives of their personal experiences during the depression years of the 1930s. (Similar personal experiences of hardship in the 1930s were used to sustain the morale of the British miners striking against pit closures in the 1980s.) These narratives re-emerged in letters from old party members to the party newspaper *Rudé právo* in the early months of 1990 as arguments against privatisation and the introduction of an economic model based on market principles. The point is that it is 'lived' experience of this kind which gives credence to the statistics employed by official propaganda: statistical figures are experience-distant, and reality as it is understood by the people themselves can be apprehended only through concepts which are experience-near,

The proverbial denial of the values of the previous generation by the members of the subsequent one undoubtedly played some role, but the main reason for the politicisation of young people in Czechoslovakia was mainly that their experience was quite different from the experience of their parents and certainly of their grandparents. Most of those involved in the demonstration on 17 November and in the subsequent student strike had not even been born in 1968, and those who had been were too young to remember it. Their 'lived' experience was only with post-1968 Czechoslovakia, which they were comparing not with the Czechoslovakia of the past but with its contemporary neighbours to the West. In comparison with their counterparts there, they felt deprived in every respect: prevented from travelling, from playing and listening to music they liked, from reading books and looking at pictures they liked, from hearing more than one view on anything in the course of their education, and even from freely choosing whether to believe in God.

Another reason it was the young people who rebelled most openly against the state was that in their case one important tactic of the regime for forcing the population to toe the line was completely ineffective. Although the leading dissidents were given prison sentences after 1968, the main ways of controlling dissent were economic. Dissidents were prevented from getting employment appropriate to their qualifications and could at best earn their living in menial jobs. Examples of writers, journalists, actors, and priests employed as stokers, unskilled labourers, lumbermen, and - with luck - taxi drivers are legion. One of the most effective means of forcing potential dissidents to give up their subversive activity was discrimination against their children; irrespective of their academic achievements, they were denied access to higher education. It was one thing to engage in political opposition to the regime and suffer in consequence; it was another to engage in such opposition in the knowledge that one's children would suffer as well.

There is no doubt that using children as hostages was the most effective means of breaking down the widespread popular opposition which followed the invasion by Warsaw Pact armies in 1968 (Simečka 1984). In 1989 young people were free from this particular kind of pressure. Of course, not only they themselves but their parents too could have suffered for their actions. But while it is difficult to justify the punishment of innocent children for the actions of their parents, it is not so difficult to justify the possible punishment of the parents for the actions of their children. After all, it was precisely the inactivity of the parents' generation which had created the mess in which the country found itself. The pride which people took in the students in November and December 1989 was remarkable. It was obvious that the students were managing to do what they themselves had always wanted, but never dared, to do.

The small circle of dissidents who stood in active opposition to the regime objected particularly to the systematic persecution of scholars, journalists, writers, poets, musicians, pop singers, and other artists who had declared their open support for the reforms of 1968 and who were unwilling to seek the regime's favour by

publicly renouncing their 'ideological mistakes'. These active dissidents formed only a tiny minority of the country's intelligentsia, but their small circle included virtually all leading Czech and Slovak intellectuals, among them many of those who had contributed to the high international profile of Czechoslovak cinema, drama, and literature in the 1960s. Those who had not emigrated had been banned, forced to survive in menial occupations, and from time to time imprisoned; their creativity had been driven underground. The result was that hardly a novel, film, or drama of any significance had been published or performed in Czechoslovakia since 1968 (on Czech literature after 1968, see Pynsent 1994: 152). In the words of Heinrich Boll, Czechoslovakia had become 'a cultural Biafra'.

As the systematic creation of a cultural desert in post-1968 Czechoslovakia was seen as the gift of the state to people whose self-image was that of a highly cultured and well-educated nation, it is understandable that the persistence of rigid censorship and systematic and ruthless persecution of anyone expressing a thought which deviated from the official line was seen by the intellectuals as the state's betrayal of the very nation whose state it nominally was. The state's cultural policy turned the intellectuals against the state in the name of the nation of which they formed a part and in whose name they saw themselves as speaking. The actors joined the students in the strike not because they had any greater grudge against the state than other intellectuals but simply because they and the musicians who joined them were, because of their visibility, the only intellectuals who could strike effectively.

The idea that a strike in the theatres of London's West End could topple the British government when even miners and ambulance drivers had not come anywhere close to it is clearly laughable. Pursuing further this unimaginable parallel, we may amuse ourselves by contemplating how long a strike in the West End would have to last before workers in the Midlands and farmers in Northumberland or Cumbria would even notice it. The strike of actors in Prague theatres, however, not only spread like wildfire to all the other theatres and concert halls in the country and was emulated by other entertainers (such as the footballers who refused to play the scheduled league matches) but was followed in ten days by a countrywide general strike which made it clear to the ruling party that its time was up. Western commentators, who probably had in mind my hypothetical image of a strike in the West End, clearly thought that they were witnessing something approaching a miracle. With hindsight it is clear that the general strike could have come much earlier; the intellectuals who led the revolution were themselves cautious in estimating the impact of their own action on the masses and thought that at least ten days were needed to rouse them from their apathy. Their caution derived from their awareness that Czechs and Slovaks did not suffer any significant economic deprivation. In spite of its technological backwardness, the Czechoslovak economy was in better shape than any other in Eastern Europe (with the possible exception of East Germany), and therefore one obvious source of widespread popular opposition to communist rule was missing. They were also very well aware that the specific grievances of the

intellectuals did not motivate the population at large. Most people did not even know who the leading intellectuals were. When Havel first addressed the mass rallies, most people perceived him as one of 'those mysterious dissidents', and when he later emerged as the only serious candidate for the presidency, Czech newspapers hurriedly printed articles explaining who he was. There were cooperative farmers and factory workers who genuinely believed that if he really were a world-renowned playwright, his plays would surely have been staged in Czechoslovakia and they would have heard of him.

Whatever may objectively be the cultural and educational standard of those who expressed such views, they too were Czechs and saw themselves as part of a nation whose main characteristic was being cultured and well educated. What they resented as members of this nation was not the persecution of a few intellectuals but the affront of having to obey the orders of those who not only knew less than they should have in their positions but often knew less than those whom they were supposed to lead. The image of those in authority as blithering idiots was all-pervasive and an unceasing source of popular jokes. The Civic Forum skilfully exploited these feelings when it broadcast to the public in the street the secret recording of the general secretary's impromptu speech to the district party secretaries. The grammatically incorrect and syntactically incoherent speech of the once most powerful man in the country drove the point home without any need for further comment. The crowds of ordinary people who listened to this broadcast rolled with contemptuous laughter and in this act itself were displaying their own *kulturnost*; the message was 'Less cultured nations would shoot you; we laugh at you.'

What gave the 'velvet revolution' its impetus was the general feeling in the country that on 17 November, state repression had become unbearable. People's perception of themselves as a cultured and well-educated nation again played a significant role in fostering this general feeling. The 'uncultured' use of brute force by the state against the 'cultured' and peaceful demonstrators made it clear that the Czechs had a state that did not befit them as a cultured nation and that they deserved a better one. In an open confrontation of intellectuals and future intellectuals (students) with uncultured and uneducated power, the people's place could only be at the side of the cultured and educated. The myth of a nation whose leading personalities had always been intellectuals provided the charter for action and in the confrontation of intellectuals with the power of the state, perceived as uncultured and uneducated, the myth swayed the nation to the side of the intellectuals.

The rallying of the masses was of course considerably facilitated by the fact that the revolution took place in the television age. It was significant that the students were first joined in the strike by actors and that the actors were seen as the main representatives of the intellectuals, for actors have visibility which writers, poets, playwrights, and philosophers never do. Those in open rebellion against the state were not unknown dissidents but men and women whose names and faces were known from the television screen. This gave them an authority which the leading

dissidents (including Havel) whose faces and often names were mostly unknown, could never have had. All this contributed to the perception of the 'velvet revolution' as a revolution of the cultured against the uncultured.

That the actors' strike had such a tremendous political impact derives to a great extent from the fact that the notion of the Czechs as a cultured nation and the notion of Czech history as giving meaning to contemporary events are encapsulated in the symbol of the National Theatre. Even those with only a smattering of knowledge of Czech history know two things about it. The first (which is not, in fact, historically accurate) is that the National Theatre, by keeping the Czech language alive, was instrumental to the survival of the Czech nation at a time when it was struggling by direct political means for its rights within the Austrian monarchy. The other (historically correct only to a certain extent) is that its construction was made possible only by the financial contributions of ordinary people (for many of whom it meant a considerable financial sacrifice) and that when it burnt down in 1881 before its construction was complete it was rebuilt in record time solely from such contributions. The words 'Nation to itself above the proscenium arch call attention to this remarkable dedication to the national cause. The story of the building of the National Theatre is one of the most important national myths, and, in consequence, the theatre itself is one of the most important symbols of the Czech nation and, after Hradčany Castle, probably the most frequently visited: there are probably few Czechs who have never been to the National Theatre. It is known as 'the golden chapel' - a name which suggests that it is more important as a national shrine than as a venue for theatrical performances. Although the actors' strike did not start at the National Theatre, the fact that the actors of the National Theatre immediately joined it was of the utmost importance. The fact that the National Theatre was closed was an unmistakable sign that the nation was in crisis.

Both the tradition of the cultured and well-educated nation and the democratic tradition were instrumental in shaping the revolution of November 1989. Czechs manage unproblematically to preserve their belief in a democratic tradition as characteristic of their nation because all the past collapses of the democratic form of government can be seen as catastrophes imposed on it by others: by the Nazis in 1939, in a coup d'état inspired by Moscow in 1948, and by the Soviets in 1968. It was precisely the invocation of the Czech democratic tradition which enabled communist rule to be perceived as an imposition of an alien form of government upon the Czech nation. Although the Soviet Union did not govern Czechoslovakia in the same way as Nazi Germany governed its Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and although the Soviet troops were in no way instrumental in maintaining the post-1968 communist system, the Soviet army could still be perceived as an army of occupation and the Soviet Union as maintaining the Czech communist government in power. The tradition of democracy was invoked to inspire and mobilise the nation to rise against the undemocratic communist rule imposed from outside.

The invocation of the democratic tradition during the 'velvet revolution' and its aftermath helped to create hope that the Czechs could again achieve what they had - when left to their own devices - achieved in the past; a democratic society that befitting their tradition. One of the major aims of the 'velvet revolution' and the political and economic changes that followed it was to 'return Czechoslovakia to Europe'. The national traditions were invoked to foster the confidence that the Czechs, as a democratic, cultured, and well-educated nation, rightfully belonged to the West.

There were, of course, various other aspects of Czech culture which in many subtle ways played their role in the events of November 1989. Their significance is apparent from the fact that it was not only the actors' strike which led to the almost immediate politicisation of the whole population of the country, but also the brutal suppression of the students' demonstration by the police on 17 November. Like all the previous demonstrations, that of 17 November took place on a symbolically significant day; the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of all Czech universities in 1939 as a reprisal for student demonstrations against the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. The demonstration of 17 November differed from the previous ones in two respects: it was allowed to take place after the city authorities had agreed with the students on the route of the march, and the police and what later appeared to have been specially trained anti-terrorist units brutally assaulted the students. Since the police blocked all possible escape routes after they had requested the students to disperse, the purpose of the attack was obviously not to break up the demonstration but to teach any potential demonstrator a lesson once and for all. The massacre, as it came to be called, occurred on one of Prague's major streets and, as a subsequent parliamentary inquiry indicated, had been planned by the police from the start (Wheaton and Kavan 1992: 41-8). On 17 November the state thus manifested its alienation from the nation in a doubly meaningful way: its repression became unbearable and, even more significantly, in its own way it repeated what the German fascists had done fifty years before.

Repression is the opposite of care, and the communist state spent a considerable amount of propaganda on presenting a caring image, mainly by stressing its role as the guarantor of the social security available to all citizens. In the Czech cultural conceptualisation, care is a typically feminine trait. The defining features of femininity are motherhood and the socialisation of children. Maternal sentiments are culturally assumed to be grounded in female nature and as such not susceptible to manipulation by culture and society. The result is a strong cultural affirmation of a naturally given association of women with the domestic domain (to the extent that the woman holds the purse strings and is responsible for running the domestic economy) and a naturally determined gravitation of women toward caring professions in the public domain. In 1990, 73 per cent of teachers were women, and the percentage of women employed in social services, retail trade, and health care was even greater (*Respekt*, 1993, no. 37: 1), and women outnumbered men not only as nurses but also as

doctors. To give birth, to bring up children, and to be caring are the culturally assumed main characteristics of womanhood condensed in the image of the woman as mother.

The whole programme of the Czechoslovak Union of Women was built on this conceptualisation. (It may be worth mentioning in passing that one of the acts of the new government was to abolish the celebrations of International Women's Day and to reinstitute Mother's Day. This change met with no opposition, as if people were saying, 'Correct - what right does a woman have to be venerated unless she is a mother?') If mother-hood, as a symbol with all its connotations, enters into the construction of the nation as a life-engendering entity, the state - construed as the guardian of the nation's interests - cannot but behave in a caring, that is, motherly way. It certainly cannot repress the members of the nation, the metaphorical children of the mother country. When it does, it alienates itself from the nation; it betrays it. And this is how it was perceived on 17 November, for then it was assaulting not just citizens - the metaphorical children of the nation - but actual children, 'the future of our nation'.

As is the case with many other cultural premises, those which motivated the perception of the events of 17 November were taken for granted rather than explicitly stated and their existence can only be inferred from discourses for which they served as unspoken assumptions. One such discourse was that concerning the action of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Union of Women after 17 November. The leadership expressed regret over the severity of the police action but instead of condemning it merely described it as 'disproportionate' to the task of maintaining public order. This formulation outraged the rank and file of the union, who saw in it a betrayal of the maternal feelings of the women whose interests the union was supposed to represent. The leadership was forced to resign, and at a congress called to discuss the future of the women's movement in Czechoslovakia the union dissolved itself, to be replaced by a number of independent women's organisations.

The revolution in Czechoslovakia was triggered by the state's assault on students (young people, our children) participating in an event for which it had itself given permission - an obvious sign of its betrayal of the nation. The nation's outrage against the state was given shape by intellectuals (mainly actors) and students, who were in the forefront of the popular revolt. The concepts brought into opposition during this revolt were not socialism and democracy - as most Western commentators were inclined to see it - but totalitarianism and freedom.

Demands for sweeping political change were articulated by representatives of Charter 77, other independent groups, and a few intellectuals and students who had so far stood outside these dissident circles in a meeting in a Prague theatre on 19 November. The opposition of the independent groups to communist power had always been formulated in terms of respect for citizens' legal rights, and the organisation which its representatives founded after the first street protests was appropriately called the Civic Forum. Its spokesman - Václav Havel - addressed the

demonstrators on 21 November and subsequently presented the Forum's demands to the communist government and led the ensuing political negotiations. It was because of the Civic Forum that the conflict between the nation and its state was eventually redefined as a conflict between the citizens and the state.

Economic transformation

In present-day political rhetoric, Czech national traditions are invoked to buttress national identity and compensate for a lack of national confidence and solidarity. They are invoked to foster the identification of people with political goals construed as the goals of all Czechs. The national traditions are appropriate images for this purpose because the common national identity and goals which they invoke ignore the inequalities and conflicts within Czech society.

As elsewhere in the former socialist countries, the overthrow of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was swiftly followed by the implementation of plans for a wide-ranging economic reform aimed at creating a market economy. Alongside the creation of a democratic political structure and a new system of central and local government and administration of justice, the reform of the systems of education and health care, etc., this was part of the revolutionary process of the creation of a post-communist social order. In many respects, it was the most important part of this process, for the introduction of a free market would inevitably effect changes in all spheres of social and political life. In contrast with the situation in many other countries of the former socialist bloc, the introduction of a market economy and the restitution of private property in Czechoslovakia were swift, successful, and welcomed by the majority of the population, although strong objections to particular aspects of the reform were also expressed.

In January 1990, when the government started to prepare the necessary legislation for the economic transformation and economic reform was being widely discussed by the public at large, 85 per cent of the people supported the programme of radical economic and social transformation and 68 per cent supported the introduction of a market economy with a substantial private sector which might lead to the bankruptcy of unprofitable firms. Fifty-six per cent of Czechs and 46 per cent of Slovaks expressed confidence in the eventual success of the reform and a belief that it would eventually lead to a general increase in the standard of living.¹ Only 9 per cent were opposed to the introduction of a market economy (*Forum*, 1990, no. 3; *Lidové noviny*, 14 December 1990, 24 February 1990). According to an opinion poll conducted before the official start of the economic reform on 1 January 1991, only 23 per cent

¹ In January 1992, a year after the start of the reform, the number of people in the Czech lands who expected prosperity as the end result of economic transformation increased to 71 per cent; 66 per cent thought that the speed of the reform either was adequate or should increase; only 6 per cent believed that reform should be stopped altogether (*Aktuálne problémey Česko-Slovenska*, January 1992: 58-9).

of the people in the Czech lands (but 48 per cent in Slovakia) considered it a mistake; 75 per cent in the Czech lands (but only 57 per cent in Slovakia) were of the opinion that only economic reform would prevent the total collapse of the Czechoslovak economy (*Lidové noviny*, 28 December 1990).

The need to introduce a market economy was justified in both pragmatic and ideological terms. The view that the economy had to be restructured to avoid its eventual collapse predated the political change. Considered in terms of the economists' standard criteria of economic performance, the Czechoslovak economy had been in poor shape for a considerable time and had increasingly come to resemble that of a Third World country: productivity and the quality of manufactured goods were low, the rate of growth was declining steadily, the internal and external debt of the country and inflation (mostly hidden because of widespread subsidies) were increasing, and international trade was heavily biased toward the export of raw materials and the import of technology. All this had been recognised a long time before the political change at the end of 1989, and an important part of the old regime's political programme was the 'restructuring of the economic mechanism' - a phrase which replaced 'economic reform', ideologically tainted by its association with the reform attempts of Dubček's regime. 'Restructuring of the economic mechanism' envisioned some kind of strengthening of market relations but did not aim at abolishing central planning and the public ownership of property: its main aspects were better planning, tighter central control and more effective sanctions (mainly in the form of the distribution of state subsidies), and increased productivity through better work discipline.

In 1990, by contrast, the government programme of economic reform took the form of a complete abandonment of any central planning and its replacement by a liberal market economy in which the state would interfere only through its fiscal policies (taxation, control of the money supply, etc.). The possibility of a 'third road' which would combine some elements of a planned economy and some of a market economy was ruled out, and the only question remaining was the speed of the transition. Eventually the 'radicals' around the finance minister won the day over the 'gradualists', and a swift transition to a free market economy became the government's policy. The three main elements of the economic reform were the liberalisation of prices, to be determined solely by the market, the internal convertibility of the Czechoslovak currency, and privatisation of state and cooperative enterprises. The small ones, such as retail outlets, workshops, and restaurants, were sold at auctions and the large ones were converted into limited companies through the sale for a nominal price of 'investment vouchers' which could be redeemed for shares in the privatised companies or sold. Any citizen over the age of eighteen was entitled to purchase them and some eight and one-half million Czechoslovak citizens availed themselves of the opportunity.

However, the economic transformation was motivated by more than the need to boost the ailing economy. The market also had strong ideological connotations, and

the transition to a free market was presented as the realisation of the goal of the 'velvet revolution'. The image which the Czechs have of themselves as a highly cultured and well-educated nation motivates what they call their 'return to Europe' and view as the ultimate goal of their revolution. Czechs have always detested being classified as Eastern Europeans and are quick to point out that Prague is west of Vienna and west of the line between Vienna and Berlin. For Czechs, Eastern Europe is Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, and possibly Poland, but their country is part of Central Europe and it is commonly described as lying in 'the heart of Europe' or even as being 'the heart of Europe'. Czechs use the concept of *kulturnost* to construct a boundary between themselves and the uncultured East into which they were lumped after the communist coup d'état in 1948, and they see their proper place as alongside the civilised, cultured, and educated nations of Western Europe. The idea of the 'return to Europe' dominated the election campaign in June 1990, and the transition to a market economy was construed as a necessary part of this re-entry. This notion was clearly articulated by Václav Klaus, the Czechoslovak minister of finance and chief architect of the economic reform:

As a slogan of our 'gentle revolution' we chose 'the return to Europe', including the adoption of an economic system which is characteristic of the civilised world and which shows that, in spite of all its shortcomings, no better arrangement of economic relations exists.

(*Lidové noviny*, 10 March 1990)

The rhetoric in which the necessity of the transition to a market economy was couched constructed the market as a symbol of the civilisation to which Czech society now again aspired. As this symbol, the market was an integral part of the package of ideological notions, the other important elements of which were democracy and pluralism of ideas, all 'civilising mechanisms' which were destroyed under socialism. As Radim Valenčík expressed it in his analysis of 'real existing socialism',

the society which wanted 'to command the wind and the rain' grossly distorted the forms of the organisation of production based on market relations which had gradually been created in the process of historical genesis. The suppression of the market by centralist administrative-bureaucratic management resulted in the emergence of pre-capitalist relations - feudal ones, characteristic of the Asiatic mode of production and even of lineage society. This social atavism led not only to stagnation (as it was euphemistically called) but also to an ever-accelerating rot.

(*Tvorba*, 1990, no. 42)

Shared cultural values were marshalled, however, not only in support of the market but in support of objections to particular aspects of the economic reform. One of these values was national pride, distinctly heightened by the sweeping political change that took place in Czechoslovakia at the end of 1989 and, particularly, by the style of this change. Czechs take a distinct pride in the 'gentleness' of their revolution,

which for them is a sign of their *kulturnost*. They compare themselves favourably not only with the Romanians, whose revolution was distinctly bloody and messy and showed that they lacked the Czechs' *kulturnost*, but also with the Poles and East Germans, who took much longer than the Czechs to achieve the change. That the Poles and East Germans paved the way for the Czechs is conveniently disregarded,

At the start of the economic reform, the self-image of Czechs as a cultured and civilised nation was often invoked in the moral condemnation of money-changers and the emerging private entrepreneurs. As they offered their services mostly to foreigners who did not know their way around, they were perceived as destroying the Czechs' reputation as a cultured nation and creating the undesirable image of Czechs as cheats, swindlers, and profiteers. In so doing, they were seen as hampering the Czechs' return to Europe: 'Would Europe really want us if we are not able to behave in a civilised manner?

National pride and the notion that Czech is best (expressed in the rhyme *Co je české, to je hezké*, 'Czech is beautiful') also led to opposition to the participation of foreign capital in Czech enterprises. This was spoken of as the sell-off of national wealth, and three reasons were given for opposing it. It was argued that the sale of shares in Czech enterprises to foreigners would lead to the exploitation of Czech labour by foreign capital, to the cheap export of labour and national wealth, and to the subjugation of the Czech economy to foreign rather than to national interests. While, according to an opinion poll conducted in June 1990, 46 per cent of the people approved of the sale of large unprofitable companies, only 23 per cent approved of their sale without its being restricted to Czechoslovak citizens and firms. Large firms in particular were the object of national pride, and the objection to foreigners' participating in their ownership was particularly strong; while 44 per cent approved of the sale of small enterprises to foreigners, only 18 per cent approved of the sale of large ones (*Lidové noviny*, 18 June 1990). In January 1992, 43 per cent of Czechs were afraid that the negative aspect of economic reform would be the sell-off of national wealth to foreign capital (*Aktuálne problém Česko-Slovenska*, January 1992: 59).

Beyond being a symbol of 'civilisation' and 'modern society', the market was also a symbol of the rational organisation of society or even of rationality itself, and economic reform was often talked about as 'the return of rationality to our society' (*Forum*, 1990, no. 10) or as 'an experiment in the return to reason' (*Lidové noviny*, 11 July 1990). The introduction of a market economy was a return to 'the normal order' of things (Václav Klaus in *Literárni noviny*, 2 August 1990).

The rationality of a market economy was seen as deriving from the fact that unlike a centrally planned economy, it was the result not of an ideological construction imposed artificially on society but of society's normal historical development. It was seen as 'a great historical invention of humankind' (*Forum*, 1990, no. 11) and in this respect, it was 'natural', whereas a planned economy was 'artificial':

(In a centrally planned economy) the price of labour and goods was determined *artificially*² and, moreover, even nonsensically according to ideological directives. However, modern society is organisationally directly dependent on the free exchange of services and goods, i.e., on a monetary principle.
(Vladimír Ulrich in Tvorba. 1990, no. 42)

The planned economy is an *ideological construct...* in essence it is violence imposed on economics by politics. Nobody *constructed* the market economy - it developed *naturally*, what was useful survived, what was not useful died out.

(Otakar Turek in Literární noviny, 14 June 1990)

The market economy and democracy are *natural* conditions of mankind, and it should be possible to return to such a *natural* state... At the beginning there may be only a few (entrepreneurs), but they will be heroes, the new pioneers who will breach the dam separating us from the *natural* state of affairs and take others along with them.

(Dušan Trška in Mladá fronta dnes, 12 September 1990)

The market economy not only operated as a process of natural selection but was itself the result of the process of natural selection, and it was precisely this aspect of it which accounted for its effectiveness:

The market mechanism is the most perfect means to the satisfaction of the needs of all people created in the process of the historical development of society.

(Lidové noviny, 26 May 1990)

The market economy achieved this perfection because it was not guided by political or ideological considerations but left to develop according to its own principles.

In this package of notions in terms of which economic reform was legitimated, the various characteristics of a planned and a market economy were seen as in opposition (table 5). Each term in which the market economy was constructed in opposition to the centrally planned economy invoked a different kind of agency from the one invoked in socialist ideology. Part of that ideology was the construction of man as the master of nature, which he could shape to his own will. In terms of this ideological construction, man was the sole agent of social and economic processes: he was constructing socialism, the first just society, and he was constructing an economy in which people were rewarded according to their merits, not in virtue of inherited privileges, and in which they would ultimately be rewarded according to their needs. Human agency also positively affected natural processes, for the new man whom socialism brought into being could 'command the wind and the rain' as their needs.

² I emphasise with italics the key words and expressions in these and subsequent quotations in chapters 5 and 6.

Table 5. *Images of the planned and the market economy*

Planned economy	Market economy
Atavistic survivals of pre-capitalist societal forms	Civilisation, modern society
Stagnation	Development
Irrationality	Rationality
Artificial	Normal, natural
Ideological construct	Result of pragmatic consideration
Subject to politics	Independent of politics

Human agency also positively affected natural processes, for the new man whom socialism brought into being could 'command the wind and the rain' as the slogan, now the object of ridicule and routinely invoked as the ultimate proof of communist folly (see the quotation from Valenčík, pp. 151-2 above), proclaimed.

It now became part of the ideological packaging of democratic pluralism and the market economy to point out that man's tampering with society had led not to the freeing of human potential but to the suppression of all human rights, not to the creation of a just society but to the creation of a totalitarian system, not to the gradual withering of the state but to its increased interference in all aspects of its citizens' lives, not to the creation of a higher form of morality but to the destruction of all moral principles and a disregard for even the most rudimentary principles of 'civilised' behaviour. The rudeness of those employed to serve the public too was directly attributed to the absence of the market:

Anyone who has been in the West can testify that willingness, regard for others, and respect for their needs are quite common there. This is not in spite of but because of the fact that the market has reigned there for more than two hundred years and its 'invisible hand' has educated citizens in this way. 'The baker bakes good, cheap rolls not because he is an altruist but because he is an egoist' is one of the basic maxims of classical economics. Readiness to serve, a friendly attitude, and interest in the needs of the customer are basic conditions of survival in the competition of the market, and these qualities are then reflected in other interpersonal relations.

(Anna Červenková in Lidové noviny, 3 September 1990)

Television commentators especially explain (the market mechanism) as a kind of self-salvation which will automatically deliver smiling shop assistants, waiters ready to serve us, correct measures of beer, and anything else we may ever wish for.

(Jan Hýsek in Forum, 1990, no. 44)

It was stressed that man's attempt to 'command the wind and the rain' had resulted in unprecedented levels of pollution and ecological devastation which only the market could correct. In the words of the minister of finance,

The only solution to our ecological problems lies in the introduction of a *normal* market economy. We know very well that the environment is the most devastated in countries which lack a market economy. A *normally* functioning market economy is the crux of everything because it is an economy which lends to all goods, including water, air, and everything else, their correct price.

(*Lidové noviny*, 20 December 1990)

As far as the economy itself was concerned, it was argued that man's tinkering with it had resulted in the transformation of Czechoslovakia from a country which before World War II enjoyed the tenth highest standard of living in the world into a country which at the end of the 1980s occupied forty-second place, well below many Third World countries. The message was easy to grasp: the prosperous countries were prosperous because, unlike us, they had never tinkered with their economies; they had let the market do the job rather than trying to do it themselves. Speaking of the aims of economic reform, Václav Klaus clearly expressed where the agency should lie: The aim is to let the invisible hand of the market act and replace the hand of the central planner' (*Forum*, 1990, no. 18).

However, the necessity of introducing a market economy was justified not only in terms of the agency of the market, which, as a self-regulating mechanism, was capable of avoiding all the errors and deficiencies of an economy whose agents were planners, bureaucrats, and ideologists, but also in terms of the agency of those who participated in the market. In particular, the notion of the natural character of the market was predicated on both types of agency. On the one hand, the market was 'natural' as a self-regulating mechanism which itself determined prices and values in opposition to a centrally planned economy, in which prices and values were 'artificially' determined by human agents. The return to a market economy was, then, a return to the 'natural' state of society. But the market was also 'natural' because it was an arrangement of economic relations that corresponded to human nature. In consequence, when human nature was not interfered with, it always gave rise to the market:

(The market) is a great historical invention of humankind and it is never possible to destroy it completely. The striving of its participants for a bigger share has so far been the only basis of innovative movement and economic growth that corresponds to human *nature*.

(*Forum*, 1990, no. 11)

This 'human nature' is the people's propensity toward private property, which is the main factor that motivates them to work:

In the case of small firms combined with the owner's direct work participation, private property is the most effective motivational factor.

(*Jaroslav Smrká* in *Forum*, 1990, no. 10)

It is a fact established through years of experience that in most branches of human activity private ownership is socially the most effective way of the management of material goods.

(*Forum*, 1990, no. 2)

Repression of private property leads to diminished work motivation.

(*Lidové noviny*, 21 July 1990)

During the November events, freedom was defined not positively (freedom for what) but negatively (freedom from what). The calls for freedom implied freedom from the oppression of the totalitarian state: freedom from constant surveillance by the secret police, from restrictions on travel abroad, from censorship (which concerned not only writers but also various pop groups and aficionados of contemporary Western pop music), from restrictions on access to higher education, from political qualifications for most non-manual jobs, and from many other forms of state intervention in personal lives. The positive content was given to freedom not by the demonstrators themselves but by the politicians who came to power during and after the revolution. While equating freedom with democracy in political terms, in economic terms they equated it with private ownership, the restitution of which became the main element of the economic transformation.

Although no demands were expressed for the restitution of private ownership during the mass demonstrations of November 1989 and although the initiation of the economic transformation met not only with approval in some quarters but also with scepticism and apprehension in others,³ privatisation and the restitution of private property were soon accepted by most people. This is because the institution of a market economy basically legalised the effective private ownership which had prevailed in the official socialist economic system. In that system, enterprises in 'socialist ownership' were officially declared to be in the common ownership of all people and in the popular perception they were seen as belonging to no one. In fact, from the economic point of view they were the effective property of their socialist managers. It was impossible to buy a lucrative petrol station, a workshop, a shop, or a restaurant, but for those whose right it was to make decisions about the management of such enterprises and outlets, it was possible to place a relative or - for a price - an acquaintance there as manager. For the manager the enterprise was a source of financial gain through overpricing, pilfering, and in other ways cheating the legal

³ In December 1990, before the start of the economic reform, 70 per cent of Czechs and 80 per cent of Slovaks were afraid that it would result in considerable weakening of the social security which they had so far enjoyed. People were also afraid that it would be accompanied by an increase in social injustice (53 per cent in the Czech lands and 71 per cent in Slovakia) and that it would lead to the deterioration of general morality and inter-personal relations (*Lidové noviny*, 28 December 1990).

owner - the state. It also offered the possibility of providing goods in short supply to those who were, in this 'market system', able to supply desirable counterservices, including other goods in short supply, labour in servicing one's car or building or extending one's house, medical treatment in a state hospital, or even admission of one's child to a high school or university (Možný 1991: 19). Anyone who had scarce goods, skills, or favours to 'sell' was in one way or another involved in this hidden 'market economy', in which all goods and services were obtainable for their realistic 'market price'.

The most tangible expression of any private ownership that was left in communist Czechoslovakia became the ownership of weekend homes ranging from little wooden cabins to substantial cottages and farmhouses. The intellectuals who justified private ownership ideologically as the basis of freedom argued that the 'possibility of caring about [even a small] part of the world is something so basic that even the communist states eventually had to allow it' and had to tolerate the private ownership of holiday cabins and cottages.⁴ That was that bit of the world where even our "working man"

⁴ Country cottages and farmhouses became increasingly available during the 1960s and 1970s when cooperative farmers began to build themselves new homes with modern facilities and were willing to sell their old cottages to town inhabitants as holiday homes. Cabins vary from simple one-room frame structures to structures which are, in fact, family houses and which, by circumventing planning and building regulations, have been built with a view to providing a permanent home in retirement and are equipped with modern amenities such as bathrooms and central heating. Those who can afford it spend as much time as possible in their cottages. This offers an opportunity to acquiring all the paraphernalia of luxury, such as fireplaces or bars, which cannot be accommodated in the confined space of a flat - particularly a flat in a prefabricated tower block, which, before the market with flats and houses gradually developed after 1989, was the only kind to which most of those who did not inherit a flat in an old apartment block could have aspired.

In 1934 Prague residents owned a total of 3,000 holiday cabins; in 1974 they owned 65,000 in central Bohemia alone, with many others travelling farther to their cabins in other parts of the country. In 1967 there were 110,000 cabins in the Czech lands; by 1970 their total reached 150,000, and, according to the population census of 1991, there were 206,456 in the Czech lands in that year. The wooded countryside south and west of Prague is virtually littered with these tiny frame structures, the abundance of which has played havoc with the natural environment in recreational areas and caused practical sanitation problems. In 1974 the Czech government felt it necessary to curb the 'dacha mania' by limiting to 25,000 the number of building permits which could be issued in the future. At that time, it was estimated that there was still a possibility of acquiring some 33,000 vacant buildings in the country for conversion into holiday homes; many of them were farmhouses and cottages abandoned after the war by Sudeten Germans forced to leave Czechoslovakia (Paul 1979: 34). Apart from the holiday cabins, 52,622 country cottages and 128,120 flats were being used solely as holiday homes in the Czech lands in 1991. Holiday cabins, cottages, or flats were owned or regularly used by 452,080 households in the Czech lands (12.2 per cent) and 387,198 buildings were used solely as holiday homes. The proportion of households owning holiday homes is unequal throughout the country. In Prague, a full 27.7 per cent of households have a holiday home in the country,

was free for two days of the week', for he could, in his own way, without any interference from the state, care about a small part of the world:

A *natural* expression and a tangible form of this care about a piece of the world is private property: a house, a garden, a workshop, a shop. Ownership and property are, in this form, a condition of normal human freedom.

(*Jan Sokol in Přítomnost, 1990, no. 1: 8-9*)

Because the opposing notions in November 1989 were not socialism versus democracy but totalitarianism versus freedom, the debate surrounding the economic reform in Czechoslovakia did not suggest an ideological link of the free market to democracy through the notion of individual freedom, as most Western analysts are inclined to argue. In their conceptualisation, just as only democratic pluralism guarantees individual freedom of political choice, only the market guarantees individual freedom of economic choice. Individual freedom of economic choice is ultimately freedom of choice among competing products, that is, consumer choice. In this conceptualisation, the notion of a free market is part of an ideological package including pluralism, competition, and freedom of choice as opposed to the centralism, cooperation in the realisation of a common societal goal, and equity of needs which formed the package of notions characteristic of socialist ideology.

In the Czech conceptualisation, the link between the market and freedom is construed differently. It is not so much freedom in the sense of the exercise of choice as freedom in the sense of an unconstrained expression of human nature that is linked to the concept of the market. If private property is construed as part of human nature, only a free market economy based on private ownership of the means of production offers people real freedom, for, in contrast to the planned economy, it does not constrain their natural propensity toward it:

Private ownership is not only the basis of a market economy but one of the main guarantees of human freedom in general.

(*Josef Mlejnek Jr in Český deník, 12 September 1992*)

The tangible symbol of freedom is not consumer choice but private ownership, and this symbol was invoked to justify the economic reform: to achieve freedom we must have a free market, the precondition of which is private ownership. Privatisation then logically becomes the key element of the economic reform.

This construction of freedom as the freedom not of consumers but of producers (who are owners) was consistent with the emphasis on the production side of the economy. In the early days of post-communist Czechoslovakia, consumer choice appeared to be at best only a distant ideal. Demand considerably outweighed supply,

and the proportion is even higher in the city of Plzen (28.9 per cent), which lies closer to the border territories inhabited before the war by the Germans.

and the emphasis on production reflected the reformers' goal of boosting the productivity and increasing supply. They openly admitted that achieving this goal would mean at least a temporary tightening of belts, for prices would rise when subsidies were eliminated. This emphasis on productivity is similar to the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which insist on the introduction of various austerity measures as the condition for credit. That the terms 'market' and 'world market' themselves entail an emphasis on production rather than consumption is suggested by the rhetoric of 'penetrating the market' or 'gaining new markets'. The market is understood as a place where commodities can be disposed of, and who or what is the source of the countervalue which is exchanged for the commodities in the market seems to be of little concern. The Czech conception of the market corresponds to this conceptualisation.

In line with this conceptualisation of the market is the fact that most people see themselves as the market's passive objects and not as active agents who through the exercise of choice influence the quantity, quality, and price of commodities. What they experience is not the working of incipient market forces but the practices of emerging entrepreneurs, which they evaluate by moral rather than economic criteria. The private entrepreneurs who have taken advantage of the government's policy of price liberalisation to set their prices above the level previously established by the state are seen as profiteers. The state, pursuing a policy of minimum administrative interference in the running of the economy, tends to see these activities as excesses that will automatically disappear once the free market is fully established. The pressure on the government to control overcharging (a criminal offence when all prices were centrally determined) is countered by elementary lessons about people's envisaged role as active agents in the market and the power they exercise as consumers. At the beginning of the economic reform, women's magazines and daily newspapers printed articles whose message was 'If you think it is expensive, do not buy it. If they cannot sell it for its asking price, they will have to lower the price.'

However, the practical policy of economic reform has not been able to ignore all the objections to market economy which stem from the perception of entrepreneurs as the active agents of the market and customers as its passive objects. When the privatisation of retail outlets, restaurants, and workshops (the so-called 'small privatisation') was being discussed, the concern was often expressed that the new owners would stop selling the goods which until then had been retailed in the shops and begin selling merchandise which would guarantee them more immediate profit. If the new private entrepreneurs were allowed unlimited freedom in choosing the goods they wanted to sell, it was argued, the customers would suffer. The government eventually yielded to these arguments, and legislation was passed which forced the new private owners of grocery shops to continue selling groceries for at least a year. In the early days of the economic reform, the main objects of moral indignation were the street moneychangers (*vekslaci*). As they operated without licences, their activities remained illegal as they had been under the previous regime, but after the collapse of

the communist system they operated virtually with impunity. Like entrepreneurs who drove prices above what they should be, they drove up the exchange rate, and this was seen as immoral because it undermined the 'just' price.

However, the government did not yield to the public's outrage. The opening of the country's borders and the resulting influx of tourists had not yet been matched by the necessary expansion of banks and exchange bureaux. In this situation, street money-changers provided a service without which the tourist industry - an important source of badly needed foreign currency - would break down. With the subsequent devaluation of the Czechoslovak currency, the difference between the official and the black market exchange rates had narrowed considerably, and the government did not see the money-changers as a serious threat to the economy. Providing companies with the hard currency they needed, they offered services which were a welcome addition to those available through the underdeveloped banking system. Moreover, their activities were seen as those of entrepreneurs who operated effectively according to the principle of supply and demand and thus contributed positively to setting the only 'realistic' exchange rate. The government was, on the whole, inclined to see them as people who would either gradually be absorbed into the emerging banking system or eventually go out of business once the currency had become fully convertible and the necessary number of licensed exchange offices had been established as a result of a fully operational market. All that in fact quickly happened, and the once ubiquitous illegal moneychangers have become a rare sight on Prague streets.

Irrespective of whether a collectivity is imagined as a collection of heterogeneous individuals or individuals are imagined as parts of a whole (giving rise to the opposed notions of individualism and collectivism), the relationship between the individuals themselves can be imagined as either hierarchical or egalitarian. Seen in terms of these two dichotomies, Czech society is characterised by egalitarian collectivism. Suppression of individual difference and personal autonomy engenders a strong egalitarian ethos ('We all have the same stomach'), which in socialist Czechoslovakia was realised in practice to a much greater degree than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. In 1979, for example, the highest income was only two and one-half times the lowest and according to a 1984 survey of attitudes and values there was widespread support for a further decrease in wage differentials (Wolchik 1991: 172-5). In an opinion survey conducted in 1990 before the start of the economic reform, four-fifths of the respondents said that their efforts and work products had no influence on their salaries (*Lidové noviny*, 21 December 1990). These facts and perceptions were seen by the economic reformers of the Prague Spring as dampening personal initiative and hindering economic development but they were never an issue of popular concern. If anything, Czechs found it distinctly comforting: so long as no one has much more than I do, things are as they should be. Although it would be foolish to deny that forty years of socialism in Czechoslovakia had played their part in strengthening the egalitarian ethos, it seems to me that the ideal of egalitarianism was

the aspect of the socialist ideology to which Czechs objected least, precisely because it built upon Czech cultural values which, like individualism in England (McFarlane 1978), had deep historical roots. After the demise of the Czech nobility during the Counter-Reformation the major class and status division paralleled the basic ethnic division and this situation did not change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the rising capitalist class in Bohemia was German or at least spoke German. National legends have always taken cognisance of this egalitarian ethos, and this in fact may have helped make it possible to eliminate the private economic sector to a much greater extent than anywhere else in the socialist bloc.

The Masaryk legend put great emphasis on his ordinariness. Every schoolchild knew that he slept on a simple military iron bed and enjoyed simple food, and nothing symbolised his hatred of ostentation more than the simple military-style tunic and military-style hat with a ribbon in the national colours which appeared to be almost the only items in his wardrobe. Stories about the headaches of the personal bodyguards whose watchful eyes he constantly tried to escape communicated his dislike of privilege. President Havel has gradually been acquiring a similar image. Soon after his election, Czech newspapers and television reported that after his visit to the largest factory in Prague he stopped at the local pub for a beer. Although he has consistently enjoyed great popularity, the fact that he comes from a wealthy family and as an internationally successful playwright has always been rather well off, even under the communist regime, diminishes his standing in the eyes of many Czechs. When in 1993 he bought a large villa and moved into it from his flat, it was reported in virtually every Czech newspaper and the price which he allegedly paid was for a time the main topic of everyday conversation. In contrast, the popularity of Václav Klaus was greatly enhanced by the fact that he has continued to live in his flat in a prefabricated tenement house even after becoming prime minister. To discredit him before the elections, his political opponents spread the rumour that he was buying a villa in one of the most prestigious Prague suburbs.

A market in which entrepreneurs were perceived as active subjects and everyone else as a passive object offended the cultural ideal of equality and minimal material disparities and differences in lifestyles within society. The market economy was perceived as a system which increased differences in wealth, and only 40.3 per cent of those who expressed their intention to vote for non-Communist parties in the June 1990 elections and only 18.5 percent of those who intended to vote for the Communist Party found the increased differentiation acceptable. By contrast, 70 per cent of the potential non-Communist voters and 42.9 per cent of the potential Communist voters supported the transition to a market economy (*Forum*, 1990, no. 6). According to an opinion poll conducted in December 1990, 57 per cent feared that economic reform would make it possible for some people to become extremely rich (*Lidové noviny*, 28 December 1990). Fear of increased inequality was also reflected in differing attitudes toward the different forms of privatisation. According to an opinion poll conducted in the first year of the privatisation programme, 81 per cent

of Czechs had confidence in small-scale privatisation, but the restitution of property to its original private owners or their heirs was supported by only 49 per cent (*Aktuální problémy Česko-Slovenska*, January 1992: 60).

The deep-rooted commitment to social equality was seen by the architects of the economic reform as perhaps the most serious potential danger to its success. This led to exhortations that 'to be responsible for oneself is the sign of human and civic maturity' (*Lidové noviny*, 27 July 1990), that 'a market economy gives the capable and hard-working a chance', and that 'each of us has to learn to look after himself, as the former prime minister Marian Čalfa expressed it (*Lidové noviny*, 11 July 1990). In its turn, this rhetoric led to the expression of feelings that 'the economic reform and all the changes which are connected with it address the citizens of the republic as if they all were only businessmen, managers, and entrepreneurs' (Václav Slavík in *Rudé právo*, 15 November 1990).

Acknowledging the strength of egalitarian feelings, the reformers argued that this ideal had never been achieved. It had existed even under communism, although then it was based on ideological and political privileges rather than on the degree to which one contributed to the creation of wealth which guaranteed a high standard of living for all. Given that inequality was a necessary condition of living in society, they argued, a market economy was just, or at least less unjust than the centrally planned economy, for 'only market relations will show who really deserves what' (V. Klaus in *Literární noviny*, 2 August 1990). The market economy 'builds on the ability, skill, and wits of all, not only on the wits of the leading "elite" as was the case in the system of centrally planned economy' (Otakar Turek in *Literární noviny*, 14 June 1990). This view was, however, far from widespread. Those who had 'worked honestly' under socialism saw themselves as discriminated against because they had never been able to accumulate the capital which would have enabled them to become entrepreneurs. Some commentators argued that the ideologically motivated preference for private property was 'the betrayal of the programme of the November revolution, which expressed equality of all forms of ownership and not only a preference for one of them' (Jiří Vraný in *Tvorba*, 1990, no. 45). People expressed a similar view in complaining that the market was privileging those who had once controlled the distribution of housing, higher education, cars, and other scarce goods and commanded substantial bribes - that only those who had prospered under totalitarianism were destined to prosper under the market economy. These people were referred to as 'the mafia', and the prevailing collective image of them was as an octopus with society firmly in its tentacles. The question of the laundering of dirty money became a prominent element of the debate over economic reform. The government's attitude that attempting to regulate the sources of capital of the new private entrepreneurs would only delay the economic reform and thus worsen the already dismal economic situation strengthened fears of a new totalitarianism.

Democratic tradition and political culture

Czech national traditions are not generalisations of actual events of Czech history but formulations of ideals. For the ideals to remain credible, the gap between the ideal and the real has to be bridged; the ideal must be realised in practice at least from time to time. This realisation is most effective if accomplished by those in the public eye, whose practical conduct and attitudes are open to public scrutiny and with whom the public can empathise. If the chosen representatives of the nation can be seen to be living up to the ideals embodied in national traditions, the existence of the traditions, like the existence of the characteristic traits which Czechs attribute to themselves, can be proved by ostension ('Are we not a well-educated and cultured nation? Look at Havel'). I would suggest that it was once more the invocation of the ideals of a democratic, cultured, and well-educated nation which led to Havel's being unopposed for president after the November revolution. As a world-renowned playwright and intellectual and a man who persistently fought for democratic rights at the cost of great personal suffering, he was the man who could be seen as best embodying Czech national traditions. The choice of Masaryk - a philosopher and social thinker - as the first president of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was largely motivated by the same considerations. After two years in office, Havel still enjoyed the support of 80 per cent of Czechs (his popularity was less in Slovakia), who, pointing at Havel, compared themselves favourably with the Poles, who in their view had in Walensa, an electrician and trade unionist, the president they deserved.

To embody the ideals whose carriers are not particular individuals but the nation as a whole, the chosen representatives of the nation have to be able to transcend the characteristic traits which Czechs ascribe to themselves and which are embodied in the image of the little Czech. Because one of these traits is intolerance of individual difference, they must be individualists, by definition - people able to approach their own lives as conscious objects and to make a selection among the attitudes and customs existing in their social environment. They have to be able to distance themselves critically from the social and cultural environment in which they live and seek ways of putting the imprint of their own individuality on the world that has emerged from the given situation (Heller 1984: 22-3). In other words, they have to be capable of living up to the ideal embodied in the national traditions and subscribing in practice to different values from those to which most Czechs pragmatically subscribe. The ideology expressed in terms of national traditions is holistic in that it 'valorizes the social whole and neglects or subordinates the human individual' (Dumont 1986: 279). Yet, paradoxically, to remain credible it has to be enacted by people whose own personal philosophy is highly individualistic. Havel's individualist attitude is best described by himself:

When all power in the communist countries is in the hands of the bureaucratic apparatus of one political party, then it is of course understandably worse than when there are two parties which are under control of freely expressed public opinion and when the public can choose between them in elections. Nevertheless, I do not consider even that to be ideal. It would

appear to me more meaningful for people to be elected rather than parties... for politicians to canvass for the favour of the voters in their own right as concrete human beings and not merely as members of the party machine or as its favourites... I am not against the solidarity and cohesion of different interest groups; I am merely against anything that dilutes personal responsibility or that rewards anyone for his obedience to a power-oriented group.

(1990a: 19-20)

To venerate the collective ideal, the nation which imagines itself to have a strong democratic tradition, must, paradoxically, venerate an individual hero and thus create its specific political culture.

Pointing to the fact that Czechoslovakia was the only democratic country in Central Europe between the two world wars, a number of analysts have stressed the democratic tradition as an important part of Czechoslovak political life. However, the Czechoslovak political culture before the war was based on the notion of power concentrated in the centre and its infallibility. Numerous historians today point to authoritarian elements in pre-war Czechoslovak democracy, particularly in relation to the role of Masaryk in Czechoslovak politics. Although he was not a dictator, Masaryk was generally seen as the central political figure of the republic, in which political decision making effectively involved only a small group (Leff 1988: 48-50, 61). This quasi-presidential form of government is perhaps best captured in the phrase 'Masaryk's republic'. Although he never publicly challenged the constitutional constraints on the presidency, he managed to circumvent them in the actual running of the state, and for this reason, Campbell (1975) describes Czechoslovak democracy as 'directed democracy'.

During the pre-war republic, the list system of the Czechoslovak form of proportional representation 'led to highly oligarchic party organisations, with party bosses exercising near-dictatorial powers' (Barnard 1991: 138). Parliament did not, however, play a decisive role in political decision making. Political decisions were made in the 'Fiver' (*Pětka*) - a coordinating body consisting of the leaders of the most powerful parties which Masaryk created in 1920 and which lasted for six years as a kind of 'state council' in spite of the fact that the party leaders themselves often had no seat in the parliament. The decisions reached by the 'Fiver' were binding on all the deputies of the five parties. During the crisis of 1938, the parliament was replaced by the 'Twenty' deputies delegated by the ruling coalition parties. The ultimate responsibility was placed in the hands of the president, who never declined to play the decisive political role and who distinctly preferred to work with a small, knowledgeable elite than with elected politicians, most of whom were in his opinion 'still insufficiently educated politically to bear the responsibility for leading a state' (Barnard 1991: 138). The general acceptance of Masaryk as the charismatic leader of the new Czechoslovak state led to the general acceptance of his nominating Beneš as his successor, making the constitutionally prescribed election of the president by the parliament a formality. According to the constitution, anyone could become

president, but in fact there always was only one serious candidate - the heir apparent. Serious politicians avoided this role, and anyone who tried to assume it was suspect.

In 1989 Václav Havel personified all the required characteristics of a president. He symbolised the opposition to the communist regime with which most people wholeheartedly agreed but very few were willing to demonstrate through their actions. He thus represented an almost messianic figure, metaphorically bearing the cross of the oppressed nation. Significant in the meteoric rise of his popularity after the 'velvet revolution' was not only that he was seen as its leader but also that he never reproached anyone for not having behaved as he had during the communist regime and publicly acknowledged that everyone, himself included, through compliance with the formal demands of the totalitarian regime, had contributed to its maintenance (Havel *et al.* 1985; Havel 1990b: 12).

In the presidential elections in 1992 he was again the only candidate but this time he was not elected because the Slovak deputies in the parliament -for whom he epitomised Czech domination over the Slovaks - did not vote for him. This was seen by most Czechs as a clear manifestation of Slovak separatism and betrayal of the ideals of the Czechoslovak state. The only candidate put forward in the second round was the leader of the ultra right-wing Republican Party. Other Czech political parties, concerned for their reputations, recognised that it would be political suicide for them to nominate a candidate for the presidency. The leader of the Republican Party was not elected. The fact that some deputies of other parties voted for him was generally seen as a scandal. That the leader of the Republican Party was perceived as an usurper of the throne rightfully belonging to Havel was vividly demonstrated by the fact that he was physically assaulted by an angry crowd when he was leaving the parliament building.

A relatively strong tendency to emphasise the authority of the leading political personality over the formal political structures manifests itself in the continuing debates whether, for example, Beneš could or should have acted differently during the Munich crisis in 1938 or whether Dubček could or should have acted differently in 1968. In February 1948 the Czech people were willing to show their confidence in Beneš and to accept his authority at the cost of fundamental constitutional changes and the curbing of traditional civil liberties. This tendency to accept the charismatic authority of political leaders, which during the pre-war republic facilitated the creation of political consensus and political decision making, manifested itself equally strongly in 1945, Skilling (1976) speaks in this respect about the 'domestic roots of Stalinism'. In his speech on the occasion of the second anniversary of 17 November, in an attempt to resolve the paralysis of the parliament, Havel questioned its authority in favour of the authority of the president. His appeal led to mass support during public street demonstrations.

A political culture determined by the notion of power concentrated in the centre and its infallibility (such as that of the Soviet Union (White 1979: 107)) produces a cult of the leader manifesting itself in the erection of monuments to the living person,

the naming of streets, institutions, and encyclopaedias after him, and the official celebrations of his birthdays. In pre-war Czechoslovakia Masaryk was the object of such a cult (see Pynsent 1994: 193-4). It is paradoxical that people were taught democracy almost single-handedly by this philosopher-president. The role of Havel in present-day Czech politics is analogous to Masaryk's. Although certain of his advisers have often been the object of popular criticism and scorn, criticism of Havel is seen by most Czechs as in bad taste. The analogy with legends about good kings and their treacherous and unfaithful courtiers is striking.

But perhaps there is nothing paradoxical in this situation: by being chosen to represent the traditions of the nation, the hero relieves others from the necessity to live up to their ideals and makes it possible to maintain the credibility of an ideal which would otherwise be challenged by the historical experience of the masses. It is ultimately through venerating his heroes that the autocratic, intolerant, begrudging, and not exceptionally cultured or educated little Czech can still consider himself to belong to a democratic, cultured, and well-educated nation.

6. Nation and state in the context of Czech culture

The discourse surrounding the beginning of the economic transformation in post-communist Czechoslovakia explicitly contrasted the socialist planned economy with the market economy. The opposition between a natural process and human design which it articulated was explicitly posed by Prime Minister Václav Klaus in a television interview in October 1992 in which he objected to the interviewer's formulation 'instituting a market economy' and his question of when the process would be completed. In Klaus's view, a market economy was not something that could be instituted by human beings and certainly not something that could be declared as having been successfully instituted from a specific date. Rather it was a 'spontaneous process', and all people could do was to create the legislative conditions that would allow it to take place. The opposition between the naturally constituted or given and the artificially created through deliberate human design is an opposition that not only articulates and gives form to economic discourse but is regularly invoked and pervasive in many other discourses and in that sense can be seen as an important dichotomy of Czech culture.

Like any other culture, Czech culture is not isolated from others. Czechs constantly compare themselves with others, and Czech culture accepts new ideas and values from other cultures. This process is, however, highly selective, and it is again the opposition between the naturally constituted and the consciously created that

provides the gauge for the acceptance or rejection of new trends. In the past several decades, the two most important trends that have emerged in the West have been the ecological and the feminist movements, and each has had a distinctly different impact on Czech culture.

The ecological discourse

Ecological awareness is now firmly a part of Czech culture, and the ecological movement was an important form of opposition to the communist regime, whose policy of extensive economic development was seen as the main cause of the increasing destruction of the natural environment evident in the dying forests of northern and western Bohemia, the polluted air and water of much of the country, and the deterioration in the quality of agricultural land. The supporters of the ecological movement considerably outnumbered the dissidents, and during the last years of communist rule in Czechoslovakia ecological protest became the most important form of expression of disagreement with the communist system. Whereas the regime tried to suppress the dissident movement, its main strategy vis-a-vis the ecological movement was to co-opt it (Wheaton and Kavan 1992: 24, 29).

In communist Czechoslovakia, private ownership acquired a different meaning from ownership in Western European countries with highly developed consumer societies. The ideal of most Czechs was to own a flat (or at least its contents), a car, and a holiday home and thus to create a space into which they could withdraw from the public sphere of employment and politics with which they were unable to identify. The visible deterioration of the environment was felt as an intrusion of the public domain into this private sphere and a violation of its sanctity. People who had their own cars but were forced to drive on congested roads and to breathe poisonous emissions, who could spend two days a week in their holiday homes but remained as exposed there as anywhere else to air polluted by numerous industrial plants, or who were able to buy enough food but were aware that it was highly contaminated came to see ecology as the main problem.

For the most part, the ecological movement in Czechoslovakia was not motivated by the perception of the environment as a whole of which humans are an integral part which has been gaining ground in ecological discourse in the West since the 1960s. According to this perception, nature has an intrinsic value that exists independently of human needs, experiences, and evaluations. In the centre of this perception is not man-in-the-environment but the interrelationship of all the elements of the biotic whole. The movement in Czechoslovakia instead embraced for the most part the traditional Western perception, rooted in Christianity, of people's relationship to the environment. The book of Genesis enjoins people to dominate over nature, which God gave them to use. With Protestantism emerged the notion of individual responsibility for the rational understanding and harnessing of nature which modern theologians express in the idea of stewardship: people have the right

to use nature for their benefit but also have duties toward it; they must respect it as God's creation and are responsible to God for it.

In this view, nature has an instrumental value in that it provides resources which people use. It is the means for the creation of new value. This conception of the environment forms the basis of many Czech environmental concerns. Differences in average life expectancy in areas polluted to different degrees, for example, are pointed out. The necessity of protecting domestic animals against mistreatment is legitimised by biochemical evidence that their suffering diminishes the quality of their meat for human consumption. The main argument for the protection of environment is people's health and the health of their children and future generations; one of the most visible environmental groups is the 'Prague mothers', who, with their children in protective masks, occasionally demonstrate against the polluted atmosphere and who in 1991 threatened to keep their children home from school on days when the concentration of sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere exceeded the officially acceptable level,

Against the background of this perception of people's place in the environment, the expressed concerns with environmental issues reflected, on the one hand, an awareness of the deep crisis of the socialist system and, on the other, a radical critique of it. Awareness of the crisis was most forcefully driven home by the fact that Czechoslovakia had both a lower standard of living and lower life expectancy than Western capitalist countries. In 1960 Czechoslovakia occupied eleventh place among the nations of the world in average life expectancy, but by 1989 it had dropped to approximately fortieth place. Whilst in Western industrial countries life expectancy for women was 79.0 years and for men 72.5 years, life expectancy for women in the Czech Republic was only 75.4 years and for men 68.1 years, approximating that of countries such as Uruguay, Chile, or Panama. In the highly polluted areas of northern Bohemia, life expectancy was even lower. The figures for infant mortality were even worse. Whilst in Western industrial countries the rate of infant mortality (measured in the number of children deceased before the age of one year in relation to the number of children born during the same time) was 122.5 in 1989, in the Czech Republic it was 188.6 (*Data a fakta*, no. 4, December 1991). This clearly indicated that the constant growth and progress through extensive industrialisation on which the building of socialist society was predicated had failed dismally. Socialism had delivered neither a higher standard of living nor a healthier and longer life.

The ecological movement in Czechoslovakia reflected anxieties resulting from living in a society which was perceived to be in crisis. It not only expressed dissatisfaction with the ways in which life in a socialist society was shaped but articulated concerns over important moral and existential realities. Issues of the physical environment, being tangible and therefore perceived as 'objective' in terms of the scientifically biased Western culture, were readily understandable symbols of these wider moral and existential issues (see Grove-White 1993). In the Czechoslovak case, an additional reason for concentration on the issues of the physical environment

stemmed from the fact that under the communist system no discourse openly voicing moral and existential anxieties would have been tolerated. For these anxieties to be voiced at all they had to be expressed in terms of a discourse in which the party and the government were forced to take part. Not even they could have denied the deterioration of the environment during the previous twenty years. The party's leading role in society, enshrined in the constitution, gave it not only a monopoly of power but also a monopoly of responsibility. When reminded of this responsibility by people concerned with ecological problems, it could not simply label them as agents of Western imperialist agencies aiming at the destruction of the socialist system, as it did the dissidents campaigning against the violation of human rights.

The fact that in the ecological discourse the environment figured primarily as a tangible symbol of the wider ills of the socialist system is attested to by the development of the ecological movement since November 1989. Although the quality of the environment has not greatly improved, there has been a noticeable decline of ecological awareness. In opinion surveys, protection of the environment dropped from the first place which it still occupied in March 1991 among society's problems (*Data a fakta*, no. 9, March 1992) to seventh place in 1992 (*Respekt*, 1993, no. 1: 9). Whilst in June 1990, 44 percent of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic were dissatisfied with the quality of the environment, their number had dropped to 28 per cent in July 1993, although in northern Bohemia, where the pollution and the general environmental degradation have reached record levels, 61 per cent of the people expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the environment even in 1993. The government ascribes this trend to the strengthening of environmental legislation and to people's belief that the overall transformation of society will bring about improvement in the environment as well. Ecological activists argue that people's interest in environmental issues has been overshadowed by the political and social concerns which the transformation of the society naturally brings in its train, and that their diminishing interest in the environment is the result of propaganda presenting the government as deeply concerned with ecological problems and systematically working toward their gradual alleviation (*Lidové noviny*, 11 August 1993).

The gender discourse

In contrast to the ecological movement, which began to have its impact long before the final overthrow of the communist regime, the feminist movement came to affect Czech discourse only gradually after the November events. The first public debate on feminism was broadcast on television in the autumn of 1992, and a book hailed as the first Czech feminist writing appeared only in that year (Biedermannová 1992), which also saw an issue of the main Czech philosophical journal devoted mostly to feminist philosophy (*Filozofický časopis*, 1992, no. 5). The public debate was triggered by a series of light-hearted articles on sexual harassment by Josef Škvorecký in the political and cultural weekly *Respekt* (1992, nos. 32 and 39). In these he dismissed the notion of sexual harassment as a misguided and ludicrous idea which, if

taken to its logical conclusion, would make it impossible for men to communicate with women at all. It is symptomatic that most of the adverse reactions to Škvorecký's views, which can be seen as part of the male backlash against radical feminism, were written by Czech men and women living in the West rather than by those living in the Czech Republic.

Although a few middle-class, university-educated Czech women call themselves feminists, most women reject this label and distance themselves from the premises and aims of the feminist movement. The representatives of some of the women's organisations which emerged alongside and partly replaced the pre-revolutionary Union of Czechoslovak Women (now the Czech Union of Women) emphasise that they do not want to be feminists. Women's organisations, such as the Movement for the Equality of Rights of Women of Bohemia and Moravia, campaign for a greater role for men in the family and women in society, to be achieved by raising women's self-consciousness. The activists of the movement themselves admit that their efforts have not met with much interest among Czech women.

Basic socio-economic differences between capitalist and socialist systems account to a great extent for the differences in the impact of and attitudes to the feminist movement in the West and in the Czech lands. As did all of the socialist countries, Czechoslovakia legislated the right of women to work and education, equal pay for men and women, and six months' maternity leave at full pay. By placing women in public posts on the basis of quotas, the socialist system opened public institutions to women to a much greater extent than is usual in Western liberal democracies. One legacy of the socialist system is that 88 per cent of Czech women of productive age work full-time and that women constitute 45 per cent of the total labour force, with 12.5 per cent of women considering themselves sole and 48 per cent partial breadwinners for their families (*Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992; *Respekt*, 1993, no. 1).

Communist ideology emphasised the value of the working woman, and the communist government always argued that women in socialist countries did not need a women's movement of the Western type because under socialism they had already achieved full emancipation. The impact of this ideology on the consciousness of Czech women is reflected in the belief that the feminist movement's campaign for women's emancipation is justified in Western liberal democracies but unnecessary in the Czech situation. The socialist state made the full incorporation of women into the work process possible by providing not only generous maternity leave but also nurseries and kindergartens in local communities and workplaces. According to a sociological survey carried out in December 1991, most Czech women are of the opinion that neither men nor women enjoy any advantages or suffer any disadvantages in law, that the social security system treats men and women equally, and that the educational system does not discriminate against either sex. The family offers the same advantages to men as to women. Private entrepreneurial activity, employment, and particularly politics are the only areas in which women see men as

having an advantage. The percentages of women who expressed opinions on the advantages of men and women in particular social spheres are summarised in table 6.

Table 6. *Opinions of women (percentages) on advantages of men and women by social sphere*

	<i>Men advantaged</i>	<i>Neither sex advantaged</i>	<i>Women advantaged</i>
Law	9	82	9
Social Security	7	68	25
Education	16	83	1
Family	28	49	23
Private entrepreneurial activity	50	49	1
Employment	52	46	2
Politics	89	10	1

Source: *Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992.

The argument of those campaigning for equality of rights for men and women is that, far from emancipating women, socialism exploited them to a degree to which they never had been exploited before. By making it impossible for the average family to live on a single income, it forced women into full employment without relieving them of their traditional household work and child care, which the system of nurseries and kindergartens helped only to a limited extent. As a result, women enjoyed three hours less leisure per day than men. Even their seemingly increased participation in the public sphere was far from the ideal of true emancipation. In spite of the legal guarantee of equal pay for men and women, the average woman's pay was 30 per cent less than that of a man because many more women than men were employed in low-paid unskilled and semiskilled jobs. In the 1991 survey mentioned above, 45 per cent of women reported that their pay was less than that of men in the same jobs in spite of equal performance, and 62 per cent of women mentioned various forms of discrimination of the work teams in which women predominate. Women are also more likely than men to be made redundant (*Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992).

The socialist system probably fostered the present attitude of most Czech women to feminism in that it militated against the development of antagonism between men and women, which many analysts see as a form of class antagonism. Socialist reality robbed men as well as women of their dignity. Men felt degraded by not being able to

fulfil their traditional role of breadwinners solely responsible for the financial security and material well-being of their families; women felt degraded by not being able to fulfil properly their traditional role as homemakers. The division between 'them' and 'us' was drawn not along gender lines but between the state and the people who felt manipulated by it even in the most private aspects of their lives. The feeling of solidarity between men and women in the face of their common adversary was thus much stronger than in liberal-democratic political systems.

However, the specific aspects of communist ideology and socialist reality, although undoubtedly significant, are not in themselves sufficient to account for the differences in the intensity of the impact of ecological and feminist movements on Czech society before and during its post-communist transformation. The issues on which the women's movement in the Czech lands concentrates are also greatly affected by the unquestioned and taken-for-granted premises of Czech culture, which in feminist terms is distinctly patriarchal and sexist.

The Czechs see gender differences as embedded in nature and as resulting directly from the biological differences between men and women. Women, in particular, emphasise their unique experience of gestation and childbearing which men can never share, and deduce from this experience all the other differences which they attribute to men and women. Both men and women argue that women's desires are almost entirely directed to the bearing and upbringing of children and that because of their biological differences men and women have different natures and different psychological dispositions and think differently. Even people who are unable to specify how male and female mentalities differ assume that they must. Gender identity is seen as something that is not socially constructed but biologically given. A female university student argued that biological differences between men and women were undeniable and, given these differences, it was only to be expected that men and women would also differ in their psychological dispositions, mentalities, and interests. She did not think that women were inferior to men; they were just different, and in her view any effort to achieve equality with men was foolish: 'I have never heard of men's striving for equality with women; why should women strive for equality with men?'

The characteristics of men and women which my informants mentioned most often resemble the standard gender stereotypes of male-dominated Western culture. Thus, for example, I was told that men are naturally predisposed to be assertive and women to be shy, tender, and submissive; that men are more guided by reason and rational calculation and women more by their feelings and intuitions; that men are openly confrontational and women likely to resort to subterfuge, flattery, and subtle manipulation from behind the scenes; that men are innovative and willing to experiment and women tend to stick to traditional and time-honoured ways of doing things; that men are firm in their opinions and intolerant of those of others and women less sure of their opinions and more prepared to see another's point of view; that men are egoistic and authoritarian and women unselfish, loving, and caring. At

the same time, it is seen as natural for women to arouse men sexually and for men show sexual interest in them. As in other spheres of life, it is considered natural for men to initiate sexual encounters and for women to show restraint before submitting to their sexual advances.

Because men and women are considered to think differently, they are viewed as being naturally predisposed to different tasks. The association of women with the domestic domain and of men with leadership positions in the public domain is culturally constructed as naturally given. It is significant that most self-proclaimed Czech feminists emphasise that they became feminists after they married. As one expressed it, ‘The experienced ones say that a woman becomes a feminist when she marries. That, indeed, was my case. Only feminism helped me to find out that I am not abnormal when I do not enjoy housework and that it does not have to be “natural” for me’ (Eva Hauserová in *Lidové noviny*, 14 May 1993). Since the feminists emphasise not only the emancipation of women in the public sphere but also the importance of increased participation by men in the domestic sphere, many men and women who openly reject feminism describe it as a movement of hysterical women who hate housework or who demand to be paid for it.

The cultural constructions of gender differences are reflected in attitudes as well as in behaviour. Forty per cent of Czech women prefer a man as their superior in employment and only 6 per cent would prefer a woman in this position. Only 5 per cent of women would prefer a female to a male doctor under all circumstances while 14 per cent would prefer a male doctor. When the question was modified to ‘sometimes or depending on the circumstances’, 80 per cent of women expressed a preference for a female doctor. In the sociological survey mentioned above, 57 per cent of respondents denied any awareness of sexual harassment, 33 per cent said that they had heard of it, and only 10 per cent admitted personal experience of it in their workplace (*Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992), conduct which in the West would be interpreted as sexual harassment is, however, almost standard practice in virtually every workplace. Although for most Czech women sexual harassment would require more explicit and overt sexual advances than those which they habitually encounter in the average workplace, they do not see it as degrading or offensive. Most of them see it as appreciation of their attractiveness and sex appeal. Even a self-proclaimed feminist admitted that if a man told her that she had beautiful legs she would start wearing miniskirts (*Lidové noviny*, 14 May 1993).

Jokes about women which play on the stereotypes of male and female nature are found objectionable by only 4 per cent of women; 54 per cent object only to vulgar ones. A greater degree of differentiation appears in attitudes toward the public display of female nudity (table 7). Even women who find the ubiquitous pictures of nude or partly dressed women demeaning are reluctant to protest them; ‘I would feel ridiculous, prudish’, one said (*Raspekt*, 1992, no. 29: 8).

Table 7. Objection of women (percentages) to displays of female nudity by context

In general magazines	73
In ‘erotic’ magazines	28
On posters in the streets	83
On posters in workplaces	75
On posters in homes	80
On packaging of consumer goods	71
In television advertisements	62
In films	34
In doctor’s surgeries	49

Source: *Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992.

Czech advertisements rely heavily on woman’s capacity for sexual attraction as the selling point and mostly depict women as subservient or inferior. For example, washing powder advertisements routinely depict a woman as a caring housewife who is persuaded about the advantages of this or that washing powder by the male scientist who has developed the miraculous product. In this rather blatant as well as in other, more subtle ways, advertising fosters ideas about the way a woman should look or behave. This practice has not yet inspired any debate among Czech women, and no campaign has yet been mounted against what would be seen in the West as the commercial exploitation of women. On the contrary, Western-style advertisements in which women were pictured as strong, independent, and successful, which deliberately reversed the traditional roles of men and women, or which ironically commented on the traditional gender roles were seen as unrealistic or downright silly by the people with whom I discussed them.

The degree to which Czech women accept their role as men’s helpers and supporters and their association with the domestic domain and the upbringing of children is perhaps best indicated by their attitude to the various stereotypical images of women perpetuated in Czech literature, film, theatre, and television (table 8).

One out of four women considers women abnormal who devote themselves totally to their careers and who do not resign on marrying and having children (*Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992).

The association of women with the household, family, and children and the association of men with the public domain is perpetually re-created not only by women’s magazines but also by the organisations which represent women’s interests. Under the communist regime, typical women’s issues were not only motherhood, the

Table 8. Objections of women (percentages) to various female stereotypical images

Guardian of family hearth	7
Man's partner for all seasons	11
Mother	16
Committed office-holder who manages to cope with everything	43
Absent-minded scientist or scholar incapable of finding 'her' man	49
Sex symbol	60
Unintelligent and submissive woman (<i>slepice</i> , 'hen')	78
Exhausted worker/wife/mother	83

Source: *Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992.

upbringing of children, and the problems of the family but the cumbersome and poorly functioning retail sector and the occasional shortages of food, household necessities, children's clothing, and other items. For the Czechoslovak Union of Women, an improvement in the supply of goods was one of the most important ways to better the position of women in society, and many women's organisations which emerged after the fall of the communist system still called for greater attention to women's roles as mothers and homemakers (Wolchik 1991:205).

With a full range of food and consumer goods now readily available in privatised Czech shops, however, most women's organisations no longer see women as suffering unduly in the performance of their traditional role of homemaker. The main women's issue is the insufficient representation of women in politics. Only 10 percent of the members of the Czech parliament which emerged from the 1990 elections were women, and their number dropped to 8 per cent in the parliament elected in 1992. Of the sixteen members of the cabinet formed after the 1990 elections, only one was a woman, and there was no woman in the Czech cabinet formed after the 1992 elections. Politics is the main domain which women see as clearly advantaging men, and 95 per cent of women participate in no political activity. Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, women rejected any suggestion of quotas which would guarantee them greater participation in politics, arguing that 'it would be like under the Communists' or that 'women do not belong in polities'. By December 1991, however, 70 per cent of women favoured quotas which would guarantee a certain number of parliamentary seats to women, as is customary in many European countries (*Data a fakta*, no. 13, September 1992). This change of opinion was due to the campaign of various women's organisations for more active participation of women in public life in general and in politics in particular. These organisations do not necessarily see themselves as feminist, and many of them explicitly distance themselves from feminism. As a female politician has expressed it, 'the question of the representation of women in politics does not need to be a feminist matter. It is

the matter of a normal development of democratic society' (Petrá Buzková, deputy chairman of the Social Democratic Party, in *Lidové noviny*, 7 August 1993).

Two main arguments are put forward for the desirability of greater representation of women in the main political institutions of the country. The first is that women are seen as better qualified than men to propose legislation on education, child benefits, child care, maternity benefits, and other issues which fall under the rubric of family policy and family law. The second is that greater participation of women would 'soften' and 'clean up' the political game and thus improve the overall political culture of the country. Politics is understood as an arena of competitive confrontation between opposing views and principles, and more participation of women, with their proclivity for care, tolerance for the opinions of others, and reluctance to be drawn into direct confrontation, is expected to yield a more consensual politics to the benefit of both men and women.

Both arguments are predicated on assumptions about the inherent and naturally determined differences between men and women in characteristic traits, inclinations, and ways of thinking. The cultural premises on which the Czech pattern of gender relations is built are constantly invoked in the gender discourse. When the minister of health, in response to a question in a television interview, said that he appreciated and admired the work of women but considered their number in business circles, in top administrative posts, and in the parliament sufficient, there was adverse comment from many women. Asked for his reaction to this, he replied:

Politicians are good and bad, successful and unsuccessful; the division into men and women in various professions is secondary. According to my information, there are many women in business and I appreciate this. My statement was only an expression of the fact that I understand their choice. Luckily, the roles of men and women are different and to a great extent predetermined biologically and historically. A different angle from which to see the world is an indispensable corrective for both groups. Politics requires both views to different degree at different times. There are two ways of dealing with difference, either to accept it or to change it. Because as a surgeon I know the second possibility very well, I recommend the first. (*Lidové noviny*, 10 August 1993)

What makes radical feminism unappealing not only to Czech men but also to the overwhelming majority of Czech women is ultimately the unquestioned assumption that differences in men's and women's roles are naturally determined. Czechs reject feminism not so much because they perceive its ideology as leftist and militant (*Respekt*, 1992, no. 29: 8) as because of its conviction that gender differences and the traditional roles of men and women are not biologically determined but learned and can thus be consciously altered. The conscious redefinition of gender roles which is the goal of the feminist movement in the West is seen as ridiculous or at least excessive not only by Czech men but by almost all Czech women, including the well-educated. It is seen as an inappropriate interference of conscious human design with the givens of nature which, if carried through, would destroy naturally constituted

gender relations just as various human projects have destroyed the naturally constituted ecological balance. In consequence, Czech gender politics is aimed not at altering existing gender relations but at better employing existing gender differences for the benefit of society.

The cultural construction of the natural and the artificial

In the Czech conceptualisation, things are perceived as either having emerged naturally (like, for example, gender relations or a market economy) or as the result of deliberate human design (like, for example, gender relations in the West which are the result of feminist agitation, or a planned economy). The dichotomy between the naturally constituted and the consciously created does not simply parallel the nature-culture dichotomy. That the market economy, for example, is seen as natural in opposition to the consciously created planned economy indicates that what is seen as naturally constituted is not limited to cultural constructs that are seen as innate in nature, but also includes constructs that are seen as the result of the evolution of human society and of its historical development. The evolution of human society and of its specific institutions (e.g., the family) is itself seen as ‘natural’ in the sense that these institutions cannot be attributed to particular human agents as their conscious or deliberate creations. The market economy is seen as natural because ‘nobody created it’. Similarly, the course of history is ‘natural’; although specific historical events are the result of purposeful human action, those who at any given moment ‘created’ history did not act alone. Historical events are the result of the interaction of a multiplicity of actors whose goals and purposes were mutually opposed and who were at the time unaware that they were making history. Rather than as a dichotomy between culture and nature, the dichotomy between the consciously created and the naturally constituted can be formulated as a dichotomy between will and nature – between processes designed and controlled by human agents and those outside such control and design. The dichotomy is an anthropocentric one: the naturally given or constituted does not define what can be created, designed, or controlled by the human will; rather what is or can be so created and controlled determines what will be classified as ‘natural’.

The cultural constructs which I have mentioned as examples of the dichotomy between the naturally constituted and the humanly created are clearly differently evaluated. The market economy is seen as superior to the planned socialist economy, ecological balance has to be preserved from the human creations that threaten and destroy it, and gender relations based on the natural proclivities of men and women ought not to be altered in the name of deliberately created ideals. This might suggest that a higher cultural value is ascribed to what is seen as natural than to what is seen as the result of conscious human effort, design, or will. The construction of gender relations suggests, however, that this is not the case. In comparison with men, women are seen as more emotional and less governed by reason. This difference is routinely invoked as a justification for the virtually total absence of women from high

political offices in particular and from politics, seen as the domain of rational calculation *par excellence*, in general. A politically active woman is seen as lacking natural feminine attributes, a view expressed in the sexist joke that either she is a spinster or there is something wrong with her ovaries. She is a peculiar creature who suppresses her naturally given disposition to nurturance in the name of a deliberately created ideal. Emotions can be provoked or perhaps controlled, but they cannot be created or designed by human will in exactly the same way as certain natural phenomena, although existing independently of human will, can be provoked or controlled by human action (acid rain is a pertinent example). In terms of the dichotomy between the naturally given and the deliberately created, emotions stand at the natural pole.

The Czech language makes a semantic distinction between *city* (such as love, hate, joy, sorrow, grief, etc.), which I gloss as ‘feelings’, and *emoce*, which I gloss as ‘emotions’. Certain feelings may of course be inappropriate to certain situations, but in ordinary speech *city* is value-free, whereas *emoce* always has negative connotations. In ordinary speech, ‘emotions’ connotes not any particular feeling but rather, as one of my informants formulated it, ‘an unsuitable or inappropriate expression of feelings; unsuitable in the sense of their expression through inappropriate means’. The word ‘emotion’ acquires its meaning in opposition to ‘reason’: ‘Emotion is an inappropriate expression of feeling or opinion, that is, an expression which is not sufficiently guided by reason’, as another informant expressed it. Particularly in political rhetoric, politicians, political commentators, and ordinary people commenting on political events and decisions condemn as irresponsible the appeal to emotions by extremists, both ultra-left-wing and ultra-right-wing populists, and they negatively evaluate ‘emotional solutions to problems’ and ‘emotional answers to complex questions’.

The guiding idea of Czech culture is not the positive or negative evaluation of either the naturally constituted or the consciously created, but the negative evaluation of the excess of one pole of the dichotomy over the other. This notion is expressed in a number of common sayings: *všebo moc škodí* (‘too much of anything is harmful’), *čeho je moc, toho je příliš* (‘too much of anything is excessive’), and *všebo s mírou* (‘everything in moderation’). Shifting from one extreme to the other is bad: it lacks direction or forward movement (*ode zdi ke zdi*, ‘from wall to wall’). The root metaphor of Czech culture is the ‘centre’.

The Czech lands are seen as part of neither Western nor Eastern Europe but Central Europe. Although Czech pro-government political commentators argue that the Czech Republic is unique among the post-communist states in having elected a right-wing coalition government in 1992 and thus signalling to the world ‘We belong to the West’ (Jan Patočka in *Český deník*, 27 October 1992), the Czechs I listened to do not share this view. They talk about a trip to Austria, Germany, France, or Britain as visiting the West; they talk about ‘Western cars’, ‘Western goods’, ‘Western films’, ‘Western technology’, ‘Western influences on Czech culture’, and ‘the penetration of

Western capital into Czech industry', They talk similarly about the 'East' - Russia, Romania, and other countries of the former socialist bloc. They see themselves as belonging to neither the East nor the West - as standing in between. Their country lies on the boundary between East and West, and it has often seen the solution to its political predicament by thinking of itself as a 'bridge' between them. The image of a bridge expresses again the positive value ascribed to centrality: a structure that links the two sides. Czech national identity has been built on this metaphor since nineteenth-century national revival. In the introduction to his *History of the Czech Nation*, Palacký identifies the historical task of the Czech nation as to 'serve as a bridge between German and Slav, between East and West in Europe'. This idea was actively invoked by Czech intellectuals and politicians after World War II in their efforts to prevent the total incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the East. The metaphor of the bridge lends to Czech identity the role of mediator between two distinct European cultures and value systems, and creator of their eventual synthesis (Macura 1992; see also Pynsent 1994: 179-80).

Another core symbol of the desirable mediation between the naturally given and the consciously designed is reason. Nationalism has negative connotations because it is a manifestation of emotions (the naturally given) insufficiently controlled by reason. The Czech-Slovak conflict is occasionally seen as a conflict of reason and emotions (Petr Nováček in *Mladá fronta dnes*, 27 October 1992; Havel 1992: 64; Macura 1993: 40-1). Nationalism is an emphasis on nation as the highest cultural value. As the nation is a naturally constituted entity, nationalism is a manifestation of an undesirable excess: it disturbs the culturally valued balance between the naturally constituted and the consciously created in human existence.

Reason curbs not only emotions but also ideological dogmatism as an extreme expression of unmitigated human intention. One commentator characterised the controversial dam on the Danube at Gabčíkovo as 'a perfect monument to the grand victory of idea over reason' (Jaroslav Veis in *Literární noviny*, 30 October 1992). When the Czechs speak of reason, they mention either common sense (*prostý rozum*) or, more specifically, 'a healthy farmer's reason' (*zdravý selský rozum*). By explicitly invoking the image of a farmer, this particular type of reason aptly expresses the creation of value through cultivation - the transformation of the naturally constituted through conscious human effort. Although this is not its only connotation,¹ 'a healthy farmer's reason' suggests cultivation as another metaphor for the culturally valued harmonious balance between the naturally constituted and the consciously created.

The idea of balance embodied in the metaphors of centre, bridge, and cultivation (the last itself a metaphor for the right kind of reason that mediates between the naturally constituted and the wilfully created) is the guiding idea of Czech culture. The achievement of balance is recognised as the ideal. In various contexts different oppositions, such as those between freedom and responsibility or private and public

¹ The expression connotes primarily a down-to-earth, no-nonsense practicality.

interest (Jaroslav Veis in *Literární noviny*, 30 October 1992), may be invoked, but the desirable state of affairs is always the balance between them:

Freedom has its inevitable counterpart in personal responsibility, without which it is impossible to achieve a much needed *balance* and *harmony* in society.

(Václav Klaus in *Český deník*, 15 September 1992)

An excess of deliberate constructions is as undesirable as an excess of emotions:

In the history of states, it does not often happen that people want to die for the republic as they did in 1938. We should think about that as well, to remember and realise that that should be our highest goal. Such a goal is not a matter of a *rational engineering plan*.

(M. Uhde, chairman of the Czech National Council, in an interview about the new Czech state, *Český deník*, 30 October 1992)

The Communist Party had a slightly different opinion about the building of the prosperity of the state in the framework of the 'world socialist system'. However, this opinion did not agree with what is logical and *natural*.

(Metropolitní telegraf, 30 October 1992)

One of the questions debated in connection with the drafting of the constitution of the Czech Republic was the question of the role of the president in the political system and the way in which he should be elected. In one particular contribution to this debate, the change from his election by the parliament to his election by direct popular vote was criticised in terms of the danger of tinkering with established social practices which might destroy the desirable balance that had naturally developed:

Society is not a laboratory for experiments, and the return to proven forms of parliamentary democracy is more than desirable. The president is non-partisan in his function, and he guarantees first of all a *balance* between the legislative and executive powers. The problem of the direct election of the president and of his non-partisanship is *artificially created*; it is a pseudo-problem.

(Vladimír Hepner in *Český deník*, 7 December 1992)

By disturbing the desirable balance between the naturally constituted and the consciously created, the excess of wilful engineering is against nature (*proti přírodě*) or against reason (*proti rozumu*) and can eventually become something that is existentially alien (*bytošně cizí*). Ultimately, the rejection of socialism as a system alien to Czech culture derives alternatively from its excess of deliberate social engineering and planning or from its lack of cultivation, which leads to the excess of the animal-like side of human nature.

The excess of deliberate social engineering and planning is emphasised by contemporary Czech critics of socialism as its most characteristic feature not only in the context of a socialist planned economy but in a number of other contexts:

(The government of one party) overturned the *natural* course of affairs. Specifically, in Prague it started to build hideous concrete boxes and allowed that which at one time breathed with life to die ... Prague thus turned into some kind of open-air museum, and life moved into lifeless boxes... [Another] Czech interest thus must be to defend at all costs the *natural* course of affairs and not to consent to a government by one party.

(Vladimír Hepner in *Český deník*, 26 September 1992)

The numerous criticisms of socialism which point out the moral devastation which it brought about stem from the recognition of the opposite excess of the socialist system, manifested in its lack of cultivation of human nature:

Just notice the conduct of many old-new bureaucrats in many old-new offices. Just notice the attitude to customers of certain suddenly emerging entrepreneurs. Even those are examples of the omnipresent heritage of the *jungle* in which not only words but also values and relations become degraded... Anyone who wants to be successful and to influence the course of events has to perceive and to heed the *natural* trends, norms, and constraints... Let us avoid taking *extreme* positions. *On the one hand*, it is a negative identification in relation to a real or illusory enemy; *on the other hand*, it is a worshipping of new idols.

(Petr Havlík in *Český deník*, 16 October 1992)

The perpetual striving for balance between the naturally constituted and the consciously created does not mean that the excess of either is always negatively valued. Just as the basic premises of Czech culture make possible and shape ongoing discourses, they also give meaning to the observable changes in Czech culture and to its long-term development. This development is a process of counterbalancing periods of unrestrained dominance of the deliberately created (such as the socialist system) with periods of unrestrained dominance of the naturally constituted (such as the period of aroused emotions, euphoria, and re-emergence of national sentiment following the 'velvet revolution' of 1989). Similarly, the indisputable incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the Eastern bloc has now been replaced by emphasising its Western orientation (see Jan Patočka in *Český deník*, 27 October 1992).

The cultural construction of nation, state, and homeland

In the Czech conceptualisation, the nation is a naturally constituted community. Membership of the nation is, as we have seen, not the result of an individual's conscious decision but determined by the very fact of one's birth - a natural process *par excellence*. To belong to the Czech nation is as naturally given as gender or physical characteristics - something that cannot be changed by a conscious decision. The cultural construction of the nation as a naturally constituted entity is attested to by the fact that many informants mentioned that one was a Czech because one felt that one was a Czech. This is a kind of belonging that also determines membership of other naturally given categories, such as those of gender. Ultimately, as some of my

informants said, one is a man or a woman because one feels that one is one or the other.

Whereas the nation is not something people can build, the state is a deliberate human construction. 'States come into being and disappear, nations remain' (the historian Jaroslav Opat in *Lidové noviny*, 27 October 1992). We are 'building the state', as Czechs have recently been incessantly reminded by the politicians and mass media in connection with the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. 'What kind of state we are going to build' has been one of the issues most heatedly debated in connection with the drafting of the constitution of the Czech Republic and considerations of its future economic and social policy, international orientation, military doctrine, etc,

When talking about their homeland most of my informants described it as the country in which they were born and grew up and in which they had their family and friends - as one informant expressed it, 'where one has one's roots through the relation to one's parents, family, and other people'. Many people found it difficult to define a homeland in general terms, and in trying to do so they often mentioned various tangible symbols which evoked for them the image of the homeland - from family, friends, language, customs, way of life, mentality, culture, history, and traditions to specific familiar places, characteristic landscape, and natural environment. Most people stressed that a homeland was epitomised not by its landscape and natural environment but by the people who lived in it and their culture. The statement of one of my informants that 'a homeland is not a particular place but people' succinctly expressed this generally shared sentiment.

By seeing a homeland as epitomised by the commonality of the way of life, customs, mentality, and traditions of the people among whom one lives, the Czechs construe it as that socio-cultural space in which they understand what others do and others understand what they do. As one informant expressed it, 'A homeland is an environment in which everything is familiar to me and I do not have to learn new ways of doing things, in which I can live without fear of the unknown, in which I know what is proper or improper to say and do.' A homeland is thus the space in which the conduct, expectations, attitudes, feelings, and reactions of others are predictable and in which one knows the rules of appropriate behaviour. An important part of this familiarity is the language. The same informant mentioned specifically that a homeland was a country in which every word of the language had a clearly understood meaning, and another one expressed the same thing by saying, 'If I had to live in a country where people spoke a language which was not mine, it would not be my homeland even if I spoke and understood that language well.'

Semantically, *vlast* ('homeland') is related to *vlastní* ('own') and opposed to *cizina* ('abroad'), derived from *cizí* ('foreign, alien, strange'). People often expressed the meaning of 'homeland' by saying that it was 'their country', 'their home', or a country in which they had 'the right to live'. It is a country which stands apart from all other countries which are *cizina* and in which, as one informant put it 'everything is more familiar to me than it is abroad' (*v cizině*).

Territorially, the Czechs delineated their homeland alternatively as Bohemia, the Czech lands (i.e., Bohemia and Moravia), or Czechoslovakia. The variations in this delineation reflected to some extent the differences in the conceptualisation of the nation of which particular informants considered themselves to be members (i.e., whether they thought of themselves as Czechs or Czechoslovaks), but more than this was involved. The fact that most people considered only Bohemia and Moravia their homeland was of course to a great extent determined by the fact that I did my fieldwork in 1992, when the partition of Czechoslovakia into two separate states was already a foregone conclusion and was constantly being discussed. A few people said that before the partition was mooted they had considered the whole of Czechoslovakia their homeland, but most of them stressed that even before this their homeland was only Bohemia and Moravia; Slovakia was part of the state in which they lived, but it was not their homeland. They said that they had never been to Slovakia and did not know any Slovaks or that, although they knew some Slovaks intimately, their family and most of their friends lived in the Czech lands. Language is also often invoked as the reason Slovakia is not part of a Czech's homeland: although the Slovak language is very close to Czech and Czechs can understand it perfectly, most of them cannot speak it.

Language, customs, traditions, and culture are attributes which make a homeland of a country. At the same time, they are attributes which make a nation of a collectivity. In this respect, the present-day Czech construction of a homeland does not eliminate nationality as did the construction of the nineteenth-century Bohemian nobility characterised as regional patriotism (*Landespatriotism*). If one's homeland is a country in which people speak the same language and have the same traditions and customs as one does, one's homeland is the country in which one's nation lives. This is the reason many of my informants mentioned that even if they lived abroad, the Czech lands would always be their homeland. However, although the same attributes may be used to construct a nation and a homeland, these two terms are not synonymous. In the Czech conceptualisation, the nation is defined by common language and culture and remains a nation whether its members inhabit a particular territory or not. Although played down in the Czechs-definition of 'homeland', the spatial aspect enters into its conceptualisation as it does not enter into the conceptualisation of a nation. This emerges from the frequent equation of 'home' and 'homeland' and from the statements of many informants that their homeland was not only where they felt at home, but was also their home. 'Home' is not an intangible entity but always and foremost a specific place; the proper question is not 'What is your home?' but 'Where is your home?' For most people home is the place where they were born and brought up or, alternatively, the place in which they established their own families and had their children. In relation to the 'proper' home understood in this way, homeland is the familiar space stretching beyond its boundaries and is a 'home' in the wider sense of the term. One woman, who stressed that her homeland was formed by her family and friends and was not merely a territorial concept,

expressed it in the following way; 'My home is in this country. I see my homeland as that territory in which I have my home; the centre of that territory is my home.'

In saying that a homeland is a country in which one knows the rules of appropriate behaviour, people mean not only the customary rules which have evolved spontaneously but also the rules stipulated by the state. And when they describe their homeland as either the Czech lands or Czechoslovakia, they again resort to the concept of the state or, even more concretely, of the state's boundaries, to delineate the homeland. Yet, again, the homeland is not synonymous with the state. One can love one's homeland deeply and still be extremely critical of or hostile to one's state. This was the attitude of people who explained to me why they had not emigrated from communist Czechoslovakia in spite of suffering persecution. Although they hated the communist state, they loved their homeland too much to leave it. For most Czechs, the Czech lands were their homeland during the pre-war republic, during the war years when their state was a German protectorate, and during the years of the socialist state, and are their homeland now. States come and go, but the homeland remains. A homeland is a construct which mediates between the naturally constituted nation and the artificially created state; it is that space in which the nation and state intermingle or are linked.

The Czechs make a sharp distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is a positive attitude to or awareness of belonging to one's homeland. Most people defined it as the love of one's homeland which manifests itself in the willingness to do something positive for it, ranging from contributing to the development of national culture to having a cultured lifestyle respectful of national customs and traditions. Even people who did not claim strong patriotic feelings and said, for example, that they would never fight for their country maintained that patriotism was a desirable attitude. As some of them argued, it had to be, because love itself was a positive feeling and so, of course, was love of one's country. But first of all, patriotism was a positive attitude because it expressed love for one's country without engendering animosity, hatred, and a feeling of superiority toward other nations.

The latter sentiments are characteristic of nationalism, which most people described as immoderate, fanatical, or exaggerated patriotism -patriotism gone too far. Nationalism stresses the exceptional qualities of a particular nation and belittles the qualities of other nations. It is an expression of a negative attitude and often open hostility to other nations, and it manifests itself in intolerance, the pursuit of national interests at others' expense and the denial of others' rights. Whilst patriotism is solely inward-looking and is thus tolerant of other nations, nationalism is always outward-looking. It is a hatred of other nations which typically leads to violence. Everyone I spoke to condemned nationalism, and most of them expressed the view that while Czechs, or at least most Czechs, were patriots, they were certainly not nationalists. These views were reflected in a survey conducted in the Czech Republic in autumn 1990, in which 52 per cent of respondents expressed the opinion that Czechs had no

strong awareness of themselves as a nation (*Aktuálne problémy Česko-Slovenska*, November 1990: 26). Opinions like this give rise to the often-expressed view that Czech nationalism does not exist or, if it does, emerges only as a reaction to Slovak nationalism, with its openly expressed anti-Czech sentiments. The perceived lack of Czech national awareness is to a great extent the result of the fact that Czechs have been the dominant nation in the Czechoslovak Republic; in consequence, Czechness is not felt to be under threat and does not need to be openly asserted. Nationalism is something that plagues others - Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and the various nations of the former Soviet Union - but not the Czechs. Denial of Czech nationalism is part of the construction of a positive image of the Czech nation, for nationalism, whether as a militant movement or as heightened national feeling, has unambiguously negative connotations.

Identification with the state is also denied a positive value. Czech political commentators on both the right and the left continually criticise the prevalence of party-political interests in Czech political culture, as opposed to the common interest of the state, and ordinary citizens' lack of identification with the state. In pre-war Czechoslovakia this attitude was seen as a survival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when Czechs had little reason to identify with the state whose citizens they were but which did not serve their interests. Today this attitude is explained as a survival of the communist regime, when Czechs had every reason to see the state as alien and oppressive. Czechs certainly do not seem to take any special pride in the institutions of their state, whether the parliament, the civil service, the army, or the police. In 1992, when the political institutions of the Czechoslovak federation had been paralysed but not yet fully replaced by the institutions of the Czech state, no one seemed to mind. The situation was viewed not with concern or disquiet but, if anything, with amusement. Everything seemed to be in order, for the homeland with which Czechs identified was still there.

The Czech state and Czechoslovakia: the natural and the artificial

The key cultural metaphors of the natural and the artificial and the notion of a desired balance between the two were actively invoked in the discourse about Czech statehood which emerged soon after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and gained prominence after the elections in Czechoslovakia in June 1992. This debate was triggered by the reconsideration of the coexistence of the Czech and the Slovak nation in a single federal state which was immediately put on the political agenda.

The problematic nature of Czech-Slovak relations came to the fore in the spring of 1990, when the Federal Assembly debated changing the country's name. There was agreement on leaving out the adjective 'socialist', and as most members of the parliament at least verbally subscribed to the legacy of the pre-war republic it was generally expected - at least in the Czech lands - that the country would once more be called the Czechoslovak Republic. However, this was unacceptable to the Slovak deputies, who insisted on 'the Czecho-Slovak Republic'. This provoked strong

aversion among the Czechs because it had been the official name of the truncated republic which came into being as the result of the Munich agreement of 1938. Eventually, a compromise, 'the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic', was accepted.

This official name indicated that post-communist Czechoslovakia endorsed the federal structure set up in 1968. But whereas the communist government might have employed the legalistic rhetoric whilst effectively ignoring its own laws in practice, the post-November regime was determined to build a legal state and in practice had to implement, at least initially, the structure of government and the laws inherited from the previous system. Many of these laws and their underlying principles, such as the principle that neither Czech nor Slovak deputies could gain an absolute majority in the Chamber of Nations, which had to approve any legislation passed by the Federal Assembly, resulted in political paralysis which was eventually resolved only by the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate states. Virtually the whole period between November 1989 and the elections in June 1992 was marked by lengthy, tortuous, and turbulent negotiations between Czech and Slovak politicians about the mode of coexistence of the Czech and Slovak republics in a common state.

The negotiations were complicated by the differing interpretations of Czech and Slovak politicians of the various agreements which they had already reached and by the repeated demands of Slovak politicians that federal laws be subordinated to the laws passed by the parliaments of the respective republics, that a treaty between the two republics be a prerequisite for the adoption of any federal constitution, and that special attention be paid to Slovakia, which would be more adversely affected than the Czech lands by the proposed economic transformation. Some Slovak politicians argued that Slovakia should act as an independent subject of international law and have its own army and currency; there was also the threat that Slovakia would adopt a constitution of its own which would not necessarily respect the existing constitution of the Czechoslovak federation. In coming forward with these proposals, Slovak politicians emphasised that they were not seeking full Slovak independence but aiming only at achieving Slovak sovereignty as a precondition for a treaty with the Czechs (Měchýř 1991).

On the Czech side, the roots of the prolonged political crisis had been widely perceived as lying in the Slovaks' pursuit of national sovereignty. The content of the negotiations changed after the elections of 1992. The growing fear during 1991 that agreement would eventually be impossible was confirmed by their result. The strongest party to emerge from the elections in the Czech lands was the Civic Democratic Party of the former finance minister Václav Klaus, which campaigned for the maintenance of a common federal state with a unified international policy and a unitary economic system based on strict market principles and a minimum of state interference. In Slovakia the elections were won by the Movement for Democratic Slovakia under the leadership of Vladimír Mečiar, which campaigned for recognition of Slovakia as an international subject in its own right (either as part of a loose Czecho-Slovak union or as an independent state linked to the Czech lands by an

international treaty) and with an economic system in which market principles would be combined with a strong state role.

In the Czech lands, the negotiations which took place before the 1992 elections were perceived as an effort by Czech politicians to find an acceptable model of a common state in the face of increasing separatist tendencies in Slovakia. After the elections the negotiations took a new turn. The Czechs rejected the Slovak proposal of a loose Czech-Slovak military, economic, and monetary union in which Slovakia would exist as an independent subject of international politics, insisting on the creation of two independent states whose relations would be determined by treaties. The inevitability of the separation of the Czech and Slovak republics was accepted by both sides, and the negotiations concentrated on guaranteeing the peaceful dismantling of the common state within the agreed constitutional and legal framework. Part of this process was the declaration of an independent constitution for each republic and the termination by the parliament of the Czechoslovak federation. As a result of this legislation, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic came into being as two fully independent states on 1 January 1993.

It is not my purpose here to write the political history of Czech-Slovak relations in post-communist Czechoslovakia or to speculate about whether the demise of Czechoslovakia was the result of the unwillingness of the Czechs to abandon their dominant role in the Czechoslovak Republic and their paternalistic attitude to the Slovaks, as most Slovaks and some Czechs argue, or of Slovak separatism and ingratitude, as most Czechs and some Slovaks prefer to see it. According to a survey conducted in September 1992, opinion in the Czech lands was equally divided on the creation of two independent states but 80 per cent of respondents considered it inevitable. Most of those who approved of the division saw it as the result of Slovak nationalism and separatism;² most of those who disapproved saw it as the result of

² The Czech sociologist Josef Alan has captured this view in a collection of essays on Czech-Slovak relations written during the complex political negotiations about the future structure of the state and published at the height of the constitutional crisis in 1992:

Although the discussion is about the tension in Czech-Slovak relations, the issue has always been Slovakia, and it has, since the creation of the republic, principally been initiated by the Slovak side and almost regularly construed by the Czechs and Czechoslovakists (or ‘federalists’) as the manifestation of nationalism.
(Alan 1992: 17)

It is a view which depicts Slovaks as nationalists while denying the existence of any nationalist sentiments among the Czechs. It is expressed not only by ordinary people but by many Czech intellectuals, including Alan himself:

The Czech lands first experienced a process of the creation of national self-consciousness, building upon the ancient traditions of the Czech state, during the nineteenth century, and national identity has become self-evident, a lived value rather than one sought after. As a result, paradoxically, it has exhausted its culture-creative potential and ceased to be perceived as an ultimate value. It has even ‘dried up’ or, more exactly, acquired such refined forms that it is no longer defined as specifically national... This achieved

the inability of the Czech and Slovak politicians to reach an agreement. For most Czechs, then, the creation of two independent states in place of the Czechoslovak federation was something which they had never wanted.³ In this situation, the main problem for Czech politicians, helped by Czech journalists, historians, sociologists, and other intellectuals, was to convert the unwanted necessity of creating a new identity into the positive programme of building an independent Czech state. The tacit assumptions of Czech culture gave shape to the discourse both in formulating the problems which had to be addressed and in providing solutions to them.

The first problem was the fact that most Czechs had always treated Czechoslovakia as their state even though most of them considered only the Czech lands to be their homeland. In an interview for a Polish newspaper, in answer to the question ‘What does it mean - a Czech state? What is the Czech national interest? It seems that Czech politicians are avoiding this question, and arguing that there will be time enough to think about it in the future’, Václav Havel summed up the situation:

This relates to the fact that the Czech state emerges as a result of a certain compulsion. For the past seventy-five years, the Czechs have identified with Czechoslovak statehood; they have felt themselves to be Czechoslovak patriots. The idea of Czech statehood has had no special meaning during the past few decades because it has been merged with the idea of

national identity is accompanied by the emergence of a universalistic and institutionalised value system in which the state is a ‘transnational’ institution, a set of forms of social coexistence, which can be transferred from one setting to another.
(Alan 1992:14)

(The Czech) side accentuates universalistic values which transcend the horizon of the nation (civic society, free market economy, individual liberties, etc.); the (Slovak) side universalises particularistic values (the nation and its sovereignty, language, Catholicism, etc.). Another dimension; one side emphasises a civilisational-geographical identity (belonging to the West), the other side a cultural-historical identity (faithfulness to traditions).
(Alan 1992: 16)

³ The perception in Slovakia was different. The Slovaks wanted a different kind of coexistence with the Czechs in a common state which would truly reflect the equality of the two republics in the form either of a confederation or of some other kind of union. In Slovakia the disintegration of Czechoslovakia was mainly perceived as a result of the intransigence of the Czech politicians who emerged from the 1992 elections and who, arguing that the goal of the Slovak politicians was the creation of ‘an independent Slovakia with a Czech insurance company’, presented the Slovaks with an ultimatum; either a ‘workable’ federation (which the Slovaks saw as the maintenance of the old unitary state) or complete separation. As a unitary state, in which they felt themselves to be discriminated against and which was widely perceived as having never served Slovak interests, was no longer acceptable to the Slovak people, the separation forced upon the Slovaks by the intransigent Czechs became the only solution. According to a September 1992 opinion poll, 41 per cent of Slovaks agreed with the division of Czechoslovakia (in October it was only 37 per cent) and 46 per cent did not agree. Most of those who agreed with the division (32 per cent) attributed it to ‘Pragocentrism’ and discrimination against Slovakia within the federal structure. Most of those who did not agree with it (49 per cent) attributed it to the inability of the Czech and Slovak politicians to reach agreement about the form of the common state.

Czechoslovak statehood, and therefore today, as the Czech state approaches the task of establishing itself, we observe a certain embarrassment and hesitation.

(*Lidové noviny*, 11 September 1992)

Communist propaganda had concentrated on building a negative image of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic as a capitalist state based on the exploitation of the working masses. What was emphasised after November 1989 was its democratic character. Czech newspapers and magazines were full of articles on various aspects of the history, political system, and economy of the first Czechoslovak state; post-1989 Czechoslovakia was construed as the heir to the pre-war republic, symbolically expressed in the fact that 28 October, the day of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, was once again celebrated as the main state holiday. A significant part of the building of the new Czech state was the emergence of a critical attitude to the pre-war republic. The main theme of this criticism was its artificial character. Although the Czechoslovak Republic was seen by the Czechs as the revival of their historical statehood, that is, the continuation of the Bohemian kingdom, it was in fact created on the basis of temporary pragmatic considerations.

In contrast with the newly created Slovak state, the Czech state was not the result of a nation's aspirations to express its identity vis-a-vis other nations. The Czechs already had such a state in the Czechoslovak Republic. An independent Czech state might thus again be seen as a deliberate construction founded on momentary pragmatic considerations. To preclude this possible construction, political rhetoric seized on the notion of the natural not as innate but as the result of spontaneous historical development, consistently construing the Czech state as natural in opposition to the artificially created Czechoslovak Republic.

In accordance with this meaning imposed on the naturally constituted, what was emphasised was not so much the building of a new state as the re-emergence of the historical Czech state that had evolved naturally and existed within the boundaries of the newly emerging state for a millennium:

Our task is not to search for statehood; that has simply existed for several centuries. Our task is only to give this statehood the appropriate form of a democratic state which guarantees civic liberties.

(Pavel Šáfr in *Český deník*, 29 September 1992)

It is necessary to understand the independent Czech state, which is renewing itself ... as a self-evident continuation of a millennium-long historical development... It is not an easy task because our thinking is still influenced not only by the idea of Czechoslovakism but also by the detrimental continuous suppression of national awareness in the name of a proletarian internationalism.

(Milan Šimek in *Český deník*, 23 September 1992)

The fact that Slovakia is separating itself from Bohemia does not mean that the continuity of Czech statehood is ending and that it is once more necessary to define our state in some dramatic way... It is not at all necessary to redefine the idea of Czech statehood . . . The

continuity of Czech statehood was preserved in Czechoslovakia, and it will go on even after 1 January 1993.

(Martin Schmarek in *Český deník*, 27 October 1992)

Today it is not the matter of the division of the state, much less of the emergence of some new Czech state, which is the explanation our government coalition has accepted from the current Slovak political representation. No new Czech state is emerging after 1 January 1993. The Czech state has been, is, and will be here; only the organisation of the state administration is changing, as, of course, has happened many times in the past. And also, of course, a part of the territory will be lost which we never considered to be our own in the true sense of the word; we only loved it as our own.

(Petr Vopěnka, minister of education in the 1990-2 government, at the conference on the idea of Czech statehood held in Prague in October 1992, quoted in *Lidové noviny*, 20 November 1992)

A commentator in the daily *Český deník* (7 December 1992) summarised the political rhetoric by pointing out that

during the search for the roots and meaning of Czech statehood a long-known fact has been 'discovered': that Czech statehood has lasted without interruption since the Middle Ages and did not cease to exist even in the time of the 'Habsburg oppression',

(Josef Mlejnek Jr)

A tangible symbolic expression of the construction of the Czech state as natural was the 'celebration of the renewal of the Czech state' organised in October 1992 by the ruling Czech Civic Democratic Party at Vyšehrad in Prague, the first seat of Czech kings. The demonstration, attended by some ten thousand citizens of Prague, was addressed by the Czech prime minister, the chairman of the Czech National Council (the Czech parliament), and Václav Havel. After the singing of the St Wenceslas hymn and the Czech part of the Czechoslovak anthem, the demonstration ended with the laying of a wreath by the prime minister and the chairman of the council on the grave of Vratislav II, the first Czech king.

The metaphor of the centre

The political discourse which preceded the founding of the Czech state aimed to persuade Czechs of the necessity of having a state of their own. In so doing it played on the higher cultural value ascribed to the naturally constituted over the artificially created by emphasising the fact that the Czech state was not being artificially created for reasons of pragmatic expediency but simply assuming a new shape in its millennium-long natural continuity. It also seized actively upon the Czech cultural notion ascribing a positive value neither to the naturally constituted nor to the deliberately created, but to the harmony and balance between the two. We have already seen an example of such evaluation in the ascription of high value neither to the nation (the naturally constituted) nor to the state (the artificially created) but to the homeland - a construct which mediates between these two terms. The same

notion informed the emerging criticism of the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic, which pointed to its artificial character. In linking Slovakia with the historical lands of the Czech crown, Czechoslovakia became a deliberate construction manifesting an excess of the consciously created over the naturally constituted, which was also ultimately the reason for its eventual and inevitable demise. The emphasis on the natural character of the Czech state is aimed at precluding the interpretation that its founding is a similar victory of the consciously created over the naturally constituted. If the state is, on the one hand, something people create and, on the other hand, something that is in itself natural, a desirable balance between the naturally constituted and the deliberately created is achieved.

The discourse about the Czech state contains disagreements about specific issues and about solutions to particular problems under discussion. These disagreements stem from the fact that one text of the discourse may focus on the opposition between the various positively or negatively valued terms, such as the opposition between the positively valued natural and the negatively valued artificial or the opposition between the West and the East, whereas another may focus on the opposition between any pair of these two negatively valued extremes and their positively valued reconciliation. For example, the disagreement about whether the Czech lands are or should be part of the West stems from the invocation of these two different oppositions. However, the disagreements reflect the tacitly accepted agreement on the basic premises of Czech culture. It is this agreement that makes possible the production of particular texts within the discourse and defines the issues which are the subject of either agreement or disagreement among their authors.

The national principle of the Czech state

The main disagreement in the discourse about the Czech state is over the principles on which this state should be built. One of these principles is the civil principle which strives toward the balance between the naturally constituted and the deliberately created in curbing the undue emphasis on the naturally constituted nation and the excess of emotions characteristic of nationalism;

(The new Czech state) can in no way be the state of the Czech nation as some people wrongly imagine. The state has to be built on strictly civil principles so as not to repeat the mistakes which Czechoslovakia committed in relation to minorities after 1918.
(historian Jan Rychlík in Lidové noviny, 29 October 1992)

Although much of the political rhetoric similarly emphasised that the new state had to be built on civil principles and the principle of the market economy, equally strong was the view that it could not be built on these principles alone. In the interview from which I have already quoted, Václav Havel expressed it in the following way:

I am of the opinion that a market economy is an essential condition, an unavoidable component, and a necessary part of the building of this state.' But at the same time I think that this alone would not be enough. A market economy is the programme of many countries from Bohemia to Hong Kong, and it is hardly possible to found a state on this idea alone, for the question could then emerge why we could not become the seventeenth land of the Federal Republic of Germany - why is it necessary to have an independent state because of the existence of something which is a universal programme? I think that it is necessary to seek other dimensions of Czech political traditions and Czech statehood.

(Lidové noviny, 11 September 1992)

One of these 'other dimensions' has been the growing emphasis on the national principle of the new Czech state, consistent with the positive value ascribed to the nation as a naturally constituted entity and the negative value ascribed to the state as a deliberate creation. The emphasis on the pursuit of specifically Czech interests in the process of building the new state has been expressed in the context of numerous aspects connected with the dismantling of the Czechoslovak federation, ranging from the division of federal property, through the problem of the structure of the local government of the new state, to its international relations.

The discourse about the Czech state emphasised that the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic, to which the post-1989 Czechoslovak federation declared itself an heir, was an unnatural creation because it was not a nation-state - a form which balances and harmoniously combines the naturally constituted (the nation) with the deliberately created (the state).

The positive identification with the naturally constituted Czech nation was invoked as a principle which would enable the identification of citizens with the state which was being consciously constructed. In his speech at the demonstration at Vyšehrad in October 1992, the liberal and market-oriented Czech prime minister emphasised the necessity of solidarity among those who would together build the new Czech state and clearly defined that solidarity as 'the solidarity among us Czechs' (*Metropolitní telegraf*, 26 October 1992). Stressing the necessity of the feeling of togetherness which makes it possible to find new possibilities in political disagreements and a 'common road', he said:

(To achieve the desirable togetherness) one has to know that there is a community which subsumes every democratic differentiation and lends it a certain meaning. That community is the *Czech nation*.
(Český deník, 26 October 1992)

An editorial comment in the right-wing *Český deník* stated the position bluntly:

There is no point in philosophising about the creation of the Czech state. Its meaning is given by the existence of the *Czech nation*.
(6 October 1992)

The invocation of the national principle is not only the prerogative of right-wing politicians. The left-wing opposition also invokes national interests, albeit for reasons

of an effective defence against the power of the state. The chairman of the reformed Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia explained the programme of his party as follows:

I consider the consistent defence of *national interests* and an offer of social self-defence against profiteering, speculation, and the asocial behaviour of the state bureaucracy to be the main pillars (of this programme).
(*Rude právo*, 11 November 1992)

The different reasons for emphasising national solidarity and the pursuit of national interests stem, however, from the shared cultural premises whereby the nation is construed as naturally constituted and the state as consciously created, each of them thus standing at one pole of the dichotomy which needs to be brought into balance and harmony.

Referendum on the Czech state: reason and emotions

Czech cultural premises were also invoked by the ruling coalition in the Czech lands to justify the specific political means by which it pursued the disintegration of the federation and the creation of the new Czech state.

The main argument of the opposition against the ruling coalition's policy was that the creation of an independent Czech state was not part of the election programme of the Civic Democratic Party which emerged victorious from the 1992 elections and therefore the government coalition had no mandate for the dismantling of Czechoslovakia. Whether the Czechoslovak federation should be preserved or split into two independent states should, it was argued, be decided in a popular referendum. According to an opinion poll conducted in September 1992, this view was shared by more than 80 per cent of the population.

The government coalition opposed such a referendum arguing that as an element of direct democracy it would negate the principle of representative democracy and that it was unnecessary in a well-functioning democratic system in which the political will of the people was expressed by their duly elected representatives in the parliament. In the government's view, the opposition was insisting on the referendum not out of any concern to preserve the federal state but in an effort to change the result of the elections. As the opinion polls conducted in September 1992 showed that only 36 per cent in the Czech Republic and 37 per cent in the Slovak Republic would vote for the end of the federation in a referendum, the opposition hoped that the referendum would reveal disappointment with the government coalition for its inability to preserve the Czechoslovak federation.

The government coalition also used another argument against the referendum which again stemmed directly from the premises of Czech culture. In line with the negative evaluation of emotions in opposition to reason, the government argued that voters who lacked full knowledge of the complexities of the problem of either preserving or dividing the federation would base their decision on their emotions and

accused the opposition, which was aware that most Czechs identified emotionally with Czechoslovakia, of arousing those emotions. The referendum would be nothing other than an attempt at an emotional solution of a complex problem which could not be solved emotionally:

The overwhelming majority of citizens are simply not sufficiently informed. The MPs are no wiser than ordinary citizens; they only have a larger amount of information at their disposal. On the basis of this information, they see a little bit farther than citizens. They are more acutely aware of the inevitable consequences of the prolonged agony of the state. They are better informed about the economic and political consequences. They have facts and figures at their disposal. They can evaluate better whether we will pay more for the division of the state or for stubbornly keeping it alive in an atmosphere of permanent instability.

... An *emotional* opinion of the uninformed majority should not win over the opinion of informed minority in the decision about the future of the state.

(Pavel Černocký in *Metropolitní telegraf*, 24 October 1992)

Should there be a referendum about maintaining or abolishing the federation, many people in Bohemia would vote for the federation because their *sentimental* attachment to the idea of Czechoslovakia prevents them taking into consideration what are or are not the wishes of the Slovaks. A similar problem in orientation to all the twists of the constitutional question exists also in Slovakia, and many people are demanding a common state and the independence of Slovakia at the same time.

(Václav Klaus, Czech prime minister in *Český deník*, 18 September 1992)

The above texts suggest that a decision taken on the basis of emotions would be an expression of nature uncontrolled by reason. The sense in which nature has been invoked in these particular texts is just one of many senses in which it has been employed in the discourse about the Czech state. Different texts of the discourse use the metaphor of nature in different contexts, drawing variously on the opposition between the naturally constituted nation and the artificially created state, the opposition between the natural character of the Czech state and the artificial character of the Czechoslovak Republic, or the opposition between naturally given emotions and deliberate social engineering. Nature was invoked in yet a different sense in the discussion surrounding the referendum. One commentator argued that to ask people in a referendum whether they wished the Czechoslovak federation to be preserved was like asking them whether they wished never to have a toothache again. This rhetorical device construes the disintegration of Czechoslovakia itself as a natural process which it would of course be folly to oppose. And it would of course be equally foolish to oppose the creation of a Czech state once the Czech state has been construed as a naturally given entity rather than something created by human design.

Conclusions

A specific understanding of politics is of course in the interest of politicians, and they shape the discourse to achieve that kind of understanding. That the Czech government largely succeeded in putting across its policies concerning the creation of an independent Czech state without holding a referendum is attested to by the results of opinion polls. Whereas in September 1992 more than 80 per cent of respondents favoured a referendum on the question of whether the Czechoslovak federation should be preserved, in October only 42 per cent of the population of the Czech lands (and 51 per cent of the population of Slovakia) considered a referendum to be the best way of terminating the common state. In the end, when the independent Czech Republic was officially declared on 1 January 1993, although the event was greeted without any particular joy, it did not trigger any opposition.

This considerable shift in public opinion clearly suggests that Czechs found the discourse about the disintegration of the federation and the creation of an independent Czech state persuasive. By construing the Czech state not as an artificial creation but as a natural entity, the discourse made sense of and therefore made manageable ideas and actions which most Czechs found not only disturbing but undesirable. The discourse gained its persuasive power by effectively invoking the symbols and key metaphors through which Czechs make sense of the world in which they live. The meanings of these symbols and metaphors, through which the basic premises of the culture are expressed, are not restricted to any particular discourse but emerge in a multiplicity of them. The metaphors of the natural and the artificial are employed in economic, political, ecological, and gender discourses and probably many more besides. In this respect, they are key metaphors of Czech culture.

This culture, however, does not exist in people's heads simply because they have learned it and because what they have once learned simply persists by virtue of some kind of mysterious resilience. It is the various discourses which keep it alive and also change it (Halliday 1978: 124-5; Scherzer 1987: 296, 306). They keep it alive by seizing on the metaphors through which its basic premises are expressed, and by so doing, they achieve their persuasiveness. They change it because each necessarily alters, at least to some extent, the meaning of these metaphors by applying them to contexts to which they have not been applied before. The discourse on the Czech state not only re-created Czech culture by metaphorically employing its key notions of the natural and the artificial but also, at least to some extent, changed it by newly contextualising these notions and thus giving them new meanings. These altered meanings are then themselves used to express the basic premises of culture in other discourses. In this sense, culture is not itself a discourse (in the same way as language is not discourse) but is reproduced, kept alive, and perpetually changed in ongoing discourses.

The basic premises of Czech culture and the way in which Czechs construct their national identity have affected not only the discourses which I have discussed in this chapter but also the way in which communist rule ended in Czechoslovakia and the

whole process of transformation on which Czech society embarked thereafter. This process was accompanied by the emergence of a multiplicity of new discourses which, on the one hand, seized on the basic premises of Czech culture and, by positively invoking them, reaffirmed and re-created them and, on the other hand, altered them in many subtle ways. Seen in this way, Czech culture and ideas about what constitutes Czech identity must be conceptualised not as timeless and unchangeable attributes of the Czech nation, as Czechs themselves conceptualise them, but as constructions perpetually re-created and modified in political practice. Moreover, rather than as a harmonious, singular, and coherent ideational system, they must be seen as a system of competing values and concepts which are internally inconsistent and ultimately irreconcilable.

One set of such values and concepts is generated in an overtly nationalist discourse which emphasises the values of egalitarianism and construes individuals as parts of a nation and as emanations of collective Czech nationhood. During the events which led to the fall of communist rule in Czechoslovakia, in the process of subsequent post-communist transformation of Czech society, and during the political crisis which was eventually resolved by the creation of an independent Czech state, the notions, beliefs, and values espoused in what may be called Czech nationalism gained prominence in a number of everyday discourses. However, the nationalist discourse is not the only one that creates and re-creates Czech cultural assumptions, premises, values, and beliefs. It is in constant competition with a discourse which espouses the values of Western individualism and construes individuals not as parts of a nation but as autonomous persons in their own right.

Czech identity is negotiated in these two simultaneous discourses, which, on the one hand, are in competition with each other and, on the other hand, draw upon each other and are occasionally collapsed into each other. In situations perceived as national crises, the values espoused in the nationalist discourse come to prominence and those espoused in the competing discourse on individualism may be temporarily submerged. But in fact both sets of values feed into the premises of Czech culture, and a middle way is ideally sought between them so that neither discourse is ultimately seen to be dependent upon the other. In consequence, Czech culture is a system of values and concepts which are in constant tension with each other and which surface and are argued about in a multiplicity of discourses through which they are perpetually created and re-created.

In chapter 4, I discussed two images of the past, one of which construes the Czech nation as a subject and the other as an object of history. These two images compete and are often collapsed into one everyday discourse. Just as these two images represent two ways of looking at Czech history, the notions of collectivism and individualism, with their associated values, represent two ways of looking at Czech culture. They too are in competition and occasionally are collapsed into each other. For example, in everyday discourse they are represented in the image of the individuality of the leader and the collectivity of the masses or in the celebration of

the intellectuality and individualism of leading historical and political personalities and the simultaneous emphasis on the conformity and mediocrity of the little Czech.

This collapsing of competing notions into one everyday discourse is probably most clearly manifested in the fusion of universal European values and particularistic national sentiments in the discourse about the future political and economic orientation of the Czech Republic. The proclaimed goal of the Czech post-communist government is admission to the European Union, and it is doing everything in its power to achieve this. For example, it makes sure that all new legislation passed by the Czech parliament is in line with the European Commission's rules and regulations. This effort is the most tangible expression of the 'return to Europe' upon which Czechs embarked after the overthrow of the communist regime in 1989.

Yet, the notion of the return to Europe emerged in the context of heightened nationalist feelings which accompanied the demise of communism not only in Czechoslovakia but in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Nationalism is generally perceived as being at odds with the idea of greater European integration, the proclaimed goal of the European Commission. The self-proclaimed European federalist and former president of the European Movement in Britain has pointed to the growth of nationalism and the establishment of independent nation-states as the underlying cause of rivalry and enmity within Europe (Wistricht 1989: 77). A similar view has been echoed by Hobsbawm (1990) and by Smith (1992: 76), who argues that confronting established national identities is the supreme challenge that faces Europe today. The attempts of the European Commission to achieve a higher form of European integration than a common market are based on the recognition of the need 'to change people's consciousness of themselves, including their identity as nationals rather than European citizens' (Shore 1993: 784). In the view of the ideologues of greater European integration, the precondition of European unification is 'the dismantling of the nation-state and its associated ideology of nationalism' (Shore 1993: 787).

The Czechs see their 'return to Europe' as appropriate for a nation which is highly cultured and well educated and possessed of a long tradition of democracy and other characteristics which link it to other liberal-democratic countries of Western Europe. As I have shown in chapter 3, these assumed traditions and characteristics, which embody and emphasise universal European values, are currently re-created through comparisons with the Slovaks, whom Czechs see as lacking any of these values. The ostensibly European values which the Czechs attribute to themselves are thus constructed in the context of an overt nationalism.

It has been suggested that 'if the EU succeeds in shifting the loyalties of large numbers of European nationals toward Brussels or Strasbourg and avoids provoking a nationalist backlash, the re-drawing of borders and boundaries that would result from the withering away of the established nation-state is certain to precipitate increased ethnic and regional conflict as those peripheral identities that have been submerged

for decades under the political roof of the big nation-state begin to assert their independence' (Shore 1993: 794). According to this scenario, greater European integration would simply mean the replacement of one form of nationalism by another. Before the nation-state withers away, the policy of particular nation-states eager to join the European Union such as the Czech Republic - might well encourage another form of nationalism, one based on a 'more-European-than-thou' attitude, in which particular nationalistic ambitions are couched in terms of what are ostensibly European values. The Czech self-images which emphasise the tradition of democracy and portray the Czech nation as highly cultured and well educated are precisely such values.

Paying attention to the self-images people have of themselves as nations, to the specific discourses through which these images are created, and to the ways in which they affect political and economic practices is particularly important in studying the process of post-socialist transformation. It prevents us from treating Eastern Europe as a politically, economically, and, to some extent, even culturally undifferentiated whole and as undergoing a single transformation from a totalitarian political system to democratic pluralism and from a centrally planned to a market economy. Although, undoubtedly, this process has many common features (Verdery 1991) which it is useful to bear in mind, it also shows the remarkable differences from one country to another. The Czech case is a special one in that it combines the problem of legitimating a post-socialist state with that of legitimating a new one to its subjects. However, legitimization of a new post-socialist order and of the gradually emerging post-socialist states is a process which, in one way or another; all former socialist countries have to face. The attention paid in this process to the invocation of shared cultural meanings and the key metaphors and symbols through which they are expressed may link specifically anthropological concerns with those of political science, economics, and sociology, the disciplines which have so far dominated the study of the post-socialist countries' current transformation.

In: Holy, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Introduction + Chapters 3, 5, 6.