

Anti-communists of the world, unite!

Transnationalism in Anti-Communism : The case of an emerging Museum of crimes and victims of the communism in Bratislava and the related activities

SOC585 Migration and Transnationalism-migrating people, migrating culture: optics, methods and impacts

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Introduction

Having the experience of living in the different social regime have a massive influence on the memory of the people. The polarity of the memories and the demarcation lines are starting to occur when the remembering the past. With the new socio-political system the new elites are coming on the stage to construct new discourses.

One of the introduced discourses into the public spheres after the Velvet revolution is the anti-communism. For the use of the paper I work with the anti-communism which is presumably carried by the people engaged in the emerging Museum of Crimes and Victims in Bratislava.

In the communism same as anti-communism can be seen two tendencies of looking at the national perspective. One tendency is strictly nationalist-emphasizing the national context of communism or anti-communism. The second is the transnational perspective focusing on the interest of the class in the communist ideology, or the interest of the people as human and the interests of humanity in general.

From the sketch above my main interest comes in: *What kind of narratives are used to construct the transnational or national identity of the anti-communism in the critical group which stands behind the Museum of Crimes and Victims of Communism?* In the essay I would like to map the ground of the national and the transnational tendencies of the (anti) communism as the memory material which is used by the group which is literally building the content of the museum. Unfortunately, the museum is still not there, so my role is more or less to analyse the interviews and the projects which had been done so far related to the topic.

The net of the theories I would like to use are the concepts connected to the memory studies connected to the issue of the communism (Sztompka, Bělohorský) and the transnationalism studies (Levitt, Boccagni).

Museum of Crimes and Victims of Anti-communism: Where it stands?

As the most of the former communist countries have the museum which is trying to reflect the previous regime, it did not take that long to realise Slovakia needs also such a museum. The museum is the initiative of the circle around František Neupauer who is a historian working in the Nation's Memory Institute.¹ František Neupauer is not known only by the activities as the professional historian but also by the non-governmental organization *Nenápadní hrdinovia* (meaning Quiet heroes). NGO is organizing an activities for the high schools and its students. Except for traditional learning methods (lecture, watching the documentaries, discussions..). They can create their own research to find out the personal story of a quiet hero against the oppression.

Except for the role as the historian, František Neupauer is representing the Christian movement The Forum of the Christian Organization. Neupauer is the chairman of the organization which main role is to be united and lobby to address the Christian topics and values into the civic life of the society. Strongest topics of the Forum is the memory and the human rights and supporting of the traditional family (the march for the family, activities to draw an attention to the problem of the abortions..). Museum of the victims and crimes is presented as one of the outcomes of the forum. To mention that the other topics of the forum: social solidarity and the international dimension of the forum which are not elaborated comparably to the other two topics.

¹The main role of the institute is to archive all the documents connected to the period of the fascist and communist regime and to do the needed historical analyses and related outputs. NMI was set as in all the other states as the public-law institution.

The museum was established though there is not an exhibition in itself. The project of the museum has gained a lot of support mainly from the groups close to Neupert, meaning the Catholic elites. During the previous government which had as a prime minister a right-wing sociologist Iveta Radičová supported the establishment of the Museum even officially. The new government of Robert Fico which has a great power is refusing the support. The representatives of the museum had decided to continue in their work and are working towards the existence of the museum as the activists. The museum is to be self-funded by the activists and the interest group. One of the supporters is the Christian College of the St. Elisabeth.

I consider important to mention that though there is a complicated relationship between the Catholic elites and the first Slovak state which was fascist but led by the Catholic priest, František Neupert is one of the Catholics who is expressing disapproval of the state

Theoretical part

Transnationalism

Mantra of the social scientists is saying “the nation is the social construction originated in the 18th century”. Thus, as far as the nation is the category widely accepted by the social actors it remains relevant for the social scientists. One of the new approaches how to face the changing realms of the nations within the intellectual elites and yet not shaking the actual presence of the constructed category is the cosmopolitanism and transnationalism.

Accepting and being aware of the differences across the regions is thought to be the quality of the cosmopolitan. The transnational dimension is referring to the extending and operating across different national boundaries. The both terms are used in the sociological theories relating to slightly different characteristics. To compare the term of transnational with the known term international. I decided to use the term “transnational” as related to the ideology and discursive practice of anti-communism though the term “international” is knitted to the socialism.

As communist internationalism was one of the most important try to relieve the collective identity from the firm grasp of the nationalism though the two are quite compatible. The most important person of the internationalism was Trocki who believed in the global solidarity (to underline it was not the cosmopolitan solidarity) of the classes. The fundamental characteristic of the socialism is its internationalism as it is related to the characters of the modern societies and global solidarity (Heywood 2008: 186).

I used the different term because of the changed circumstances in which we live in the world when we do not even try to sketch the movements over the exact national borders, as to compare it with the international perspective. Transnationalism flows over the national identity politics, whereas the term relating to the *international* is still keeping itself within the national frames. Transnationalism has become „an optic moving beyond methodological nationalism, rather than a full-blown theory-has accelerated theory building, methodological elaboration and field research with a view to achieving a simultaneous understanding and emigration processes.” (Bocagni 2011: 12)

In these optics I am using the term more as the actual reference point. The quality of being cosmopolitan in one's ideas is the derivative of the cosmopolitan memory as is shown on the example of the holocaust in the famous study of Szneider and Lewitt (2010) and Macdonald (2013). As the departure point, shared cultural trauma of the communist regime can produce the same cosmopolitan memory and the cosmopolitan dimension of the popular discourses. As applied derivative of the cosmopolitan memories I use the transnational museum practice and transnational discourses which are operating and referring over the more national borders.

Transnationalism in the Museum Practice

As one of the products of the national states can be regarded the national museums which are in Europe funded by the state. Thus through its funding and organizational structure its role as the disseminator of the knowledge is even more enforced. Museum is a created space for the artefacts which are to be stored and remembered. An authority is displaying the artefacts which are of the interest and deciding for us which we are supposed to know. The objects in the museums and the stories which create the museum can grasp the topic of the nationality on the different level.

Sociological studies within the frame of the museum practice has showned the different optics museum can use to show the different approach towards the nations. One way can be even describing the concept of the nation is relatively new and does not have to be stressed during the exhibition or the museum practice can continue in displaying the national state as there is only one nation and refuse to problematize. (Lewitt 2012)

The Slovak museal tradition is remaining quite unaffected by the cosmopolitan changes outside of the buildings and the postmodern discourse. Thus there is the assumption an emerging museum in Bratislava won't be the different and won't try to depict the world as entity where the nations are not an essentialist characteristics. Nevertheless the view of role of the national institutions is by their given institutional decretes also to map the minorities living on the area of the state which can be regarded as leaning towards multicultural perspective.

The possible reflections of the transnationalism in the Museum of crimes and victims of the communism can be underlying the role of the trans-european movement and even global context. The reflection of the position of the world and the humane in the process of the transformation can be viewed in the museum. Transnational as synonymous to human dimension can brought on the table the role of the human character in creating the conditions which were brought into the phenomenon of the crimes and the violence. As to show it is not a particularity of the regime but has been done on the various levels in the different settings and has been proved by various eye-triggering experiments.

Anti-communism

An anti-communism as a general term described the movement opposed to the communism. I use the "anti-communism" to describe special situation in the countries with the communist experience. I claim that the circumstances of the change of the elites in the Central Europe during the Velvet revolution created a ground for the special kind of anti-communism described below.

Elites have the greater power to influence the society they live in due to their different capitals. After the Velvet revolution created meaning industry labelled all who wanted to remain some characteristics of the communist system as not modern. The triumphal modernist discursive approach of some part of the society sees the arriving era of the capitalism as the stage of arriving to the rest of the world. The argumentation practices which disqualify some demands creates the depoliticization of the public sphere (Bělohradský 2010). The ideas and thoughts are being held as not relevant.

Existing forms of cultural globalizations brought the international corporations and the economic institutions into the newly- opened countries. The elites who saw the development what is to have in the home country were not to fight with the nature of the economic capital and the capitalist demands. The economic reductionism brought by the entering capital was adopted by the elites and indoctrinated the society. The example of the social democratic countries was not allowed to showed upon or easily erased by the argument "they can afford the non-market solutions as they have the money from the oil".

Talking about the change of the regimes we can talk about the cultural trauma of the transformation

which hit everybody. The deep roots of the change edited not only the system of the social institutions, but also the norms and the behavior in different spheres and whatsoever introduced the new unknown spheres of the social life. The traumatogenic potential was used by the social groups to give it a meaning of the trauma but for whom is the transformation the most traumatic? It is certainly not for the elites who have the most of the capitals and are able to exchange it according to the needs of the new system. The most difficult for coping with the situation it was for the people with less economic, educational capital. The division of the symbolic capital was changing with the transition as the new values became more important. The role of the social capital is tremendous in creating the safety net of the importance in the times of the transition.

To talk more on the mechanism which created the special anti-communist discourse we can use the Ogburn's (1922) theory we can talk about the cultural lag of the capitalism when the capitalism is understood as an externality causing the social system is already there but the different social norms how to behave are missing. The absent recipes at hand on how to deal with the situation causing the insufficient abilities to face the corporations and such I would name one way of how the influence of the corporations and of the neoliberal form of the capitalism took its way. What can be called „using the tragic narrative“ (Sztompka 2004: 177) of the people on the social security might express longing of the people for having the social security that is not there anymore. Interesting is the meaning industry how this legitimate need is de-legitimized in the process of cultural branding by the intellectuals. These people we might call the „back-ward“, „the losers of the transformation“ or „homo sovieticus“ as the term is widely popular in Poland.

Overcoming the cultural trauma is possible with the arising cultural interpretations and the argument of paying the price one have to for the transforming economies was at the hand. The field for the creation of the meanings of the situation of the dislocation from the previous system was open and it seems the more wild powers took over it meaning the economic political. The regimes of the social democratic did not have any particular interest in explaining there is not only one way how to do the things in the capitalist countries. Thus the readiness to accept the new values in the transition period opened the way for the neoliberalism view on the capital in the post-communist countries. Loosing sens for the solidarity created the opposition of the elites to the social democracy.

The discursive vacuum occurred in the countries like Slovakia during the transition period connected to the non-neoliberal public services solutions. The argument is not based on having no options for the decisions but for favoring one decision for being in tune of the argumentation line connected to the economic reductionism and thus creating the anti-communist discourse.

Analytical part

In the short analytical part I would like to use the materials which are available and connected to the group of an emerging Museum of the communism in Bratislava which help to reveal what is the vision of the museum. As there is not an actual exhibition but there are already the projects which are closely related to the museum and some of the smaller exhibition are already there. Except for the materials which help to sketch the idea of the future project there are the interviews and the blogs with the representants of the museum available.

The main activities of the museum so far are connected with the cosmopolitan memory only marginally. Projects are concerned at the discovering of the local heroes and the connection with the countries of the similar seems to be more as the added dimension which is demanded by the grant proposals, e.g. the host visit by the Dutch partner in the conference² or the participants from the Czech and Ukraine. (the web page of the Museum)

2 The Dutch partner was invited because of the import of the printing materials during the communism.

Personalities which are chosen to be presented by the organizers of the conference are usually in the national frame. To say that the main aim is to discover the quiet heroes in the neighborhood which seems is the definition suitable for the ethnic Slovaks. One of the few international connections is Matej Andáš who had close relationship to Poland. As the consul he was fighting for the minority rights of the Slovaks.

One of the main activities of the organization is the student's competition which main part is concerned with the international section. The main role is to find in the international context the particular people who manifested in the peaceful way for the human rights in the oppression for the civic and religious rights.

Nevertheless transnationalism could be part of the used discourses of the human rights which the museum tries to focus on. Using the collective memory of the crimes against humanity can be transformed into the transnational perspective of the human rights (Levy, Sznajder 2010) or into the sacrifice for the nation. Considering the perspective of the interviews and blog comments of František Neupauer his views can be characterized as reflective patriotic. ("I am ashamed that I am Slovak" -own translation ; "Slovak prime minister or the president?... Not a word" -own translation ; The Web page of the blog Postoy).

Conclusion

"The stolen Memory" That could be one of the title of the work as the collective memory of the communism is going to be shaped in the form of the museum by a special interest group. The circle around František Neupauer is awaking the strict anti-communist discourse based on the Catholicism. They are creating the binary division between the freedom and the communism as the freedom is represented by the free choice of the belief (namely religious freedom).

The cosmopolitan memory of the international unity against the communism is in particular case of the Bratislava emerging museum exchanged for the international unity under the belief in the same God. Repeating the national narratives is not moving the discourse towards the transnational standpoints thought it is welcomed the Christian elites has decided not to follow the strong part of the Christian elites who support the historical first fascist state. Using the tragic narrative for the communist past is creating an opposition of moral and immoral. The immorality of the communism is strengthening by the Christianity in the eyes of the supporters of the belief.

I do not claim my essay has done all that is possible to create the analysis of the used narratives, or planned to use in the emerging Museum of crimes and victims of communism in Bratislava. It was more a starting viewpoint to map the background of the reflective nationalist narratives and the tragic Christian narratives of the critical group behind the idea of the Museum. Named narratives are probable to be used as the constructing stories of the future museum depending on whether the museum will succeed in gaining broader support and possible changing the agenda or it will. Nevertheless, the transnational dimension of the narratives seems not to be used in its creation of the cosmopolitan memories but rather in accepting the human kind as the creatures of the God...and the God created the nations.

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