



Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism. Association for Leftist Theory SOK; Association for European Dialog (member of Transfrom network); Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 14.11.2015—15.11.2015.

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Historical Memory of Central and East European Communism

Only a few days before the Czech national holiday celebrating the anniversary of the student protest on November 17th, 1989, a conference took place in Prague which aimed to discuss the politics of memory in the Central European countries from the leftist perspective. This year's anniversary of November 17th in the Czech Republic was different from in years past. The traditional dominant motive of remembering the mass protests in 1989 as a representation of freedom and human rights against communism was replaced with nationalistic anti-refugee rhetoric. This shift possibly demarcated a turning point in the post-socialist politics of memory and its uses of anti-communist rhetoric. The conference was an opportunity to trace this change in the countries across the region and to sum up what the character of the previous period was or what the trends for newly formulated politics of memory are.

Even the conference itself can be seen as a part of these processes - it was organized by SOK, The Association for Leftist Theory, an NGO whose credo is attempting to develop the theory and praxis of socialism as an instrument for progress, democracy, humanity and freedom. See: http://www.sok.bz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=313&Itemid=45 (12.01.2016). As such, SOK opposes or opposed the dominant ideology in post-socialist countries that depicted the socialist ideology as outdated. The organizers' agenda didn't set up the tone of the conference such that many opposing perspectives on the topic were presented. Mostly because the orga-

nizers were able to attract presenters from abroad who represented different paradigmatic and institutional backgrounds. The organizing institution itself also kept the possible space for different paradigms open when the conference call covered the memory of communism in the whole 20th century.

In the end, only OKSANA KLYMENKO (Kiev) directly addressed the interwar period (constructing the memory of the October Revolution), and the rest chose the post-war period. The geographical range of the contributions also did not directly follow the call; besides case studies from the countries of Central Eastern Europe, other regions were also covered, with the significant case of the USSR, which itself is a specific case, worth conference of its own.

A very broad range of contributions helped on one hand to overcome the problem of similar conferences, which have tended to reproduce Central European cultural traumas. But on the other hand, contributions didn't try to trace common features, developments or narratives which would be valid for all the discussed regions or periods; for example, contributors used the label 'communism' or 'left wing,' but it is not clear whether these labels had a common meaning through time. Except for the keynote speaker TOMAS ZARYCKI (Warsaw), no one presented a theoretical or methodological contribution. Searching for broader concepts was left for discussions and individual reflections.

The diversity of the contributions was also curtailed

by the fact that they were housed under the paradigm of memory studies. This discipline has become fully established in the last thirty years, and the contributions at the conference represented the methodological and theoretical mainstream of the discipline: historical case studies (how the memory of some event was constructed âmainly in the first panel â Official Memory Politics before 1989â), contemporary case studies (demonstrating the divided memory with examples of a contested space â such as in contemporary Ukraine for OLEKSANDRA GAIDAI (Kiev) or Soviet monuments for ALEKSANDRA KUCZYÅSKA-ZONIK (Lublin)), and studies of contemporary memory politics (demonstrating the same situation on the discourses within the political field (ANTONY KALASHNIKOV (Oxford) for Soviet and THORSTEN HOLZHAUSER (Mainz) for German post-communists).

The temporal aspect became the main categorizing principle of the contributions. Conference sessions were structured according to established division of pre- and post-1989. This division actually follows the dominant post-socialist memory politics, which the conference itself tried to tackle, and this division further complicates to answer the question of whether there is a âleftist memoryâ that has the same characteristics across this line. Contributors approached their topics and time periods through the same concepts â official memory, popular memory or repressed memory. But did the official memory work in the same way before 1989 and after this year when formerly suppressed âright wingâ life stories became the official narrative? Is leftist official memory different from right wing official memory politics and do leftist life stories work differently than life stories of right wing dissidents?

From this perspective, some contributions could be interpreted as an attempt to newly legitimize the leftist perspective and the memory in the region which was dominated by anti-communist narrative â this is the case of the contributions mapping the situation in contemporary Hungary (ESZTER BARTHA / ANDRÅS TÅTH (Budapest) and CSILLA KISS (Aberdeen)). Their contributions were centered around the question of why socialist parties are not successful against the Fidesz party or are unable to create their own politics of memory. This problem is most visible in Hungary, but could also be valid or in other countries of the region, but with discussing this research question, we also have to adopt a perspective that is rather ideological â that leftist parties should oppose the agenda of nationalistic countries and should follow certain politics that are traditionally defined as leftist.

The line between pre-1989 and after this was visible also in this problematic issue â the contributions in general did not problematize the standpoint of the researcher or her reflexivity, but for contributions trying to analyse contemporary societies, this was a problematic aspect. Intellectuals giving speeches at conferences are also intellectuals who are setting up discourses that are shaping their field of research, and this aspect of contemporary social science was present only subconsciously.

One viable way to overcome these tricky issues would be through comparative studies, but there were only a few presented at the conference. Both ESZTER BARTHA (Budapest) (German and Hungarian workers) and STANISLAV HOLUBEC (Jena), (places of memory in Germany and Czech Republic) offered comparisons and identified differences in development in the countries discussed. In this regard, one of the most interesting contributions was âThe most long-lasting trauma in the memory of the Turkish left: The 1980 military coup and its destructive consequences in Turkeyâ by SENOL ARSLANTAS (Istanbul). His case study of a very different context actually opened up the question of whether there is one story of a âleftist memoryâ or that the Soviet communism operated in specific historical conditions and produced specific discourses which canât be transferred elsewhere or else the leftist discourse obtains a different content.

At the end of the conference, âHistorical Memory of Central and East European Communismâ provided an overview of case studies using various methodologies and approaches in the field of memory studies. But this produces a rather diverse and unstraightforward image of the politics of memory in a given region.

The organizers, contributors and visitors had a chance to seek developments, topics, and structures that can be further discussed on a more concrete level. Another chance to individually search for concepts that would characterise all of the studies of the period will be a volume from the conference that is currently in preparation, with a planned release in 2016.

Conference overview:

Keynote

Tomasz Zarycki (University of Warsaw): Communism and anti-communism as ideologies of the intelligentsia

Official Politics of Memory before 1989

Chair: OndÅej Daniel (Charles University in Prague)

Oksana Klymenko (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy): Constructing memoirs about the October revolution in the 1920s

Agnieszka Mrozik (Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences): Spinners of the (post)revolutionary reality. Constructing history of the left in the memoirs of Polish communist women in the 1960s

Catalin Parfene (History at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris): Historical memory of communist Romania's sports: Between nostalgia and romanianization

Official Politics of Memory before 1989 II.

(Chair: Michael Hauser, Charles University, Prague)

Ondřej Daniel, (Charles University, Prague): Comrades, the Comrades are Right! History of movement on the screens of late socialist television

Ugne Marija Andrijauskaite, (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas): Inventing the Communist Party of Lithuania as a labour movement. The narratives in Soviet historiography

Identities of anti-stalinist left before 1989

(Chair: Kristina Andělově, Charles University, Prague)

Jakub Szumski, (Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences): What happened in 1980? Official and popular memory of the Polish communist party after martial law

Senol Arslantas (Istanbul University): The most long-lasting trauma in the memory of the Turkish left: The 1980 military coup and its destructive consequences in Turkey

People's memory of communism after 1989

(Chair: Joe Grim Feinberg)

Eszter Bartha / Andrěs Těth (Hungarian Academy of Sciences): Contrasting the memory of the Kědě and Honecker regimes

Kalina Yordanova (New Bulgarian University, Sofia): Post-memories of socialist Yugoslavia: the place of the parents' past in their children's identity

Identities of post-1989 left

(Chair: Vězslav Sommer, Institute for Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Csilla Kiss (University of Aberdeen): Of the past let

us make a clean slate? The lack of a left-wing narrative and the failure of the Hungarian left

Thorsten Holzhauser (University of Mainz): Learned nothing from the past? Historical memory of German post-communists and its functionalization after 1989

Antony Kalashnikov (University of Oxford): Historical apologetics and factional differences in the Russian Communist Party (CPRF), 1993-2004

Identities of post-1989 left

(Chair: Martina Poliakově, Charles University, Prague)

Kristina Andělově (Charles University, Prague): The Ongoing Legacies of 1968 and 1989 are two related challenges of our future: Czech socialism, Memory of Czech Totalitarianism and the end of history

Walter Beier (Vienna): Austrian communist experiences interpreted from post-1989 perspective

Right-wing memory of communism after 1989

(Chair: Stanislav Holubec, Imre-Kertěsz-Kolleg, Jena)

Ekaterina v. Klimenko, (University of St. Petersburg): Politics of oblivion and the practices of remembrance, repressions, collective memory and nation-building in post-soviet Russia

Oleksandra Gaidai (National Academy of Science of Ukraine): Nationalism versus Sovietism? Politics of memory towards Communist heritage in Ukraine after 1991

Ittipol Jungwatanawong, (Ubon Ratchathani University Thailand): The use of historical memory by the FIDESZ party in post-communist Hungary

Places of Memory after 1989

(Chair: Josef Věda, Prague)

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik (Institute of East Central Europe, Lublin): The contemporary value of Soviet monuments in East Central Europe

Aleksandra Āorěviě (University of Belgrade): Contested histories and monumental Past: Serbia's culture of remembrance of army headquarters building in Belgrade

Stanislav Holubec (Imre-Kertěsz-Kolleg, Jena): Places of socialist and post-socialist memory in the Czech Republic and former GDR: Case of Hradec Krělově and Jena

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