CENTRAL EUROPEAN CASTLES IN THE AIR?

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There is an old story about a Hassidic Jew being asked how many countries he has seen. Well, he says, I was born in Austria-Hungary, I was married in Czechoslovakia, I was widowed in Hungary, and now I'm trying to make ends meet in the Soviet Union. Been quite a traveler then, haven't you? Not at all. I never moved a step from Mukachevo.[1]

MITTELEUROPA[2]

Central Europe, as it is known today in English, stems from the German term for this region, Mitteleuropa. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first British and American authors who took the cue to comment on this part of the continent closely followed the German coinage, and spoke of Middle Europe. I wonder whether it might have been an influence on J. R. R. Tolkien's invention of Middle Earth as the setting for his mythic epos, *The Lord of the Rings*.[3]

It was during the initial stages of the war that then was still to earn its sobriquet 'Great' or 'First World,' in 1915, that Friedrich Naumann, a member of the Reichstag (or the Parliament of the German Empire), published his famous tract, *Mitteleuropa*.[4] This exercise in imaginative geopolitics proposed a new political and economic organization for the kindred empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The goal was to create a political and economic union that would ensure prosperity, stability, and

[1] Holub, Miroslav. 1999. Introduction. In: Olbracht, Ivan. *The Sorrowful Eyes of Hannah Karajich* (Ser: Central European Classics). Budapest: CEU Press.
Mukachevo, today in Ukraine, was Munkatsch in German, Mukačevo in Czech, Munkács in Hungarian, and Mukachevo or Mukachovo in Russian. Jews, called it in Yiddish, as Munkatsh or Minkatsh. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mukachevo#Name>, Jul 18, 2010).

[2] I thank Michael O Gorman for inspiring discussions, and for his advice, suggestions and corrections. For all remaining infelicities, obviously, I alone remain responsible.

[3] Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel. 1954-1955. *The Lord of the Rings* (3 vols). Oxford: George Allen & Unwin.

[4] Naumann, Friedrich. 1915. *Mitteleuropa*. Berlin: Reimer.

peace in the region, which, apart from the two imperial powers, would also encompass Russia's western borderlands already under German and Austro-Hungarian occupation. These occupied lands coincided with Russia's share of the territories of Poland-Lithuania, partitioned by the Habsburgs, Hohenzollerns, and Romanovs at the close of the eighteenth century. Because Poland-Lithuania had been a dual state, consisting of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the occupying powers, striving for the legitimacy sometimes conferred by history, fell back on this old but still remembered and cherished pattern of a dual state. They founded a Kingdom of Poland and a Land der Ober Ost (or 'Land of Upper East'), the latter coterminous with the former Grand Duchy.

Today, the lands of the putative politico-economic union that failed to materialize are divided among the ethnolinguistic nation-states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, and Bosnia. Austria-Hungary also included Vojvodina, Transylvania, and eastern Galicia, which are today, respectively, in Serbia, Romania, and the Ukraine. By 1918, the Central Powers had overrun Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and most of Albania. They also controlled further Russian lands, in present-day terms the entirety of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, as well as the northeastern Black Sea littoral, which nowadays is in the Russian Federation. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire were allied with the Central Powers. In the west, Berlin seized Belgium, though it observed the neutrality of Denmark and the Netherlands. The price exacted for this was the nominal character of their neutrality, as both these states tacitly agreed to trade with the German Empire for the sake of the Central Powers' war effort.

Supporters of the Mitteleuropa idea reacted enthusiastically to the expansion of the borders of their would-be block. First, it would recreate the Holy Roman Empire, which for almost a thousand years (until its dissolution in 1806), known simply as 'the Empire,' had been the central mainstay of European political order and stability. Second, the Central Powers would gain the dominant position in Europe and thanks to their allies would control the Balkans and achieve a firm foothold in the Middle East, frustrating British, French, and Russian ambitions in this region. Mitteleuropa as an embodiment of liberal imperialism would guarantee and perpetuate the *primes inter pares* status for German-speakers and Hungarians. However, its planned colonial policies would not be so benign. The Central Powers shared the Western European belief in the superiority of the 'white race.'[5] Their goals were to prevent the development

[5] The closest Viennese polite society came to 'empathize' with the non-Western Other was a curious book by Peter Altenberg in which he purports to have befriended and even fallen in love with some Ashanti women exhibited in the city's zoological garden as part of the 1896 World Exhibition. (Altenberg, Peter [pseudonym of Richard Engländer]. 1897. *Ashantee*. Berlin: Fischer. The author augmented his texts with further additions and republished them as part of the volume: Altenberg, Peter. 1904. *Wie ich es sehe*. Berlin: Fischer. Translated into English as: Altenberg, Peter. 2007. *Ashantee*. Riverside CA: Ariadne Press.)

of a land bridge between Britain's colonial possessions in Africa and India, and, with Ottoman help, to achieve control over Arabia and East Africa.

Instrumental to these plans of Vienna and Berlin was the renowned orientalist and Catholic priest, Alois Musil, a second cousin of the writer Robert Musil, whose monumental and unfinished novel, *The Man Without Qualities*,[6] sketched the irreversible decline of Austria-Hungary, and remains to this day an imperfect guide for the perplexed Western reader to the Central Europe of yesteryear. Alois became Austria-Hungary's own 'Lawrence of Arabia,' and, indeed, was much better versed in Arabic than was Britain's T. E. Lawrence. Musil's increasing influence among the restive Arabs of the Ottoman Empire was paralleled by his elevated position at the Habsburg court. He was a close advisor to Emperor Charles I who ascended to the throne in 1916, and served as Empress Zita's personal confessor. Musil's successes among the Arabs were to no avail, because Austria-Hungary disappeared from the political map of Europe in 1918. He settled down in Czechoslovakia as a professor at Charles University in Prague. Besides pursuing scholarly research, Musil also wrote numerous travel books for children, based on his experiences in the Middle East. His language of choice was the Czech of his native Moravia, though he was equally at home in German.[7]

Today, with the privilege of hindsight, the concept of Mitteleuropa and the Central Powers' colonial ambitions may appear amusing, if not idiotic. But since wars are fought and won (or lost) due to the accidents and vagaries of human nature, there was a strong possibility that the Central Powers might have won the Great War. Had this been the case, many of the nation-states mentioned above would not have colored the political map of Europe. Perhaps, the very model of ethnolinguistic nation-state would have been limited to some oddball cases in Western Europe, while Central (and Eastern) Europe would have consisted of multilingual federal states or federations of national republics and monarchies.

The 1915 publication of a cheap edition of Naumann's book, with numerous subsequent reprints, underscored the popularity of the Mitteleuropa project. In a map appended to this edition, Mitteleuropa was depicted in a mutually benevolent union with Bulgaria; the Ottomans were an ally, but were not to be part of Europe or of Mitteleuropa. In 1916 the Hungarian translation, *Középeurópa*, came off the press,[8] and the following year Naumann coedited a volume of articles on the future

[6] Musil, Robert. 1930-1943. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Berlin: Rowohlt. (Part 3 was published by the Impr. Centrale in Lausanne in 1932.) The first English translation appeared in England: Musil, Robert. 1953-1960. *The Man Without Qualities* (3 vols). London: Secker & Warburg. Three decades later it was followed by an improved translation: Musil, Robert. 1995. *The Man Without Qualities* (2 vols). New York: A A Knopf.

[7] <http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alois_Musil>, Jul 29, 2010; Gellner, Ernest. 1994. Lawrence of Moravia: Alois Musil, Monotheism and the Hapsburg Empire (p 12). *The Times Literary Supplement*. No 4768, Sept 19; Feigl, Erich Feigl. 1985. *Musil von Arabien. Vorkämpfer der islamischen Welt*. Vienna and Munich: Amalthea-Verlag.

[8] Naumann, Friedrich. 1916. *Középeurópa*. Budapest: Politzer.

of Mitteleuropa and Poland.[9] For an international public the English translation, *Central Europe*, was published in 1916 and the French, *L'Europe centrale*, was produced in neutral Switzerland in 1917.[10] Now we know it was a swan song, but prior to the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution and the economic collapse of the Central Powers, neither German and Austro-Hungarian politicians realized this, nor did their Entente counterparts, nor Central Europe's aspiring leaders of the Belarusian, Croatian, Czech, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Rusyn, Slovak, Slovenian, or Ukrainian national movements.

MULTIFARIOUS CENTRAL EUROPE

Europe is a triumph of imagination over geography. When one looks at a map of the world, in no time it becomes obvious that there is no landmass encircled by seas and oceans that one could unambiguously identify as a continent of Europe. Only Eurasia fulfills these criteria, and in this shape of things Europe is a large peninsula of this geographically defined continent. It is geographically on a par with the Indian subcontinent; if one is unhappy with the modest (though fitting) appellation of 'peninsula,' from the vantage of geography the grander name of 'subcontinent' may be applied to Europe.

Central Europe is a fixation of mind within the larger imagined entity of Europe itself. In the case of the latter, a late-eighteenth-century consensus emerged that Europe's eastern land border is the unimpressive, two-thousand-kilometer-long range of the low Ural Mountains, with its highest peak reaching a mere 1894 meters, which is less than half the height of Mont Blanc in the Alps. Central Europe's Carpathians are considerably higher than the Urals; several groups of its peaks shoot up well over two thousand meters. In the south the Urals peter out in the steppe extending from the Black Sea's northern shores all the way to Mongolia and Manchuria. The Ural or Emba rivers, intended to fix the southeastern corner of Europe to the Caspian Sea, constitute a stopgap solution to the borderless character of Eastern Europe. And the hesitation continues over whether the northern or southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains ought to function as Europe's frontier between the Caspian and Black seas. Hence, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are sometimes included in Europe, while on another day they are left out of it.

Central Europe suffers an even greater identity crisis, with no international panels of geographers or statesmen interested in fixing its liquid borders which oscillate in

[9] Naumann, Friedrich; Schiffer, Eugen and Jaeckh, Ernst. 1917. *Mitteleuropa und Polen. Denkschrift des Arbeitsausschusses für Mitteleuropa*. Berlin.

[10] Naumann, Friedrich. 1916. *Central Europe*. London: King; Naumann, Friedrich. 1917. *L'europe centrale*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé.

the plains that extend from the Pyrenees to the Urals. The Baltic and the North Sea secure a bit of consistency by way of 'natural borders' (if there is such a thing at all) in the north, and the Alps, the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean in the south. But are natural features like mountain ranges or seas of any inherent importance to the definition of Central Europe, while the Carpathians instead of bisecting the region are seen as its spine, though hunchbacked.

The territorial organization of the Society of Jesus yielded one of the earliest institutionalized conceptualizations of Europe in terms of Central, Eastern and Western Europe. Jesuits saw their Central European province, or Europa Centralis (necessarily in Latin), as comprising Norway, Sweden (with Finland, and what today is Estonia and Latvia), Denmark, the Low Countries, the Holy Roman Empire and Switzerland. Poland-Lithuania, the Habsburgs' Kingdom of Hungary, and most of the Ottoman Balkans belonged to Europa Orientalis, or Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Europa Occidentalis (Western Europe) embraced the British Isles, France, Malta, the Greeks-speaking Orthodox territories in the Ottomans' southern Balkans, western Minor Asia, Crete and Cyprus, and the territories of the former Crusader polities in the Middle East. The Iberian and Apennine peninsulas were excluded from this schema, respectively named as the provinces of Hispania and Roma.[11]

When the first popular and school atlases of history appeared, they invariably came off the presses in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. The main problem they faced in their cartographic representation of the past was the Holy Roman Empire with its hundreds of semi-sovereign polities of various ranks that often came in archipelagoes of discontinuous territorial islets. The solution was the creative use of different colors for marking these lands composed of many fragments. Soon this empire and its successor states were made into Central Europe or its defining core. In 1882, the second volume (Maps) of Edward A Freeman's *The Historical Geography of Europe* was published in London.[12] One of its main sections contains twelve maps of Central Europe sketching the region's story from the late tenth century to 1871. Central Europe is identified here with the 'Western [Roman] Empire,' or Charlemagne's vast realm, later on construed as France and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1871 the concept of Central Europe, centered on France and the newly-founded German Empire, was expanded eastward and southward to embrace all of Italy (shaped into a nation-state ten years earlier) and Austria-Hungary. The polities that with time had emerged between France and the Holy Roman Empire (Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), and Denmark, too, were seen as part of Central Europe.

Central Europe in this form made it to Henry Clifford Darby and Harold Fullard's

[11] Foucher, Michel. 1993. *Fragments d'Europe. Atlas de l'Europe médiane et orientale*. Paris: Fayard, p. 19.

[12] Freeman, Edward Augustus. 1882. *The Historical Geography of Europe* (2 vols). London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Atlas published in 1970 as Volume XIV of *The New Cambridge Modern History*. Their series of historical maps of Central Europe is quite dynamic, indeed.[13] Apart from the core areas, at times it includes western and central France, the Apennine Peninsula, the Kingdom of Hungary, Poland-Lithuania, and even the lands around the Baltic that had once been gathered into the late medieval Hanseatic League.

In Ramsay Muir's popular and frequently reprinted *Philips' Historical Atlas: Mediaeval and Modern*[14] the jarring problem of distinguishing between Western and Central Europe was 'solved' by presenting both on the same map (pp 27, 37 and 47), though a separate map was devoted to Eastern Europe (p 26). Hence, it is easy to deduce the border between Central and Eastern Europe, which the author put on the eastern frontier of the Holy Roman Empire. Next, both Central and Eastern Europe are portrayed on the same map twice (pp 56 and 57). The divide between these two regions progressively expands eastward. The explanation is, first, the Habsburgs' gain of the Kingdom of Hungary, second, the inclusion of Prussia on the map, and third, the representation of Prussia's and Vienna's sections of the partitioned Poland-Lithuania. This leaves Russia and the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe. But the maps' inclusion of Denmark, southern Norway and southern Sweden (alongside Finland) makes one wonder whether these lands are intended as part of Central or Eastern Europe.

A bit of conceptual triangulation allowed by the comparison between Muir's maps of Central Europe sometimes combined with Western Europe, while in other instances with Eastern Europe, lets one deduce an approximate division between Western and Central Europe. The division is invariably the western reaches of the Holy Roman Empire, plus the Low Countries and Switzerland that officially had split away from this empire in 1648. Importantly, Central Europe encompasses here the entire Apennine Peninsula. Roberto Finzi disagrees in his *Atlante Storico de Agostini*,[15] removing from his l'Europa Centrale both Italy and the states that gained formal independence from the empire in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia.[16] But he retains the Kingdom of Hungary, Denmark, and Ducal Prussia, at that time a fief of Poland-Lithuania.

The traditional Austro-German conceptualization of Central Europe hinges on the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburgs' realms and Prussia. Prior to World War I, it was quite clearly identifiable with the German Empire and Austria-Hungary (which then included Bosnia). In the period between the two World Wars, such a Central Europe embraced the German Empire, Austria, southern Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, northern Italy, northern Yugoslavia, Hungary,

[13] Darby, Henry Clifford and Fullard, Harold, eds. 1970. *Atlas* (Ser: The New Cambridge Modern History, vol. 14). Cambridge: At the University Press, pp. 118-148.

[14] Muir, Ramsay. 1927. *Philips' Historical Atlas: Mediaeval and Modern*. London: George Philip & Son.

[15] Finzi, Roberto. 2005. *Atlante Storico de Agostini*. Novara: Instituto Geografico DeAgostini.

[16] Ibid, p. 84.

Czechoslovakia, and Poland.[17] The Swiss fully concurred with this territorial definition of Central Europe, and reproduced it in the numerous editions of their interwar secondary school atlas of geography, published in three linguistic versions, in German, French, and Italian.[18]

In the most widely used French secondary school atlas of geography and history, l'Europe centrale was limited to the lands of the former Austria-Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, northwestern Romania, and the northern half of Yugoslavia.[19] This view corresponds well to the Central Europe of Andrew Rónai's 1945 monumental *Atlas of Central Europe*.[20] The atlas was simultaneously published in the Hungarian original and in an English translation, with an eye to a postwar peace conference, at which the Hungarian government hoped to regain the pre-1918 boundaries for their state. The atlas's base map focuses on the arch of the Carpathians and the Danubian basin, thus placing historical Hungary in the very heart of Central Europe. This Central Europe is shifted a tad eastward in relation to how it was presented in the French school atlas. As a result, the region encompasses the entirety of Romania and Bulgaria, most of Yugoslavia, western Soviet Ukraine, the southern one-third of Poland, and the German territories adjacent to Czechoslovakia. But in today's Hungarian secondary school and university atlas of history, a more traditional vision of interwar Central Europe rules, one that allows in all the territories between the Soviet Union and France (including the eastern half of the latter country), and between northern Italy and Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and Scandinavia, on the other.[21]

Hitler's German Empire posed as a Third Reich, or a successor to the two previous Reichs, or the Holy Roman Empire and the pre-1918 German Empire. Interwar Germany retained its pre-1918 name of the German Empire, but had no emperor and became a republic. Many of its political class and inhabitants disliked the interwar shape of their state, shorn of many border territories, as dictated by the Allies, who also forbade Austria from entering any union with Germany or employing the word 'Germany' in its own name. Hitler, initially a democratically elected prime minister, who transformed himself into a dictator to popular acclaim, and who became the Führer or Leader of the nation, rolled back these impositions and thus became a German emperor for the new, modern times. The Anschluß with Austria (1938), the incorporation of the Czech lands (1938-1939), and the division of the eastern half of Central Europe between Germany and the Soviets (1939), made the Third Reich into

[17] Engel, Josef. 1957. *Grosser historischer Weltatlas* (Part 3: Neuzeit). Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch-Verlag, p. 176.

[18] Cf August Aeppli et al. 1936. *Schweizerscher Mittelschulatlas*. Zurich: Art. Institut Orell Füßli, pp. II, 34-35.

[19] Scgrader, F and Gallouédec, L. 1931. *Atlas classique de géographie ancienne et moderne*. Paris: Hachette, map 41.

[20] Rónai, Andrew. 1945. *Atlas of Central Europe*. Balatonfüred and Budapest: Institute of Political Sciences.

[21] Kovács, Péter and Saigeti, Borbála, eds. 2007. *Történelmi világatlasz*. Budapest: Cartographie, p. 87.

a political embodiment of Central Europe. An enlarged Hungary under German and Italian control was hemmed in geographically by a newly-founded Slovakia and by Romania, both of which became Hitler's allies, as did Bulgaria. Berlin and Rome split Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece among themselves. Germany annexed Luxembourg, extended its direct rule over northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and exerted less direct control over Scandinavia. In the wake of the onslaught on Russia, the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine were incorporated into the Third Reich. In order appropriately to reflect these successes (though they were to prove evanescent) in the country's name, it was changed to the Greater German Empire in 1943. In the same year fascist Italy collapsed, and Berlin had no choice but to take over Italian possessions in the Balkans, and over most of Italy, not yet seized[22] by the Allies.

At this moment, Germany either incorporated or controlled almost all the territories associated with Central Europe in its most extensive variant. But Mitteleuropa did not feature in the national socialist program. It was to become a German or Germanic empire, and the annoyance of other languages, ethnicities, and populations defined as 'racially inferior' was to be ameliorated either by Germanization, expulsion, or extermination. Not surprisingly, after the end of the Second World War, when the Iron Curtain descended dividing the continent, Central Europe was not to be found anywhere. For the Western Allies and the Soviet bloc it was a dead issue, because the Cold War division of Europe spawned clearly defined Western and Eastern Europe, respectively associated with the two enemy camps.

No nuance or gradation of argument was permitted in the black and white perspective needed for the effective formulation and maintenance of the Cold War conflict. Central European scholars, who escaped from the ravages of total war and the Holocaust to the United States, diligently worked in small ways to change this paradigm of the conflict. Famously, in 1974 the University of Washington Press began to publish *A History of East Central Europe* under the joint editorship of Peter F. Sugar and Donald W. Treadgold. Thus far, eight volumes have appeared out of the planned ten.

The qualification of Central Europe with the adjective 'East' implies the existence of a West Central Europe. Sugar and Treadgold adopted the widest possible definition of Central Europe, perhaps taking in as much as half of the continent, and conceived of the Iron Curtain as the rough divide between the region's western and eastern wings. In ethnopolitical and linguistic terms, their East Central Europe consisted of the lands of

[22] Did the Allies seize or liberate Italy? The Allies seized Sicily before Benito Mussolini's fascist regime collapsed. Italy joined the Allies, but the Germans overran northern and central Italy and installed Mussolini, as their virtual puppet, at the helm of the Italian Social Republic (ISR) thus created. Between 1943 and 1944 Allied forces and Italian anti-fascists fought against Italian fascists supported by Germany's Wehrmacht. The former won on 25 April 1945, when the ISR collapsed, and since then the day has been known in Italy as Liberation Day. Depending on the point of view, the events could be seen as 'seizure,' 'liberation,' 'civil war,' 'invasion,' or 'loss of independence.' The history of large human groups is complicated. It is the master national narration that smoothes out its rough edges for ideologized mass consumption.

Poland-Lithuania, Prussia, the Czech lands, and Lusatia, non-German-speaking provinces of the Habsburgs' hereditary lands, the Kingdom of Hungary, Romania, and the Ottoman Balkans, but excluded Greece (which was, somewhat paradoxically, attached to Western Europe by the existence of the Iron Curtain). West Central Europe, in an unarticulated manner, overlapping with West Germany, the Benelux countries, Austria, northern Italy, Switzerland, and eastern France, did not need any intellectual or political rescue, since it was placed on the 'correct' side of the Cold War barbed wire fence. Anyway, thinkers, politicians and populaces at large in these countries hardly ever heard of Central Europe, and did not conceive of their states as belonging to it.

Perhaps it was less true of neutral Austria, precariously reunited in 1955, and thrust deep into the encircling territories of the Soviet bloc countries and communist Yugoslavia. There a memory of the bygone glories of Austria-Hungary remained alive. But the Austrians were immunized to the attraction of the imperial-royal Dual Monarchy by the war and the prosperity of their small country, which they continue to guard jealously against 'foreigners,' many of whose grandparents had been their fellow citizens. In any case, West Central Europeans, who never knew they could be referred to as such, had no need for Central Europe. They fully identified with Western Europe, living enjoyable and prosperous lives under the protective umbrella of Nato and the European Communities. They preferred to forget their East Central European cousins, lest one day they appeared on their 'Welcome' doormats, asking for help or asylum.

Intellectuals from the wrong side of Central Europe, located east of the Iron Curtain, saw Central Europe as a concept that allowed them to differentiate themselves from the uniform red with which the countries of the Soviet bloc were marked on the political map of the world in the West. This hope was most fully articulated by the Czech writer, Milan Kundera, in his now perhaps over-famous essay, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' published in 1984 in *The New York Review of Books*. The English translation was done from the French one that appeared the previous year in *Le Débat*, and faithfully followed the title of the Czech original, 'Un Occident kidnappé, ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale.'[23] In the English title, the first part 'A Kidnapped West, or...') is missing. In it, however, the author clearly entrusted his hopes to the concept of Central Europe, believing that it would communicate to the West that Central Europe is an inalienable part of Western Europe. Kundera did mean all of Central Europe, including its eastern half, then incarcerated in the Soviet bloc.

This essay provoked so much discussion and such various interpretations which apparently were not to Kundera's liking that he suppressed his text in *The New York Review of Books*, so one cannot any longer retrieve it from the journal's e-archive.

[23] Kundera, Milan. 1984. The Tragedy of Central Europe. *The New York Review of Books*. April 26; Kundera, Milan. 1983. Un Occident kidnappé, ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale. *Le Débat* No 27, November. The essay's Czech original was titled, Únos západu aneb tragédie střední Evropy.

Though living on its territory, I first heard about Central Europe in the latter half of the 1980s, when attending the University of Silesia in Sosnowiec, Poland. Then I knew nothing about Kundera's essay. But the idea already floated in the air. Writing to pen friends or colleagues in the West, I duly added 'Central Europe' at the end of my postal address, below 'Poland.' My enthusiasm rubbed off onto my correspondents, and they replied using my address exactly as I wrote it. In my antiquated typewriter I did not have the slash, instead of which I employed the right parenthesis; they copied this, too. In the same way, my street address had become the curious 'Ładna 5)2,' due to this technical glitch.

Sugar and Treadgold's book series most decisively influenced the post-Cold War concept of Central Europe with the publication of its long-awaited first volume in 1993, the *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*. It was the work of Paul Robert Magocsi from the University of Toronto, where he holds the Chair of the Ukrainian Studies and writes on the Rusyns, their language and their culture.[24] Other authors who have written copiously on various Central European issues during the two decades after the fall of communism have time and again adopted his maps for their books and articles.[25] In order to add a degree of rigor to so variously imagined a concept as Central Europe, Magocsi decided to anchor it firmly in the concept of Europe on which a consensus as to what it is had already coalesced at the turn of the nineteenth century. He divided Europe into three vertical (or rather, North-to-South) sections of equal width, and ascribed the name of Central Europe to the middle one.

Well, not exactly. In the 1993 edition of his *Atlas* he stuck to the term East Central Europe, as prescribed by the book series' title. The lasting popularity and influence of the *Atlas* among scholars and readers at large, especially in the context of the non-usage of 'West Central Europe', convinced him to drop the qualification 'East' and to title the revised and expanded edition of 2002 simply as *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*.[26] In this way the reference announced the end of the intellectual Cold War division of Central Europe, and decisively dissociated itself from its own roots, which were deeply immersed in the East-West confrontation.

In modern-day terms, the *Atlas* covers the eastern half of Germany (including Bavaria, which constituted part of West Germany), Poland, Russia's Kaliningrad region (or the northern half of the former East Prussia), Lithuania, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, western and central Ukraine, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, most of Italy (including Sicily), Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and the westernmost section of Turkey.

[24] Magocsi, Paul Robert. 1993. *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (Ser: A History of East Central Europe, vol. 1). Seattle WA: University of Washington Press.

[25] Cf Křen, Jan. 2006. *Dvě století střední Evropy* (Ser: Edice dějiny Evropy). Prague: Argos, pp. 1049-1089.

[26] Magocsi, Paul Robert. 2002. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe* (Ser: A History of East Central Europe, vol. 1). Seattle WA: University of Washington Press.

Curiously, contrary to his objectivizing approach, Magocsi excluded from his purview the northern reaches of his middle slice of Europe, or Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia. This deficiency, probably caused by pecuniary considerations – map making is an expensive business – was rectified in 1997 by Lajos Pándi in his monumental *Köztes-Európa, 1763-1993*.[27] With 330 maps included in this unique atlas, the work deals with the entire middle one-third of Europe, set against the bigger canvas of Europe.

The title of Pándi's volume uses the term Köztes-Európa, instead of Közép-Európa, which is Hungarian for 'Central Europe.' This was necessitated by the association of Közép-Európa in Hungarian with a narrowly defined Central Europe, coterminous with the lands of former Austria-Hungary. Köztes-Európa, which can be translated as 'In-Between Europe,' is the Hungarian rendering of the German term Zwischeneuropa. This 'In-Between Europe' comprises the ethnolinguistic nation-states located between Russia, the Black Sea and Turkey in the east, and on the other hand, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Italy (or the Adriatic) in the west. Both terms, In-Between Europe and Zwischeneuropa sound a bit sinister to Central Europeans, conceptually positioning their lands in a geopolitical nutcracker, between the Western powers (or Germany) and Russia, which is about to snap.

Pándi's Közép-Európa is similar to Michel Foucher's l'Europe médiane (Middle Europe) from his 1993 publication, *Fragments d'Europe. Atlas de l'Europe médiane et orientale*. His concept of Central Europe is dynamic. When Foucher scrutinizes the period between 1815 and 1914 it overlaps with Pándi's. In addition, he appends to it Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, but not Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg or the Netherlands. When he moves his focus on to the two interwar decades, his Central Europe contracts to the German Empire, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. The defining moment for his idea of Central Europe arrives with the Cold War, producing a region consisting of the Soviet Union's satellites in Europe (East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), and the communist mavericks of Albania and Yugoslavia. West Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Greece are not included because they escaped Soviet domination. The end of communism made this region even smaller, since East Germany escaped from Central Europe after West Germany had absorbed it, thus becoming a single, non-adjectival Germany.[28]

Apparently, apart from scholars in the German-speaking countries and Hungary, a vibrant interest in Central Europe remains in France, as amply attested by Jacques Le Rider's 1994 small but boldly titled book, *La Mitteleuropa*.[29] One cannot imagine

[27] Pándi, Lajos. 1997. *Köztes-Európa, 1763-1993*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

[28] Foucher, 1993, *Fragments d'Europe*, pp. 55, 58, 59.

[29] Le Rider, Jacques. 1994. *La Mitteleuropa*. Paris: PUF.

that a German or Austrian could write a book blatantly bearing such a politically incorrect title. Le Rider successfully breached the taboo with this brilliant essay, then speedily translated into German, Spanish, Italian, Croatian, Japanese and Romanian. Interestingly, no English translation of this brief, though seminal, text has yet appeared. Thus, the Anglophone reader must content himself with an indirect literary travelogue across an (over-) intellectualized and mythologized Mitteleuropa, in *Danube* by Claudio Magris, a philologist of German language and culture from Trieste.[30]

Trieste is the city where Central Europe begins or terminates. West and East found themselves there at loggerheads, when in 1946, Winston Churchill announced that the Iron Curtain had descended across the continent from Stettin (today, Szczecin in Poland) to Trieste. And as if to make good on his words, between 1947 and 1954, Italy and Yugoslavia bickered hard on the international arena over to whom the Free Territory of Trieste (or Trst in Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian) should belong. Doubtlessly, the English-speaking visitor is also attracted to this city by its indelible association with James Joyce. This Irish writer, who single-handedly invented postmodernism with his *Ulysses*,[31] lived for more than a decade in Trieste, between 1904 and 1920,[32] earning a modest living by teaching English.

Magris's Central Europe is threaded on the axis of the Danube, similar to the Hungarian equation of the region with the river's basin. To my knowledge, after the end of communism, the only Western Europeans who compiled a straightforward atlas of Central Europe were Jean Sellier and André Sellier, a father and son team, who published their *Atlas des peoples d'Europe centrale* in 1991, with four subsequent editions.[33] They unabashedly went for the ethnolinguistic definition of the region, seeing it as consisting from the fatherlands of the small nations of Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovenes, Serbo-Croat-speakers, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Greeks (including Greek-speaking Cypriots). The boundaries of their Central Europe fluctuate in accordance with the changes in the territories of the nations' polities. All in all, the idea of Sellier père et fils reminds one of Lajos Pándi's Hungarian atlas that was published six years later.

Central Europe was given a lease of almost genuine political life in the form of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), founded by Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland in 1992. It was a cry of despair on the part of three postcommunist states that realized they could not count on swiftly joining the West. They were cast in the role of the West's poor, and rather unwanted, relatives. That is why

[30] The Italian original came off the press in 1986, and three years later, as if to seal the fall of communism and the breakup of the Soviet bloc, the New York publisher, Farrar Straus and Giroux, released the English translation.

[31] Joyce, James. 1922. *Ulysses*. Paris: John Rodker for London: The Egoist Press.

[32] Prior to 1918 the port was Triest, located in Austria-Hungary.

[33] Sellier, Jean and Sellier, André. 1991. *Atlas des peoples d'Europe centrale*. Paris: Le Découverte.

the then Polish President, Lech Wałęsa, proposed the founding of a parallel NATO[B] and an EU[B] for Central Europe's postcommunist polities.[34]

With Central Europe contained in the name of CEFTA, their slightly uncertain organization, its three member states signaled their difference vis-à-vis other postcommunist and post-Soviet polities, seen as less developed and less deserving of the privilege of becoming part of Western Europe, a privilege that was believed to be CEFTA members' birthright. Later on, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia were allowed into this increasingly less exclusive club of members that hardly ever could agree on any common position. In negotiations with the European Union each state was on its own, striving to join the union earlier than the others. CEFTA became a conveyor belt into Western, or real, Europe, as epitomized by the European Union. Not surprisingly, the founding members (including Czechoslovakia's successor states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), alongside Slovenia, left CEFTA in 2004, when benevolently allowed into the EU's fold. Three years later Bulgaria and Romania followed in their footsteps and left CEFTA. This left Croatia twinned with Macedonia, which had become a CEFTA member in 2006. The tandem rapidly expanded southward and eastward, when Bosnia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and Moldova joined the organization in 2007.

Does it mean that the enlargement of the EU equates to the widening of Western Europe? If yes, Central Europe contracts, acquiring the character of the EU's sphere of influence, rubbing shoulders with Russia's 'near abroad', itself a group of states gathered into the net of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Otherwise, can the EU be identified with Europe itself, leaving the Russian Federation and the CIS members to a non-Europe, or even Asia? Whatever conclusions one comes to in such deliberations, one thing is sure: it is human imagination and will that draw and redraw these lines of division, separation, inclusion and exclusion. Throughout the eighteenth century, Europe was construed as consisting of Northern and Southern Europe, the Alps and the Carpathians serving as the divide between these two. Hence, the confrontation of Muscovy and Sweden that also involved Denmark-Norway and Poland-Lithuania in a personal union with Saxony became known as the Great Northern War (1700-1721), not a Great Central European War.

GEOLINGUISTICS

For the imagined to become a reality, it must be espoused by the public at large or by a considerable section of it. A new, cultural-cum-institutional definition of Central Europe seems to stem from France, which may explain French intellectuals' unusually

[34] The curious superscript [B] was Wałęsa's own ingenious invention to differentiate the postulated parallel NATO and EU for Central Europe from their originals.

keen interest in Central Europe. But it is an undercover project, so secretive that I learned about it only two years ago, when serendipitously I chanced on Ariane Poissonnier and Gérard Sournia's *Atlas mondial de la francophonie. Du culturel au politique* (The World Atlas of the Francophonie: From the Cultural to the Political).[35] The Francophonie is a latter-day reply to the British Commonwealth and the sudden and unplanned rise of English to the rank of the present-day global lingua franca.

The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie was founded in 1970. It groups states where French is an official language or where many inhabitants are fluent in it. Prior to the collapse of communism, the membership of the Francophonie was limited to France and French-speaking polities adjacent to it (Belgium, Luxembourg and Monaco), Francophone Africa, Canada, Vietnam and Vanuatu. As such, the Francophonie was a reflection of France's former colonial empire, like the British Commonwealth vis-à-vis Britain's defunct imperium. But unlike the case of the British Commonwealth, increasingly downplayed by the United Kingdom itself, the Francophonie has experienced a period of unprecedented growth in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

Most of the newcomers (apart from Armenia and Georgia) are Central European states. Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Moldova and Romania are already full members, while the status of associate membership is enjoyed by Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.[36] This Francophile concept of Central Europe has more to do with wishful thinking than facts on the ground. Almost nobody in the Central European countries (not even the literati) knows that their states belong to the Francophonie, the Enlightenment empire of the 'world's most logical language.'[37] The fact remains curiously unadvertised. It is difficult to conceal amusement at justifications of the granting of Francophonie membership to many of these polities. In the case of Macedonia it reads 'French is taught as a second language in many Macedonian schools throughout the country.' In Bulgaria this language 'is spoken by nine per cent as additional language, and is taught as a main foreign language in about twenty five per cent of primary schools.' 'Poland has historic ties to France. French is understood and spoken by three per cent of the population, and many Polish emigrants settled in France in the 20th century.'[38]

Tellingly, Germany is not a member, which indicates Berlin's wish to stay away, or

[35] Poissonnier, Ariane and Sournia, Gérard. 2006. *Atlas mondial de la francophonie. Du culturel au politique* (Ser: Collection Atlas/Monde). Paris: Autrement, p. 11.

[36] <http://www.francophonie.org/-Etats-et-gouvernements-.html>, Jul 12, 2010.

[37] Rivarol, Antoine de. 1784. *Dissertations Sur L'Universalité De La Langue Françoise. Qui Ont Partagé Le Prix Adjugé Par l'Académie Royale Des Sciences Et Belles-Lettres Le 3 Juin, MDCCLXXXIV*. Berlin: Chez George Jacques Decker, Imprimeur du Roi.

[38] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_internationale_de_la_Francophonie>, Jul 12, 2010.

to work toward the renewed spread of German(ic) cultural and technological, if not linguistic, influence in Europe. The bickering over the choice of working languages in the EU institutions points in this direction. The reunited Germany dislikes the Cold War tradition of employing only English and French at such gatherings, when there are more first language speakers of German in Europe (eighteen per cent of the EU's population) than of the other two languages (thirteen and twelve per cent, respectively).[39] Now, Brussels uses all three as working languages.

Only the privileged few – aristocrats, nobility, intelligentsia – knew Central Europe's lingua francas of the past, firstly Latin, and later, beginning in the eighteenth century, French. In the nineteenth century the spread of education and modernization altered this pattern when knowledge of German became quite widespread. The Jewish language of Yiddish, a Germanic dialect with a lot of Slavic influences written in Hebrew characters, contributed to this success of German in Central and Eastern Europe, providing the cultural and communication underpinning for Mitteleuropa. The Great War stopped this spread of German in its tracks, while World War Two decisively rolled it back. The fate of international German was sealed with the Holocaust of mostly Yiddish-speaking Jews and the expulsion of the German(ic)-speaking populations from Central and Eastern Europe.

The imposition of Russian on the Soviet bloc countries as the preferred second language to be taught in schools did not work. German and French were dutifully forgotten, but Russian was not acquired. Central Europeans saw it as the language of their oppressors, and what was even worse, in their eyes 'Russians' (as Soviets continued to be popularly referred to) stood on a lower rung of the ladder of progress and development than themselves. To add insult to injury, it was next to impossible to travel on one's own from a Soviet satellite state to the Soviet paradise of workers and peasants, so one had no chance to brush up one's school Russian, or use it for any practical purpose. Like in the past, this language became a lingua franca of the chosen few, this time, the inner party members. To communicate successfully with their overlords at the Kremlin, they had to become fully conversant in Russian, their careers and survival depending on that.

The last two decades after the collapse of the Soviet bloc have clearly shown that the foreign language of choice in Central Europe is English. Since the 1950s, it has been the main language of Western pop music, which had already begun to penetrate the Soviet bloc in the 1960s and 1970s. I grew up at that time with my radio on, and most songs that I have listened to since my earliest childhood have been in English. To this day radio, music CDs and television ensure the constant and overwhelming presence of English in everyday life across Europe, indeed across the world.[40]

[39] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_European_Union>, Jul 14, 2010

[40] Cf Zieliński, Przemysław. 2005. *Scena rockowa w Polskiej Rzeczpospolitej Ludowej. Historia, organizacja, znaczenie* (Ser: W Krainie PRL). Warsaw: Trio; Zhuk, Sergei I. 2010. *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West,*

In communist Poland people were enamored with all things American and British. France came a distant third. The populace and their government were united by their hatred of 'West German revanchism.' Numerous World War Two films, with German characters invariably evil, fueled anti-Germanism. It was the founding myth of the Soviet bloc. Fear of Germany and Germans, stronger than fear of the Soviets, kept the unwilling polities of Central Europe under Moscow's tutelage. People believed that the Red Army alone was capable of preserving the precarious existence of their nation-states after 1945 in the context of the Cold War standoff.

LEAVING CENTRAL EUROPE?

Not surprisingly English became fashionable. It won the competition with other languages hands down, despite all obstacles placed in its way. The authorities in communist Poland did their best to prevent people from acquiring it. The language was rarely on offer in secondary schools, and no English books were available in bookshops, apart from Soviet editions of English and American classics whose ideological message did not clash with the tenets of 'really existing socialism.' The first book of this kind which I acquired was *The Country Girls* by the Irish novelist, Edna O'Brien.[41] I am sorry to say that I never finished reading it. Maybe my command of English was wanting then, or the novel's message was too much in line with orthodox thinking, as propagated by the communist party. After long months of looking for English-language reading matter, I happily bought a copy of the quarterly, *The African Communist*. It did not make sense to me that it was published in Cuba.

Now I am aware that at that time, with their bayonets (though at times handcuffed to a tank's steering wheel), Cuban soldiers encouraged the spread of communist revolution in Angola and Mozambique on the front of the war against imperialism, as embodied there by apartheid South Africa. Little did I know that it would be the country where I would first try out my school English in conversations with real English-speakers, or with speakers of other languages who received their education via the medium of this language and used it at work and in public life.

Having read for four years for an MA in English Philology at the University of Silesia, in 1990 my command of English was worse than that of the average secondary school student in today's Poland. All that happened before satellite television, and a long time before the internet. Photocopiers surfaced during the second and third years of my university studies. I still remember that among sixty English philology students in the first year we had to share four copies of Randolph Quirk's *A University*

Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

41 O'Brien, Edna. 1982. *The Country Girls*. Moscow: Vysshaia shkola.

Grammar of English[42] to be read exclusively in the library's reading room that opened only briefly. Faced with this challenge, we worked in shifts, rewriting appropriate chapters with the use of four to six sheets of carbon paper. Being a scribe was not a mere metaphor to us. We tried our hand at it. We disliked being scribbling monks.

During my third year I happened to leaf through a dictionary. It contained a map of the world with countries where English is an official language marked in red.[43] At that time I also had a political map of the globe on the wall in my room.[44] Some states were depicted in white to show that they should remain blank spots to the Polish citizen. Poland did not maintain diplomatic relations with them. One of these states was Anglophone, namely, South Africa. I decided to scale this barrier, forbidden fruit being the sweetest.

I assumed that embassies are well known in the cities where they are located, so I simply addressed my missives to South African embassies in Bonn, London and Vienna. In return for my effort I received some promotional materials. On the cue I began sending letters to newspapers across South Africa, with a request for pen friends. Surprisingly, many published my letters. A few potential pen friends replied. In exchange for Russian-language books, then still widely available in the so-called Międzynarodowe Domy Książki (International Book) stores, I received *A Dictionary of South African English*[45] from the University of Cape Town. But even so, I was totally confounded when on one of my first days in South Africa a person said 'I'll meet you at the robot just now,' and walked away. He meant that he would meet me at the traffic lights in about half an hour.

Richard Chernis, a consul in the South African Embassy in West Germany noticed my efforts and persistence to establish some links in South Africa. He asked the Department of National Education in Pretoria to send me application forms for a state bursary. I dutifully filled them in and obtained this bursary to read English-language South African literature for an MA in English at Potchefstroom University in the former capital of the old Afrikaner Transvaal. The first South African novel which I read and under whose irresistible charm I fell was J M Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*.[46] It narrates a story of a simpleton living a life, oblivious of civil warfare into which the unnamed apartheid South Africa of the future has sunk. Propelled by events, he travels across the bleak landscapes, and everywhere rekindles life, sowing lovingly gathered and preserved precious seeds and tending to the vegetable seedlings. [of vegetables.

In this affirmation of living in the face of ever-present death, Michael K stands

42 Quirk, Randolph. 1973. *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman.

43 Grzebieniewski, Taduesz. 1961. *Słownik angielsko-polski i polsko-angielski*. Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna.

44 *Mapa polityczna świata, Mapa fizyczna świata*. 1989. Warsaw and Wrocław: PPWK im. Eugeniusza Romera.

45 Branford Jean. 1987. *A Dictionary of South African English*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

46 Coetzee, J M. 1983. *Life and Times of Michael K*. London: Secker & Warburg.

in stark contrast to his Central European prototype Josef K from interwar Prague's German-language writer Franz Kafka's novel, *The Trial*.[47] The latter surrenders to the insane bureaucracy that has the upper hand over reason and life. He does not rage against the nonsensical death sentence to which he is condemned, and that is summarily carried out. Perhaps in this novel Kafka had a foreboding that Europe, especially Central Europe, would soon resign itself to such a temptation to a bloodbath on a grander scale, which World War Two and the Holocaust were. What was this war if not succumbing to the infernal logic of conflicts between states and follow-up retribution that in no time spiraled out of any control? The forces of progress deposited respect for life and the individual's dignity on the scrap heap of history, as the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had already done two decades earlier.

Michael K perseveres, has hope for life, his will for survival and regeneration never broken. Likewise, South Africa rejected apartheid, avoided a civil war, and survived as a country. But after the Great War Kafka did not harbor much optimism for this new Central Europe of nation-states pitted against one another, polities that were created and thrived on the carcass of the partitioned Austria-Hungary, and with no place for Jews whatsoever. With the privilege of hindsight, the Dual Monarchy appeared a lost paradise, however imperfect, already in the interwar period. Joseph Roth from the Galician town of Brody (today, Броди in Ukraine, which is the familiar Brody transcribed into Cyrillic) on the border between Austria-Hungary and Russia continued to mourn for his lost homeland until his premature death in 1939. 'My old home, the Monarchy, alone, was a great mansion with many doors and many chambers, for every condition of men. This mansion has been divided, split up, splintered. I have nothing more to seek for, there. I am used to living in a home, not in cabins.'[48]

Luckily, South Africa escaped this fate, though there was a possibility that the apartheid polity's ten bantustans (Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Gazankulu, KwaNdebele, KwaNgwane, KwaZulu, Lebowa, QwaQwa, Transkei and Venda) could have chosen or been forced into independence as ethnolinguistic nation-states, while the rest of the country would have been split between English-speakers (the Cape and Natal) and the Afrikaners (Transvaal and the Orange Free State). Central Europe did not have this choice; its division into nation-states was largely imposed from above by the Allies, in order to do away with the possibility of a German-dominated Mitteleuropa. The subsequent split of coal-rich Upper Silesia between Germany and Poland, and its tragic consequences sent the fictional everyman, Kaczmarek, wandering around his

[47] Kafka, Franz. 1937. *The Trial*. London: Gollancz. The German original was published two years earlier: Kafka, Franz. 1935. *Der Prozess*. Berlin: Schocken and Leipzig: Spamer.

[48] Roth, Joseph. 1986. The Bust of the Emperor (pp 157-183). In: Roth, Joseph. *Hotel Savoy*. Woodstock NY: Overlook Press, p. 183.

disintegrating Heimat. Another Mr K., this time from August Scholtis's unjustifiably forgotten novel, *Ostwind* (East Wind).[49]

Then, there was still time, time to prevent what increasingly loomed as the inevitable. Even more than Kaczmarek, Baba (woman or mother in colloquial Slavic) is similar to Michael K in her praise song of living, which her life was. This archetypical, unnamed woman and mother, against all odds, painstakingly and lovingly takes care of her children in the face of political calamities that after 1918 befell the borderlands of Upper Silesia and Austrian Silesia, wrenched away from Germany and Austria-Hungary by newly-founded Poland and Czechoslovakia. She is the protagonist of Scholtis's later book, *Baba und ihre Kinder* (Baba and Her Children).[50] The writer does not comment on politics; he decries the sufferings that politicians visited on people by their decisions taken in line with raison d'état, but not with common, human sense.

They took no note, and thought nothing about the total war that loomed on the horizon in the late 1930s. In August 1939, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin pre-divided Central Europe (from Finland to Romania) between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, setting the stage for another world war. As a result, a fifteen-year-old boy, Horst Bienek, was expelled from the industrial city of Gleiwitz (today, Gliwice in Poland), because in 1945 all of Upper Silesia, alongside all the other German territories east of the Oder-Neisse line (except northern East Prussia), passed into Poland, itself shorn of its prewar eastern half, which was incorporated into the Soviet republics of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. On top of this experience, Fate dealt him four years of hard labor (between 1951 and 1955) in a Soviet Gulag concentration camp in the coal-mining town of Vorkuta, in Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which he described in his harrowing novel, *The Cell*.[51]

Bienek described the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, as seen from the vantage of his hometown and through its inhabitants' eyes, in his Gleiwitz tetralogy, on which he labored from 1975 to 1982,[52] and the first part of which was filmed in 1979.

The same forces destroyed the world of Włodzimierz Ledóchowski. A native of Lwów, he fought in the Polish army against the German invasion in 1939, and then

[49] Scholtis, August. 1932. *Ostwind. Roman der oberschlesischen Katastrophe*. Berlin: Fischer.

[50] Scholtis, August. 1934. *Baba und ihre Kinder*. Berlin: B Casirer.

[51] Bienek, Horst. 1974. *The Cell*. London: Gollancz. The German original was published six years earlier: Bienek, Horst. 1968. *Die Zelle*. Munich: Hanser.

[52] Bienek, Horst. 1975-1982. Gleiwitz. Eine oberschlesische Chronik in vier Romanen, consisting of: 1. Bienek, Horst. 1975. *Die erste Polka*. [West] Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft; 2. Bienek, Horst. 1977. *Septemberlicht*. [West] Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft; 3. Bienek, Horst. 1979. *Zeit ohne Glocken*. Munich: Hanser; and 4. Bienek, Horst. 1982. *Erde und Feuer*. Munich: Hanser. The tetralogy was translated into English, namely as, 1. Bienek, Horst. 1978. *The First Polka*. London: Gollancz; 2. Bienek, Horst. 1987. *September Light*. New York: Atheneum; 3. Bienek, Horst. 1988. *Time without Bells*. New York: Atheneum; and 4. Bienek, Horst. 1988. *Earth and Fire*. New York: Atheneum.

continued as a guerilla in the Tatras. His cover blown, he escaped across German-occupied Europe and joined the Polish Forces in the West under British command. He fought in North Africa. After the war, he could not return to Poland because he would be imprisoned, as were all the Polish officers who served in the West. In any case, his section of Poland was 'off limits' to him, incorporated to the Soviet Union. Lwów became Lvov (now, Lviv in Ukraine). After a stint in the British Special Operations Executive, he settled in South Africa, where he designed motorways. Ledóchowski deplored apartheid and his activities against the system meant he had to leave the country, and go to communist Poland, ideologically a much mellower place in the 1970s than it had been earlier.[53] He published a collection of short stories based on his life in South Africa, *Mój nierodzinny kraj* (My Non-Native Country).[54] It was a revelation to me, thanks to which I was later not greatly surprised when in reply to my letters to South African newspapers, I received from an anonymous sender a badly photocopied brochure on the wretched situation of non-White workers in South Africa. Jointly, on behalf of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), it appealed to Polish and Soviet bloc fellow workers not to emigrate to the country, because their influx only contributed to the fortification of the foundering apartheid system.

Apparently, ANC and SACP activists did not realize the extent of the economic collapse that ravaged communist Poland in the 1980s. For a decade there was nothing on the shop shelves, and most basic and not–so-basic goods were available exclusively on rationing cards. Even at that, people were in practice able to buy no more than seventy percent of what the ration cards indicated was their entitlement. Queues were endemic; one had to spend tens of hours per week in them to merely to keep alive. Money was not a problem: it was worthless paper, readily printed and distributed. Only US dollars or Deutsche Marks could buy one one's fill in well-stocked hard currency Pewex shops; high-rank in the communist party gave one access to similar shops (with their windows masked by yellow net curtains) where practically free consumer goods were available to the inner party officials and their families.

Unsurprisingly, the prospect of belonging to the privileged White class in South Africa, though morally odious, was not something to be lightly rejected, if one had no Western currency in one's pocket and was not a party member. But to try it out, before 1989, one had to escape from the Polish socialist paradise, which was tightly guarded against any ideologically inappropriate defection. To this end, only loyal and proved citizens were granted passports (and then only rarely), and passports had to be immediately returned to the nearest militia (communist police) station upon return to Poland. This valuable document was issued in three basic types, the most commonly

[53] <http://free.art.pl/podkowa.magazyn/nr41/album41.htm>, Jul 15, 2010.

[54] Ledóchowski, Włodzimierz. 1988. *Mój nierodzinny kraj*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

issued one valid for the 'people's democracies' in Europe, another for Yugoslavia and the capitalist states on the same continent, and, the most rarely seen, one for the entire world. Truly a rara avis!

Indeed, South Africa was a far cry from the drab and desperate early postcommunist Poland which I left in a slushy January in 1991 to glide across the clear blue, summer skies of the southern hemisphere, and land in the spotless Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg. It was a short, two-hour drive from Potchefstroom, given to me by my future MA thesis supervisor, Attie M de Lange. When we veered into Old Soweto Road, he broke into a cold sweat, turned the car back, and we had to look for a different route. No, going through Soweto, draped in the early afternoon smog coming from open-fire cooking furnaces, was not an option. Black townships in the country's segregated cities and towns definitely were a no-go zone. These townships, hidden from sight, were as forlorn as communist Poland, and much more violent and uglier than Poland, with their quarters of cardboard and corrugated sheet steel shacks, and unpaved streets and winding lanes.

And the names, imposed on townships by apartheid administrators, for instance Ikageng (or 'Improve Yourself') next door to the white town of Potchefstroom, reeked of colonialism, and vaguely reminded me of Central Europe again. The level of ironic disdain or sheer disrespect reached that of the Prussian administrators' who, after the late eighteenth-century partitions of Poland-Lithuania, were sent to serve in Berlin's newly-gained West, South, and New East Prussia, or today's northern and central Poland. E T A Hoffmann, today mostly remembered for his novella, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*,[55] (in 1892 made into the famous ballet, *The Nutcracker*, with the music by the Russian composer, Piotr Tchaikovsky [Chaikovskii]), was sent to the new Prussian lands as an administrator. Between 1800 and 1806, he fought boredom by composing his fantastic tales, socialized with Polish-Lithuanian nobility, from among whom he found his wife, Maria Trzcińska, and invented and imposed widely outrageous surnames on dirt-poor Jews, such as Silberberg ('Silvermountain') or Goldstein ('Goldstone'). This was bureaucratic arbitrariness at its acme. To get something more mundane, to the tune of Apfelbaum ('Appletree'), one had to pay up.[56]

It all had begun with the modernizing and centralizing reforms of Maria Theresa and her son, the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II, who in 1782 decreed that a Jew could bear his traditional name of Moses ben (son of) Elizer no more, and had to adopt a proper, that is German(ic)-sounding surname. The measure was directly applied in the Habsburg lands, but soon afterward spread across the entire Holy Roman

[55] Hoffmann, E T A. 1817. Nußknacker und Mausekönig. In: E T A Hoffmann. *Nachtstücke* (vol 2). Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung.

[56] Davies, Norman. 1996. *Europe: A History*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, p. 731; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._T._A._Hoffmann#The_provinces>, Jul 19, 2010.

Empire and throughout Prussia.[57] The possibility of becoming citizens presented Jews with an additional incentive to acquire surnames. By default the necessity to adopt a surname became law in the western half of Poland-Lithuania, divided between the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs. In 1808 Napoleon reinforced this tendency across Europe with his so-called décret infâme issued, among others, to this same end. The Romanovs followed suit in their eastern half of the defunct Poland-Lithuania.[58]

But I knew nothing of that when I arrived in South Africa. At that time, Central Europe was to me a glimmer of the possibility of an alternative to the oppressive prison of the mind and the body that communist Poland was, though the bars were not in sight. I steeled myself to find all the necessary material and to write my MA thesis in the eight months of my sojourn down under. I settled for the title, *'Living in the Borderland:' Colonialism and the Clash of Cultures in the Fiction of J M Coetzee*. Re-reading it now, I see that I was writing the thesis as much on Central Europe as on South Africa, 'colonialism' and 'clash of cultures' being the code words for the ethno-linguistic roots of and incessant conflicts between Central Europe's nation-states.

I spent much time in the spacious and air-conditioned facilities of the university's Ferdinand Postma Library. The building was surrounded by luxuriant greenery, made possible on this arid high plateau of Transvaal thanks to constant watering, though no running water, let alone water closet-style toilets, was to be had in the townships. Oblivious to these sad ironies, enjoying my time in the library, I discovered shelves of German and English publications on my home region, Upper Silesia. Shielded from the sharp sunlight outside, so starkly different from the weather back in Poland, I began to read through them. I had lived in Upper Silesia all my life, but now I could look at it through a new pair of intellectual binoculars. This moved me to read more widely. I learned about Bohemia, Moravia, Lusatia, Transylvania, Bukovina, Dobruja, Dalmatia and other regions and former polities not to be seen on maps of contemporary Central Europe any longer, buried under the thick overlay of the twentieth-century nation-states.

With half of the bursary monies spent on the flights to and from South Africa, I subsisted on a pittance. To eke it out, and to be able to purchase second-hand books, I bought less and less food, and walked or cycled everywhere. It was the first time ever that I suffered hunger, waking up hungry, going to bed hungry, and only once or twice a day lightly satiating my cramped stomach with bread and peanut butter, washed down with rooibos tea with lemon and honey. Potchesftroom University was also where I wrote on a computer for the first time, and I aspired to save money to buy one after my return to Poland. All this in a land of plenty, with no queues to cheat one of one's leisure. But no money was no money, and meant exactly that; there were

[57] <http://web.me.com/ebauer/translations/page4/page4.html>, Jul 19, 2010.

[58] <http://toldot.ru/urava/lnames/lnames_4698.html>, Jul 19, 2010; <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%BCdischer_Familienname>, Jul 18, 2010.

no rationing cards or chains of acquaintances to help me make ends meet. Because the Rand was only a semi-hard currency, sustained solely by South Africa's prodigious gold and diamond output, I could not expatriate any outstanding sum in Rands without taking exceptional measures. Special forms had to be filled in and signed, and my supervisor and the dean worked with persistence to twist the banking authorities' stiff arm to allow me to change my savings into US dollars, which I could take home.

The overbearing dominance of bureaucracy over reality in the name of an ideology immediately reminded me of the Soviet bloc, or 'people's democracies,' as I spoke of these countries then in the bloc's official parlance. If something did not agree with the official line and either ideology's exhortations, the problem was with the facts on the ground, not the ideology. Ideologies, by their very definition, are ideal, and hence, perfect, so it is only reality that can be at fault. In 1972 Athol Fugard captured this cavalier approach to reality, shared by communism and apartheid, in his haunting play, *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*.

Under apartheid, Blacks had to stay in their bantustans. Those needed for work in mines and industry, or to serve in Whites' households, were obliged to obtain passes. Jobs were scarce in the bantustans, and there was next to nothing by way of arable land. One had the choice of abject poverty (at best, penury) or of looking for employment in White cities. In the play, Sizwe has not found a job in Port Elizabeth, and as a result, must leave the city in three days. Facing this unacceptable prospect, when he chances upon a dead person, instead of reporting the body to the police, he takes his pass. The deceased Robert Zwelinzima has a permit to stay in the city. Sizwe switches photographs between his and Robert's passes, and adopts Robert's identity. Then he writes to his wife that Sizwe Banzi is dead.

I watched a production of this play in Hillbrow, a bohemian quarter in Johannesburg that had never been successfully segregated. It remained a preserve of artists, dissidents and those who dared not to observe the Immorality Act of 1950 that prohibited sexual intercourse between people of different races, as defined by South African law. It struck a chord with me. Immediately after the end of war in 1945, the incoming Polish communist authorities decided to retain most of the population of Germany's Upper Silesia, as Autochthons (or 'Poles not realizing their Polishness'), in order to 'prove' the immemorially Polish character of this land. Women, whose husbands fought in the Wehrmacht (German army) and then found themselves in the western zones of occupied Germany, were not allowed to leave the new Poland to join them.

As far as the authorities were concerned the women were Poles (Polish citizenship was forced on them to this end) and their husbands could join them in Poland. The women's husbands, however, who were and still remained German citizens had no wish to leave the shrunken postwar Germany, whose borders retreated for 300 kilometers away from what to used to be Germany's Oberschlesien, and now became

Poland's Górny Śląsk. The indignities of Western occupation were preferable to Stalinism. As soldiers they had seen enough of the latter on the eastern front. The matter dragged on, children grew up without their fathers. Some mothers relented in the face of Polish bureaucratic pressure to divorce and agreed to divorce their husbands unilaterally. The solicitous authorities expedited the paperwork to free these female citizens from their burdensome chains of Germanness. Others waited it out until the early 1950s when Warsaw allowed a continuous trickle of Upper Silesians to leave for West Germany.[59]

Later this developed into reproachable open trafficking in people. The Soviet bloc normalized its relationship with West Germany in a series of treaties signed and ratified between 1970 and 1973. Both Germanys recognized each other and the United Nations accepted them as members in 1973. Two years later, the Polish and the West German governments struck a deal, in the framework of which Bonn granted Warsaw the so-called 'jumbo loan' of DM2.3 billion that, as was tacitly accepted, was never to be repaid. One of the conditions was that Poland would let 125,000 unacknowledged Germans to leave the country for West Germany. Most of them came from Upper Silesia, where the authorities covertly gave up on the pretence of considering them Polish.[60]

Another multilingual, and poly-cultural region of Central Europe was erased, first from the map, and now from the social reality. Upper Silesia was made almost into an indistinguishable part of the ethnolinguistically homogenous Polish nation-state, in line with the model of centralized and homogenous statehood as developed and implemented in post-revolutionary France. This latest, almost irreversible, unmaking of Upper Silesia still awaits its chronicler. The Saxons of Transylvania, in today's Romania, together with the Danube Swabians of Bucharest's section of Banat, found such a chronicler of their forced disappearance in Herta Müller.

Because she refused to spy on her colleagues when asked so in 1979, subsequently she had to suffer various indignities visited on her by the Romanian authorities and its not so secret armed branch, the Securitate. At last she was permitted to leave for West Berlin in 1987. Nicolae Ceauşescu, more blatantly than Poland, required West Germany to pay the lump sum of DM8,950 for each ethnic German allowed to leave Romania. The steep economic collapse of the Romanian economy in the 1980s accelerated this exodus.[61] In a poetic and heart-rending novella, *The*

[59] Kamusella, Tomasz. 1999. Ethnic Cleansing in Silesia 1950-89 and the Ennationalizing Policies of Poland and Germany (pp 51-74). *Patterns of Prejudice*. No 2.

[60] Urban, Thomas. 1994. *Deutsche in Polen. Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Minderheit* (Ser: Beck'sche Reihe). Munich: C H Beck, pp. 92-93.

[61] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banat_Swabians#Romania, Jul 21, 2010; http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banater_Schwaben#cite_note-32>, Jul 21, 2010.

Passport,[62] Müller gave an acute description of the uncertainties and humiliations which Saxon and Swabian families faced, when they decided to leave communist Romania.

In postcommunist Romania the centuries-old world of Saxons and Swabians remains as a spectral shadow of itself. The Holocaust wiped away the lively Yiddish-language culture of the Ashkenazim from Europe. The last villages of the Slavophone Protestant Mazurs in southern East Prussia (today in Poland) disappeared at the turn of the 1970s, when they left for West Germany en masse. Kashubs are a minority in Kashubia (the region extending west and south of Gdańsk in northern Poland). The practically homogenously Ukrainian Bukovina is not its old self any more, because in the old Bukovina which is remembered and regretted, the population was composed from the roughly equal in size groups of Savophones (Rthenians, Ukrainians), Romance-speakers (Romanians, Moldovans) and Germanic-speakers (Jews and Germans).[63]

CENTRAL EUROPE REDUX

After the eight-month sojourn in South Africa I was back in Poland. My wife rightly saw me as a walker with his head high up in the clouds, as I left her alone for all that time to take care of our newly-born daughter on her own. The baby was just four months old, and freshly baptized when I bolted out. I should not have. But otherwise, I would not have seen both countries changing rapidly in front of my very eyes. This invaluable experience came at a price footed by my nascent family. I am still unsure whether it was worth paying. In this prehistoric age with the internet and Skype a decade away in the future, badly squeezed for money, I resorted to writing aerogrammes. An international telephone call was priced out of my financial reach.

Before I went to Potchefstroom, there were still recurrent shortages in Polish shops, shop assistants treated customers as a nuisance, and state-owned factories kept producing what they wanted, not what people desired. Upon my return, private entrepreneurs had already taken over retail and privatization had begun in earnest, though more than a decade had to elapse before shopping malls and ATMs made a decisive appearance in Poland.

My friend, Kevin Hannan, born before the television era in a Moravian-Silesian Slavophone village in Texas, disliked this change. For him shopping malls and ATMs were the epitome of the vulgar commercialization of the public space, where no room

[62] Müller, Herta. 1989. *The Passport*. London: Serpent's Tail. The English translation came off the press three years after its German original: Müller, Herta. 1986. *Der Mensch ist ein Großer Fasan auf der Welt*. [West] Berlin: Rotbuch-Verlag.

[63] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bukovina#Population>, Jul 21, 2010.

was left for people. They had to leave for desolate suburbs, which turned city centers into ghost towns. He escaped this 'intense ugliness of America,' as he called it, and moved to Poland, leaving behind his estranged family and much better financial prospects in the United States.[64] He swapped all that for the life of a Polish academic, toiling at lowly and poorly paid positions at the University of Łódź. For him the real Poland was in the south of this country, in the Beskidy Mountains and between Cracow and Rzeszów. Here the landscape was not depressingly flat as in the north, and old village and town communities had not been wiped out during the Second World War and in the course of forced expulsions and population exchanges that followed. He loved this Poland passionately,[65] and firmly stood for a pared-down version of collectivism (what might be termed 'personalism'), as opposed to selfish individualism, in which one's wishes and pursuit of wealth take precedence over everything and everybody else.[66] He died prematurely in 2008, in the southern Polish town of Sanok, located in the old Ruthenian-Polish borderland, where Cyrillic and the Latin script used to meet. Before his death he did not manage to visit Ireland, which had been his ardent wish, though one he tended to postpone. Some of his ancestors came to America from that island, and Kevin believed in a special affinity between Ireland and Poland.[67]

Like in Poland, changes also happened at an ever-increasing pace in South Africa. Nelson Mandela was freed in 1990, and in the following year his ANC began talks with the last apartheid-era administration, led by F W de Klerk, on how to bring about peaceful change in the country while not harming the economy. If it had not preserved a working economy, South Africa would have descended into the depths of a chronic crisis as experienced painfully (and with no end in sight) by numerous postcolonial polities.

In January 1991, one had to wear long swimming trunks to be allowed in a public swimming pool in South Africa. By the middle of the year briefs had been also accepted, and in the latter half of 1991, previously White-only public facilities opened to all others, too. A week or two of awkwardness followed, when non-Whites, conditioned for the four decades of apartheid by the police baton to stay away, dared not to enter. Then, one by one they walked in under the glowering eyes of some stalwarts of

64 O'Donnell, Stojgniev [pseudonym of Kevin Hannan]. 2003. *Why I Left America: Reflections on History, Culture and Religion / Dlaczego wyjechałem z Ameryki / Refleksje nad historią, kulturą i religią*. Marklowice: The Celto-Slavic Fellowship of Apiarists and Drukarnia Wydawnictwa „Prasa Beskidzka". Kevin published this book under a pseudonym, because he was afraid that his politically incorrect views might close to him the possibility of gaining a position at a US university later on.

65 Hannan, Kevin. 2005. *Moja Polska. Eseje o polskości / My Poland: Essays on Polish Identity*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.

66 Hanna, Kevin. 2006. *Bounties of Collective Memory / Dary zbiorowej pamięci* (Ser: Rzecz Poetycka). Łódź: biblioteka.

67 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_Hannan>, Jul 21, 2010.

the old system that was being dismantled. And, whatever the main Afrikaner Church, or the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk, might think, cinemas were permitted to open on Sundays.

The collapse of communism and the breakup of the Soviet bloc in 1989, brought an end to the border wars which South Africa had fought since 1966 against communist guerillas in South West Africa (today's Namibia), Angola and Mozambique. The Cubans began to retreat. In August 1991, the KGB-orchestrated putsch against Mikhail Gorbachev caught everybody unawares. I was then on my way to Durban to talk on the theory and reality of communism at the Natal Technikon. I feared a war that my wife might have to brave alone in freshly postcommunist Poland. Luckily, the coup fizzled out before it started in earnest, hastening the breakup of the Soviet Union in December that year. This event sealed the peace in Southern Africa for good. The Cold War and its proxy hot conflicts were over.

Some from the student audiences to whom I lectured on communism called me a propagandist, and could not believe that my description of my experiences in communist Poland had been factual. They accused me of making them up, and of being a stooge of the apartheid authorities. Those who knew better claimed that real communism had not been achieved in the Soviet bloc. I could not have agreed more. They added though that, having learned from the mistakes of the past, they would build a working socialist system in South Africa. I could not stand their naïve credulity. Now, twenty years later, facing the toxic fallout of the 2007-2010 global financial meltdown, I seem to understand their principled stance better. At the turn of the 1990s, the SACP was a rainbow elite political and intellectual force behind the ANC in their patient (though not so peaceful) endeavors to bring apartheid down. Their drive at democracy for all, their drive at a redistribution of wealth (that, so far, has happened only in a small way[68]), and their dream of social equitability do not appear to me so mad any longer.

Vast, gaping disparities in personal income opened in the West during the heady 1990s and 2000s when the unbridled pursuit of individual wealth for wealth's sake was looked upon gladly. It destabilized societies across Western Europe and Northern America, and pushed the rest of the world to the brink of destitution and hunger. This vindicates the resistance of Central Europe's social democratic parties (sprung from the region's ruling communist parties from before 1989) against wholesale privatization, deregulation and the dismantling of the welfare state. The legally enshrined checks against wholesale privatization and social services that remained allowed the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia to weather the crisis quite well. (Obviously, remittances from millions of Polish and Slovak migrants in the 'Old EU' did help, too.)[69]

[68] Cf <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23812947-how-nelson-mandela-betrayed-us-says-ex-wife-winnie.do>, Aug 8, 2010.

[69] Cf Judt, Tony. 2010. *Ill Fares the Land*. London: Allen Lane (Penguin).

What I experienced and learned in South Africa unmade my trust in the old certainties peddled in my school and university textbooks. I had to make sense out of this novel, recently dubbed 'postcommunist', world anew. I wanted to know more. A chance to follow on this desire opened, when in 1991 the financier and philanthropist, George Soros (whose own family managed to evade the Holocaust in wartime Hungary,[70] and who himself in 1947 escaped communist Hungary to England, and subsequently made a fortune in the West) founded a Central European University (CEU). The idea of this postgraduate institution, modeled on the best British and American research universities, emerged from the discussions of European intellectuals conducted in summertime in Dubrovnik in 1988 and 1989, a mere two years prior to the outbreak of the post-Yugoslav wars.[71] The CEU was intended to facilitate democratization and the creation of open societies in Central Europe as proposed already in 1945 by the Central European philosopher (and Soros's quondam teacher) from the London School of Economics, Karl Popper.[72] Tellingly, the university's three campuses were located in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw, the capitals of CEFTA's founding members.

Central Europe was then politically, culturally and socially a very vibrant idea. Soros's family stemmed from Budapest, so his choice of this city as the main seat of the university did not come as a surprise. The Hungarian political and intellectual elite welcomed and fully embraced his initiative.

Since 1984, Czech dissidents had grouped around the samizdat journal, *Střední Evropa. Revue pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku* (Central Europe: A Journal of Central European Culture and Politics).[73] The Velvet Revolution of 1989 pushed it into the mainstream, and *Střední Evropa* became one of the most influential periodicals

[70] George Soros's father, Theodor Schwartz (1894-1968), tried to evade prejudice against Jews in Hungary by changing his name to Tivadar Soros. In the internationalist atmosphere of the interwar years, he saw Esperanto and the Esperantist movement as a solution to the then Jewish dilemma of having to choose between Jewish ethnolinguistic nationalism (Zionism), assimilation or the espousal of the non-national and collectivist ideology of bolshevism. He is most widely known under the Esperanto version of his name, Teodoro Ŝvarc (sometimes also, Teo Melas). In Budapest in 1922 Tivadar Soros founded one of the most renowned and influential Esperanto journals *Literatura Mondo* (World Literature), which was published until 1938, and again between 1947 and 1949, when Esperantists were suppressed across the Soviet bloc.
Soros père experienced the Bolshevik Revolution first hand, as an Austro-Hungarian soldier and then as a POW in Siberia, before he returned to Hungary in 1920. He described what he saw in a novel, *Modernaj Robinzonoj en la Siberia Praarbaro* (Schwartz, Teodoro. 1923. Budapest: Globus Presartinstituto Akcia Societo). He and his family experienced another of the two twentieth-century totalitarianisms, national socialism, in wartime Hungary. He wrote about this time in his *Maskerado ciîrkau la morto. Nazimondo en Hungarujo* (Ŝvarc, Teodoro S. 1965. La Laguna, Canary Islands: J. Régulo Eldonisto). The memoir was republished in 2001 with forewords by his two sons, Paul and George (Rotterdam: Universala Esperanto-Asocio); it is also available in a recent English translation: Soros, Tivdar. 2001. *Masquerade: Dancing Around Death in Nazi-Occupied Hungary*. New York: Arcade.
I thank Walter Żelazny, an eminent Esperantist from Poland, for the information.

[71] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_European_University#History>, Jul 21, 2010.

[72] Popper, Karl. 1945. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. London: Routledge.

[73] Sadly, this journal seems to have gone defunct in 2004. <http://stredni.evropa.sweb.cz/cont/o121.htm>, Jul 18, 2010.

in the Czech lands, which, after the waning of Czechoslovakia into Czecho-Slovakia, morphed into a Czech Republic, when Slovakia went its own way in 1993.

This was the year I entered the CEU to read for an MA in European Studies and International Relations at the Prague campus. The currency changed from Czechoslovak to Czech crowns, with an intermediate period when Czech stickers were attached to Czechoslovak banknotes to make them legal tender only within the frontiers of the Czech Republic. In Prague I made friends with students from across all of Central and Eastern Europe, meaning the former Soviet bloc countries, reclusive Albania, the post-Yugoslav states-in-the-making, and the post-Soviet polities, with some from the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Germany thrown in for good measure. Surprisingly, with war raging in nearby Croatia and Bosnia, Yugoslavs led this reverie of regional camaraderie. They had not learned yet to compartmentalize themselves into the new national categories of Bosniaks, Croats, Kosovans (Gheg Albanians), Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenes. They still spoke their bi-scriptural lingua franca of Serbo-Croatian, not yet split into Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian. Abroad, in their hearts, at least for a time, Yugoslavs continued to live in the common home of Yugoslavia, while their actual homeland was bloodily divided into the airless national cabins, so dreaded by Joseph Roth.

At first we lived and attended classes and lectures in the Hotel Ol anka[74] which was then under construction. Later in the year, thanks to President Václav Havel's high-minded gesture, our lectures were given in much more splendid surroundings, in a side wing of Prague Castle on the Hradčany Hill overlooking the Czech capital.[75] Walking up the steps to the castle, past the embassies of Italy and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta[76] was an unforgettable experience. But the CEU's Prague campus survived for only one year more, after our graduation in 1994. Havel and

[74] Hotel Ol anka as it looks like today (2010), <http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?layer=c&cbll=50.082611,14.456435&cbp=12,50.33,,0,-14.58&cid=9025038113433131488&q=Hotel+Ol%C5%A1anka,+Prague+3,+Prague,+Czech+Republic&ved=0CIoBENsF&ei=mctvTL3iNcie_gb8k_mWBQ&ie=UTF8&hq=Hotel+Ol%C5%A1anka,+Prague+3,+Prague,+Czech+Republic&hnear=&ll=50.082536,14.45612&spn=0.038884,0.076132&z=14&panoid=1QUEreOUkZ6at_H45798NQ>, Aug 22, 2010.

[75] A view of the former CEU lecture venue at the Hradčany Castle in Prague, <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=Prague+Castle,+Prague-Prague+1,+Czech+Republic&sll=40.758414,-73.985198&sspn=0.022267,0.038066&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Prague+Castle&ll=50.09165,14.403999&spn=0.001098,0.004758&t=h&z=18&layer=c&cbll=50.09165,14.404&cbp=11,0,,0,5&photoid=po-17305031>, Aug 22, 2010 and <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=Prague+Castle,+Prague-Prague+1,+Czech+Republic&sll=40.758414,-73.985198&sspn=0.022267,0.038066&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Prague+Castle&ll=50.091571,14.403269&spn=0.001098,0.004758&t=h&z=18&layer=c&cbll=50.091572,14.403269&cbp=11,0,,0,5&photoid=pg-8KUVTHTiQBvZJ7KP3kv65Q>, Aug 22, 2010.

[76] A view of the Embassy of the Sovereign Order of Malta in Prague, <http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?hl=en&um=1&ie=UTF-8&q=Sovereign+Military+Order+of+Malta+embassy+Prague&fb=1&gl=uk&hq=Sovereign+Military+Order+of+Malta+embassy&hnear=Prague,+Czech+Republic&cid=0,0,12945213592476282773&ei=r9NvTIzTKaKW4gavkfzcCg&sa=X&oi=local_result&ct=image&resnum=1&ved=0CbkQnwIwAA>, Aug 22, 2010.

Soros were the libertarian-minded Czech Prime Minister, Václav Klaus's, bêtes noires. In a messy altercation, Klaus moved heaven and earth to push the CEU out of the Czech Republic.[77] The polity was to become a proper national cabin, for Czechs only; Central Europe was being decisively rejected. The Warsaw campus of the university held out longer, until 2003, when it too was closed. The international students' main complaint was that lecturers tended to move from English to Polish. The communication gap was bridgeable for Slavophones, though non-Slavic-speaking students often had no choice but to drop out. The spirit of the narrow national cabin had prevailed again. Today, the CEU supports a vibrant international community of students and scholars in Budapest, but Magyarization has crept in, as sadly attested by the availability of the university's website in only one language other than English, Hungarian. Would it be too difficult or costly to translate it into a couple of other Central European languages?[78]

WHERE IS CENTRAL EUROPE?

A monetary reflection of Central Europe, provided it is identified with Austria-Hungary, survives still in the Czech crown (koruna), after Slovakia adopted the Euro in 2009. The Austro-Hungarian crown was officially known in the Dual Monarchy's languages, as corona in Italian, korona in Hungarian and Polish, корона (korona) in Little Ruthenian (Ukrainian), Krone in German, koruna in Bohemian (Czech), kruna in Croatian, and крyна (kruna) in Serbian. The korona survived in interwar Hungary, until, due to galloping hyperinflation, it was replaced with the pengő in 1927. Three years earlier, the Schilling had replaced the Krone in Austria, in similar circumstances. The koruna held out the longest in Czechoslovakia, until its dissolution in 1993. Even during World War Two, Berlin maintained the then bilingual Krone / koruna in its Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, though pegged to the Reichsmark (or imperial mark). Wartime independent Slovakia followed suit, but the Slovak name of the wartime and post-1993 Slovak crown differs in the placing of the adjective 'Slovak,' respectively, after and before the noun 'crown,' yielding 'koruna slovenská' and 'slovenská koruna.'[79]

Going by the yardstick of Austria-Hungary's currency, it could extend Central Europe to embrace the Middle East and the eastern half of North Africa. The silver Maria Theresa thaler became there a preferred currency in the eighteenth century. In the following century its circulation spread to Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar and as far

77 <http://reason.com/archives/2003/12/08/open-season-on-open-society>, Jul 20, 2010.

78 <http://www.ceu.hu/hu>, Jul 20, 2010.

79 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austro-Hungarian_krone>, Jul 22, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemian_and_Moravian_koruna, Jul 22, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovak_koruna>, Jul 22, 2010.

south as Mozambique. Traders readily accepted it across Arabia. During World War Two, in the Dutch East Indies occupied by Japan, people clung to it in preference to the worthless paper money issued by the occupation administration. In practice the thaler was the official currency of Ethiopia from the second half of the eighteenth century until the 1950s, and between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries in Muscat and Oman. The thaler, known as birr (meaning 'silver' in Ge'ez and Amharic), gave rise to the name of Ethiopia's present-day currency.[80]

In the interwar period Central Europe's national polities painfully felt the absence of Austria-Hungary in the economic field. The earlier broad zone of free trade was broken up into much smaller and increasingly less permeable and autarkic national economies. The maintenance and fortification of national independence took the upper hand over the economy and the well-being of people. The Second World War reawakened the elites of the nation-states being extinguished by the German onslaught to the importance of cooperation. In the summer of 1940 a Franco-British Union was proposed, to forestall the capitulation of France to the Third Reich.[81] Apparently on this model, in 1941-1942 the Czechoslovak and Polish governments in exile deliberated on a Czechoslovak-Polish confederation, and their Yugoslav and Greek counterparts actually signed an act of confederation between their countries in 1942. The Allies supported these initiatives and complemented them with their own plans of shearing Germany of border areas (to be allocated to France, Poland and Czechoslovakia), and breaking the remnant up into three smaller states (Prussia, Bavaria and a renewed Habsburg Monarchy). Another plan foresaw a wholesale partition of wartime Germany (alongside Austria) among the Netherlands, Poland, Czechia (wartime Slovakia to be divided between Hungary and Poland) and France. All the schemes vanished into thin air when the Soviet Union joined the Allies, and the Red Army, on its way to Berlin, extended Soviet domination all over Central Europe.[82]

The émigré elites of Central Europe's nation-states were appalled by the Cold War division of Europe that allocated their homelands to the Soviet bloc. They could not believe the Kremlin was allowed to keep the territorial gains that originated from the 1939 division of Central Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union, carried out in line with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Realpolitik is what it is. One of the enraged intellectuals was the Polish historian, Oskar Halecki. In the good style

[80] Semple, Clara. 2005. *A Silver Legend: The Story of the Maria Theresa Thaler*. Orrel: Barzan; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_birr>, Jul 22, 2010.

[81] I thank Michael O Gorman for bringing this event to my attention. Cf Gates, Eleanor M. 1981. *End of the Affair: The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1939–40*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

[82] Zgórniak, Marian. 1995. Koncepcje federacyjne Rządu RP w Londynie w czasie II wojny światowej (pp 119-124). In: Pułaski, Michał, ed. *Z dziejów prób integracji europejskiej od średniowiecza do współczesności* (Ser: Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, vol. 1177; Prace Historyczne, vol. 118; Studia Polono-Danubiana et Balcanica, vol. 7). Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński; Hellriegell-Netzebandt, Friedrich, ed. 1996. *Deutscher-Nationalatlas. Schwerepunkte deutscher Geschichte im Kartenbild. Von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart*. Munich: DSZ Verlag, pp. 176-177.

of the former Poland-Lithuania (and of Mitteleuropa, for that matter), he was born in Vienna and died in White Plains, New York. In 1950, in his classical study, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*,[83] he introduced to scholarly discourse the potent concept of Central Europe as consisting of West and East Central Europe. Understandably, in his definition of these two parts of Central Europe he did not refer to the Cold War division of Europe. He identified West Central Europe with the regions overwhelmingly inhabited by German(ic)-speakers. In this schema, non-German(ic)-speakers inhabited East Central Europe, whose eastern edge, separating it from Eastern Europe, coincided with the easternmost frontier to which extended more or less permanent control of the German(ic) polities from West Central Europe. Or less obliquely, in early 1918 the German and Austro-Hungarian armies managed to occupy almost all of today's Baltic republics, Belarus and Ukraine. Until 1945, German-language literature often referred to this would-be East Central Europe as the German Kulturboden (or the area of German/ic culture) and German Lebensraum (living space).[84]

As professor of history at Fordham University and Columbia University in New York, Halecki popularized the idea of bipartite Central Europe among historians and political scientists in Northern America. To this end he also wrote the extensive monograph, *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe* (1952).[85] As can be readily gleaned from its title, he focused on the past of just the eastern half of his region, the half that found itself under Soviet domination. He rationalized his approach on the ground that while the German(ic) section of Central Europe was well known in the West, the same was not true of its non-German(ic) counterpart. Henceforth, East Central Europe (or Ostmitteleuropa, as it came to be known in West Germany and Austria) became a legitimate field of study. Thanks to this serendipitous development, Peter F Sugar and Donald W Treadgold could commence their monumental book series, *A History of East Central Europe* in 1974 at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Though it had been invented to refer to the region, the term 'East Central Europe' made it to the region itself only after the collapse of communism and of the Soviet bloc, as Středovýchodní Evropa in Czech, Kelet-Közép-Európa in Hungarian and Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia in Polish. It made a tentative appearance in Serbo-Croatian (Sredno-istočna Evropa / Средно-источна Европа), in Bulgarian (Средноизточна Европа, Sredno-iztochna Evropa), and in Russian (Средне-восточная Европа, Sredne-vostochnaia Evropa), but they never gained any widespread currency. Even in the core of East Central Europe, composed of the Czech Republic, Hungary,

[83] Halecki, Oskar. 1950. *The Limits and Divisions of European History*. London and New York: Sheed & Ward.

[84] Ibid, ch 7.

[85] Halecki, Oskar. 1952. *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe*. New York: Ronald Press Co.

Poland and Slovakia, the term achieved merely a fleeting popularity in the 1990s, when it was not certain that the EU would admit these states as members. In the political vocabulary of the region 'Central Europe,' uncluttered by an adjective was preferred, as clearly visible from the name of CEFTA.

The Polish historian of the Catholic Church, Jerzy Kłoczowski, blew a scholarly lease of life into the idea of East Central Europe when in 1991 he founded a Society of East Central Europe (Towarzystwo Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej) in Lublin, Poland. Unofficially, the society branded itself as the 'Institute of East Central Europe (Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej), though the title was officially accorded to it only in 2001.[86] In 1994 they inaugurated a book series, Library of East Central Europe (Biblioteka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej), with the Polish translation of Halecki's *The Limits and Divisions of European History*.[87] Four years later, Kłoczowski published his history of medieval East Central Europe, construed as 'Younger Europe,' or a later addition to Western Europe. By that he meant the territories east of the Holy Roman Empire that were Christianized in the tenth century and later, and Orthodox areas, which were included in the Western Christian world by the means of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ('Greek Catholic'[88]) unions with Rome, as applied to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia in the southeastern corner of the Kingdom of Poland, northeastern Hungary (today eastern Slovakia and Ukraine's Transcarpathia) and Transylvania.[89]

Another volume published in this series, in 1995, was the Hungarian historian, Jenő Szűcs's, seminal essay, *The Three Historical Regions of Europe*. The Hungarian original came off the press to much acclaim in 1983,[90] and was immediately translated into English.[91] The French translation (to which the renowned French historian, Fernand Braudel, provided a preface) followed in 1985,[92] and from this edition the Polish translation was conducted.[93] This reliance on an intermediate French translation is symptomatic of the all too little direct cultural and intellectual transfer among Central Europe's national cultures, which are insulated from one another by the

86 <http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/historiaiesw.php>, Jul 22, 2010.

87 Halecki, Oskar. 1994. *Historia Europy – jej granice i podziały* (Ser: Biblioteka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej). Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

88 It was Maria Theresa who in the mid-eighteenth century introduced the term 'Greek Catholic' for referring to Uniate Churches, which came into being as a result of the ecclesiastical unions between various Orthodox churches and Rome. The label 'Uniate' was considered to be pejorative by those who were described by it.

89 Kłoczowski, Jerzy. 1998. *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza*. Warsaw: PIW.

90 Szűcs, Jenő. 1983. *Vázlat Európa három történeti régiójáról*. Budapest: Magvető.

91 Szűcs, Jenő. 1983. The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline (pp 131-184). *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. No 29.

92 Szűcs, Jenő. 1985. *Les trois Europes*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

93 Szűcs, Jenő. 1995. *Trzy Europy* (Ser: Biblioteka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej). Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej.

language barrier. However, the publication of the German translation of Szűcs's text in 1990 in West Germany, followed by the Italian in 1996, the Romanian in 1999, and the Slovak in 2001, made the book into a major intellectual point of reference. It is now impossible, either in Central Europe or in the West, to speak usefully about the former region without taking Szűcs's thoughts into consideration.

Apart from Halecki, Szűcs developed many topoi of discussion on Central Europe that remain current to this day. Among others, he proposed that Central Europe is an economic and cultural part of Western Europe but, until recently, remained backward vis-à-vis the former region, though more developed than Eastern Europe. On the one hand he saw the roots of this phenomenon of economic and cultural continuity in the spread of Western European institutions and technology by settlers from the Holy Roman Empire who were usually Germanic-speaking and who intermittently arrived in Central Europe between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries. As another cause, he singled out serfdom, which disappeared in Western Europe in the wake of the Black Death in the fourteenth century, but actually was (re)introduced into Central Europe in the following century and survived there until the first half of the nineteenth century. The system spread in the eighteenth century to Russia, too, where slavery had prevailed previously.[94]

In Western and Central Europe, the population was organized into estates, with the monarch, nobility and clergy at the top. In Muscovy (later, Russia), the pyramid was steeper; only the ruler was eligible to occupy its pinnacle. In Western Europe the nobility remained a narrow class of population (one to two per cent), in Muscovy they were subjected to the monarch's will and whim, while in Central Europe nobles accounted for as much as ten per cent of the inhabitants in Poland-Lithuania and the Kingdom of Hungary. In both the latter countries the tradition of elective monarchies developed, decisively influenced by the example of how the emperor was elected in the Holy Roman Empire. But these so-called systems of 'nobility democracy' in Central Europe were not synonymous with personal freedom, of which the peasantry was customarily deprived.[95]

Szűcs's method of finding historical, social, cultural and economic differences between Western and Eastern Europe, and wedging Central Europe between them, as similar to though somewhat different from the former and radically differing from the latter, lends itself to other comparisons of that kind. Urbanization became the spine of the social and economic development of Western Europe at the dawn of modern times. The same is true of Central Europe where the ius teutonicum model of the self-governing town and village spread from the eastern frontiers of the Holy Roman Empire to the Teutonic Order State (today's Estonia and Latvia), the Grand Duchy

[94] Ibid, pp. 75-76.

[95] Ibid, p. 69.

of Lithuania (today's Lithuania, Belarus and western and central Ukraine), and to Transylvania, Walachia and Moldavia (today, in Romania and Moldova).[96]

CENTRAL EUROPE: A REGION OF OTHERS?

Most of the settlers from the Holy Roman Empire, invited into their territories by the rulers of Bohemia, Hungary, Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, were Germanic-speakers. So, apart from the ius teutonicum-style institutions, they also spread their Germanic dialects eastward. By the turn of the twentieth century, in a territorially discontinuous fashion, their villages and towns were scattered densely across the territories of the former Poland-Lithuania and of the Kingdom of Hungary, reaching the Danube delta in Romania and New Russia, or the Russian Tasar's northern Black Sea littoral seized from the Ottomans at the close of the eighteenth century.[97]

It usually remains unacknowledged, but the so-called 'German colonization' (deutsche Ostsiedlung) is construed as that of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) Germanic-speakers ('Germanic' because German as a unitary language did not then exist). But it is an artificial construction, dictated by the constraints of Rassenkunde ('science of race'), as it developed in the late nineteenth century, before becoming the basis of ideology and regime legitimization in the Third Reich. Jews were part and parcel of the recurrent waves of eastward migration of Germanic speakers. In daily life they shared the various local Germanic dialects of their Christian neighbors in the Holy Roman Empire. What made the speech of Jews slightly different was their religion and the different customs entailed by Judaism. Their names were invariably Hebrew or Aramaic. Linguistic loans from these two scriptural languages preserved by rabbis made the Germanic speech of the Ashkenazi Jews into a jüdisch diutsch ('Jewish German language'). This term, phonetically rendered into English, spawned the name of 'Yiddish' for this language.

Yiddish, stemming from the dialectal base ('High German') of the standard German language, is more intelligible to standard German-speakers than is the Plattdeutsch (Low German) dialect, though this latter dialect is considered uncontrovertibly to be part of the German language. Plattdeutsch was the language of the Hansa, of Prussia and of the northern one-third of the Holy Roman Empire until the early eighteenth century. Its old name, Duits, serves today as the Dutch name of the Dutch

[96] Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, p. 40; Krallert, Willfried et al. 1958. *Atlas zur Geschichte der deutschen Ostsiedlung* (Ser: Monographien zur Weltgeschichte, vol. 4). Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, map 6-7; Engel, Josef. 1970. *Grosser historischer Weltatlas* (Part 2: Mittelalter). Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch-Verlag, p. 98.

[97] Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, p. 105; Krallert. *Atlas zur Geschichte der deutschen Ostsiedlung*, map 22a.

language - rightly so, because Plattdeutsch is mutually intelligible with Dutch. Linguistically, this makes Yiddish more similar to German than Plattdeutsch is.[98]

It was not language that drew a line between Christian and Jewish Germanic-speaking settlers, and both groups were equally welcomed by Hungarian, Lithuanian and Polish rulers. In the case of the former group, it was their own decision to migrate eastward. In contrast, Jews, beginning in the late thirteenth century, were progressively expelled from Western Europe and the Holy Roman Empire. The process culminated in the Black Death in the middle of the following century, when Jews were blamed for this devastating epidemic, and was compounded in 1492, when they were expelled from Spain.[99]

By making their home in Central Europe, Ashkenazi Jews absorbed many Slavic and Hungarian elements into their speech, which together with the use of Hebrew characters for writing their language, appears to make Yiddish radically different from German. It is an illusion. German- and Yiddish-speakers do not have many problems in communicating with each other. That is why the main protagonist of Irmgard Keun's (Joseph Roth's paramour) *Child of All Nations*, little Kully, coming from Germany to Poland mastered the 'Polish' language in no time, before realizing it was Yiddish.[100]

From the linguistic vantage, the eastward spread of Germanic-speaking Jews was part and parcel of the 'German colonization.'[101] When Poland-Lithuania and Hungary were erased from the political map of Europe, the teeming shtetls (לטעטש) and towns of Germanic-speaking Jews and Christians continued to serve as a defining characteristic of Central Europe. Russia did not want to become part of this world, and after the incorporation of half of Poland-Lithuania in the late eighteenth-century, a Pale of Settlement (черта оседлости, cherta osedlosti) was introduced. It limited the area where Jews could live in Russia to the incorporated territories and the northern Black Sea littoral.[102]

The distribution of Armenian communities across the length and breadth of Central Europe, from Warsaw to Plovdiv in Bulgaria, and from Budapest to Kyiv and the Crimea can also serve as a servicable definition of Central Europe.[103] Since the seventh century, they migrated westward and southward, to the eastern borderlands of the

98 Sitarz, Magdalena Joanna. 1992. *Z dziejów jidysz – jednego z języków żydowskich*. Cracow: Universitas.

99 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews_in_the_Middle_Ages#Expulsions>, Jul 23, 2010.

100 Keun, Irmgard. 2008. *Child of All Nations*. London: Penguin Books. The English translation was published seventy years after the German original came off the press: Keun, Irmgard. 2008. *Kind aller Länder*. Amsterdam: Querido.

101 Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, p. 108.

102 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale_of_Settlement>, Jul 23, 2010.

103 Mutafian, Claude and Lauwe, Éric van. 2001. *Atlas historique de l'Arménie. Proche-Orient et Sud-Caucase due VIII^e siècle av. J.-C. Au XXI^e siècle* (Ser: Atlas / Mémoires). Paris: Autrement, pp. 86-89; Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, p. 108.

Eastern Roman Empire (Romania in Greek, or Byzantium in modern Western parlance) from their southern Caucasus and eastern Anatolian principalities. These areas were frequently devastated and depopulated in the struggle between Christians and Muslim Arabs, and between Armenia and Constantinople. The arrival of the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century and the Mongolian onslaught in the following century added to the confusion sending streams of refugees across the land. Between 1080 and 1375, Armenians in their Kingdom of Cilicia (or Lesser Armenia in southeastern Anatolia) participated in the crusades. Finally, Cilicia fell to the Mamluks of Egypt, and the Ottomans seized it in the fifteenth century, sending more Armenians to seek refuge in Central Europe. Like the Jews, they preserved their original language Grabar (or Old Armenian) for liturgical and literary purposes, while Kipchak Turkic became the main vernacular of their daily life. Similarly, and also like the Jews, thanks to their linguistic advantage they excelled in trade between Western Europe and Central (and Eastern) Europe. Armenians became the preferred middlemen between Ottoman and Middle Eastern emporia and their customers in Central (and Eastern) Europe.[104]

Another group of intrepid travelers whose presence may be seen as defining what Central Europe is are the Roma. Unlike the Jews and Armenians they did not have a class of literati who would scribble down the history of their slow migration from Punjab and Rajasthan (today in Pakistan and India) to the Middle East and Anatolia, and from there to the Balkans and across Central Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[105] Roma know that there is more to life than books, bureaucracy and memoirs. Due to the non-literate character of their communities, they were customarily even more marginalized in host societies than were the Jews. As a consequence, they were effectively written out of Central European history. No major monographs and atlases of the region's past mention Roma (with the rare exception of Rónai's 1945 *Atlas of Central Europe*[106]).

Like the Jews before them, in the sixteenth century the Roma were persecuted and expelled from Western Europe and the Holy Roman Empire, and found refuge in the Ottoman Empire (which at that time embraced most of Hungary, Transylvania, Moldavia, Walachia and the Balkans) and in Poland-Lithuania. Although the Roma tend to adopt the religious faith of their neighbors and cooperate with the powers that be, it often turns out to be not enough. Their itinerant way of living, branded as 'vagrancy,' became increasingly penalized in modern times. (That is why Ireland's Travelers face the same kind of persecution and exclusion, though ethnically and linguistically they are not Roma, but Anglophone Irish.) One is supposed to go

[104] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_diaspora>, Jul 23, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Kingdom_of_Cilicia>, Jul 23, 2010; Mutafian and Lauw e. *Atlas historique de l'Arménie*, pp. 48-61.

[105] Mirga, Andrzej and Mróz, Lech. 1994. *Cyganie. Odmienność i nietolerancja*. Warsaw: PWN, pp. 50-51, 85-86, 89.

[106] Rónai. *Atlas of Central Europe*, pp. 146-147.

about one's business from one's permanent place of abode, with a proper address at which mail can be delivered. In the past, those challenging the dogma of sedentarism faced harsh laws and even slavery, which was practiced in the case of the Roma in Moldavia and Walachia until 1855 and 1856, respectively. Eventually, Germany's national socialists singled out the Roma, alongside the Jews, for total extermination to 'rid Europe of racial impurities.' (From the viewpoint of racial ideology, it was a nonsensical decision as the Roma, in the depraved terms of national socialism, were as Aryan as the Germans themselves.) Germany and Europe continue remembering and atoning for the sin of the Jewish Holocaust, but its Roma counterpart, named the Porrajmos (or 'Devouring' in Romani) remains utterly neglected, if not completely forgotten.[107]

The irony is that the genocide of the Jews entirely wiped out their communities in German-occupied Europe. After the war, most of the survivors emigrated to Israel or to North America, leaving practically no Jews in Central Europe, with the lone[??] exception of Budapest and Moldova.[108] Although up to half a million Roma perished in the Porrajmos,[109] they remain a visible and vibrant presence across the entire continent. Around ten million Roma live today in Europe, most of them in Central Europe. Statistics is an elusive instrument in this case, because many Roma prefer to conceal their identity lest they be discriminated against. It is estimated, however, that at present 60,000 Roma live in Belarus, another 60,000 in Poland, 200,000 in Germany, 50,000 in Austria, 300,000 in the Czech Republic, half a million in Slovakia, 400,000 in Ukraine, a million in Hungary, well over two million in Romania, 300,000 in Italy, 300,000 in Croatia, 400,000 in Bosnia, over half a million in Serbia, 800,000 in Bulgaria, 150,000 in Albania, and half a million in Greece.[110]

The Roma, by definition a borderless people, have successfully defied the efforts to force them into this or that national cabin. They are the only Europeans worthy of the name, who stuck to European values when these were being trampled upon by everybody else in the name one nation or another. The Roma have conceived of no national cabin of their own. Unlike, the formerly borderless Jews, who surrendered to this temptation, and transplanted wholesale to Palestine the Central European model of an ethnolinguistic nation-state.[111] They founded Israel in 1948, and to this end,

[107] Đurić, Rajko. 2007. *Povijest Roma prije i poslije Auschwitza*. Zagreb: Prosvjeta, pp. 227-228, 231-238; Mirga and Mróz. *Cyganie*, pp. 50-51; <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005219, Jul 22, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porajmos>, Jul 23, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Romania#Laws_on_abolition>, Jul 23, 2010.

[108] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_population>, Jul 24, 2010.

[109] Kenrick, Donald and Puxon, Grattan. 1995. *Gypsies under the Swastika* (Ser: Collection Interface). Hatfield: Gypsy Research Centre, University of Hertfordshire Press, p. 150.

[110] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_populations#Population_by_country,> Jul 23, 2010.

[111] Judt, Tony. 2003. Israel: The Alternative. *The New York Review of Books*, Oct 23. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2003/oct/23/israel-the-alternative/>, Aug 10, 2010.

expelled the majority of its Arab inhabitants from Jewish-controlled Palestine, thus giving rise to a Palestinian nation.[112] Sadly, until recently, in Europe 'nothing [has been] more international than the construction of national identities'[113] and nation-states, these claustrophobic cabins.

Now, with the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the European Union, and the elimination of most of the functions of state borders within the EU, courtesy of the Schengen Agreement,[114] one would think that the Roma would be appreciated and cherished as paragons of Europeanness. Not at all; the old prejudices prevail, and anti-Roma graffiti announce that they should 'go back to their home in India,' though they know no other home than Central Europe. Nobody demands that of Hungarians, who arrived a thousand years ago in Europe from the Urals, or of the Albanian-, Celtic-, Germanic-, Greek-, Romance- or Slavic-speakers who, as Indo-Europeans, came to Europe from the regions around the Black Sea between five and one and a half millennia ago. The only 'true' Europeans, more native to this continent than anybody else are the Basques, squeezed into their inhospitable and distant corner of the Iberian Peninsula, now split between Spain and France. Until recently, although in different ways, the Basques were as much marginalized and persecuted as the Roma.

Nowadays, the commemoration and evocation of the Jewish past across Europe are commonplace and widespread. They have become an integral part of the European identity, and one of the mainstays of Central Europe's tourist attractiveness. A case in hand is Cracow's Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, or קאזימיר, Kuzmir, in Yiddish. During the war the Germans gathered there all the Jews from Cracow and the vicinity as a preparation for their genocide. After the Holocaust, this poor Jewish shtetl, emptied of its former inhabitants, retained the character of a slum character. The filming of Steven Spielberg's movie, *Schindler's List*, in Kazimierz in 1993 made this district known to the world. The place's sudden rise to fame fed into the efforts of the organizers of the annual Jewish Culture Festival founded five years earlier, in 1988.[115] By the twenty first century, the poor inhabitants of the district had been evicted, their buildings repossessed and made into top-notch residential and business areas. The relentless gentrification of Kazimierz produced a prime Jewish site to be visited and enjoyed by tourists. Nonetheless, the place remains eerily and painfully Jew-less.

Was it intended like that? Is it easier to remember and speak well of those who are gone, and cannot answer back?

In the past, non-Jews did not learn Yiddish, though it was the third most widely

[112] Cf Pappe, Ilan. 2006. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld.

[113] Marie Thiesse quoted in: Baár Monika. 2010. *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Ser: Oxford Historical Monographs). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 304.

[114] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_area>, Jul 23, 2010.

[115] <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazimierz_%28Krak%C3%B3w%29>, Jul 23, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_Culture_Festival>, Jul 23, 2010.

spoken language in interwar Poland after Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian). Prior to World War Two, one could use Yiddish as a handy lingua franca from Moscow to Warsaw to Berlin to Paris to New York. It was not enough of an incentive. Today, Jews and their culture, including Yiddish, are appreciated and cherished. But it is mere lip service: hardly anybody goes to the pains of acquiring Yiddish. Simultaneously, the Roma are given the same snub by society as the Jews received in interwar Europe. People refuse to see the Roma as an embodiment of Europeanness; they dismiss and disparage their Romani language, instead of learning this true, home-grown lingua franca of modern-day Central Europe. And with the rise of India as a global power, perhaps, it could be appreciated that Romani constitutes a convenient gateway to Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and other important Indo-European languages of northern India and Pakistan.[116] The Romani Vikipidiya (Wikipedia) is written mainly in the Latin alphabet and the Devanagari script of Hindi and India's other languages. (Cyrillic pops up in some places, too.)[117]

Perhaps if the Roma had been lost as completely to the Porrajmos as the Jews were to the Holocaust, they would have been remembered more fondly. I hope I am wrong, but if I am right, I am happy the Roma are still around and can talk on their own, in their own voices. Thanks to them and their language there is still a hope for Central Europe. Maybe the current splitting of the region by the EU's eastern border will not be longlasting. It would be absurd to replace the East Central Europe of the Cold War times with a 'West East Central Europe' included in the Union, and an 'East East Central Europe' turned into a beggar awaiting mercy and favors at the gates of a half-European fortress.

István Bibó, a Hungarian lawyer and interwar politician, dreaded borders that on the whim of ethnic and linguistic difference cut across long-established countries, regions, populations, towns and villages. As Joseph Roth had done earlier in literature, Bibó, on political and economic grounds, pointed to the folly of dividing larger spaces of economic and political freedom (as earlier embodied by Austria-Hungary) into increasingly tinier ones, in the name of ethnolinguistic nationalism. According to him it was a recipe for recurrent conflicts, economic crises, political narrow-mindedness and obscurantism. He formulated his opinions on this subject in his famous 1946 essay *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága* (The Poverty of the Small States of Eastern Europe).[118]

One could criticize Bibó that in a clandestine manner he was offering a blueprint for the recreation of the historical, pre-1918 Greater Hungary. But not for him such

[116] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indo-Aryan_languages>, Jul 27, 2010.

[117] Cf <http://rmy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romane_manusha>, Jul 28, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devanagari>, Jul 28, 2010.

[118] Bibó, István. 1946. *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága*. Budapest: Új Magyarország. The Hungarian original is also available from: <http://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02043/html/194.html>, Jul 23, 2010.

an intellectual sleight of hand. He opposed the brunt of Soviet dominance in East Central Europe from inside. He never left Hungary and was the last minister of the anti-Soviet government to leave the Hungarian Parliament building during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. He saw cooperation among people in the countries of the Soviet bloc as a necessary preparation for the reintegration of the region and for its eventual 'return to (Western) Europe' when communism had fizzled out.

Bibó took care not to fall for the German concept of Kleinstaaterei. It expressed the abhorrence of early German nationalists at the hundreds upon hundreds of Germanicphone states and statelets in the Holy Roman Empire. They saw this multitude of autonomous polities as an obstruction to the creation of the 'real,' unified and centralized German nation-state. In the wake of the Great War, the same urge for creating ethnolinguistic national polities in Central Europe led to the breakup of Austria-Hungary and annexations at the expense of the German Empire and Russia. This time, German pundits accused Central Europe's national movements of fomenting good-for-nothing Kleinstaaterei. Bibó, with a premonition of a European Union, proposed arriving at solutions that would respect the political needs of ethnolinguistic nations, but would also ensure that the borders of their states would not hinder the free flow of ideas, goods, capital, people and workers.[119]

Bibó's thinking inspired Jenő Szűcs to write his essay, *The Three Historical Regions of Europe*. Like earlier Szűcs's, Bibó'stext achieved fame through being a guideline for the new times in Central Europe that came after 1989. The French translation of his *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága* came off the press in 1986,[120] and half a decade later was followed by the English one.[121] In 1992, the German translation[122] appeared, and soon afterwards translations into Italian (1994), Slovak (1994), Serbian (1996), Romanian (1999), Russian (2004), complete with the reissue of the Hungarian original published in 1997 for the Hungarian minority in Romania.[123]

Interestingly, no Polish translation of this important essay has been published so far, though the leading Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, planned to bring it out in the mid-1990s.[124] Perhaps, for the Polish public it would be too difficult to see their country as a 'small Eastern European state' Polish politicians and intellectuals find it necessary to emphasize that Poland is the largest polity of Central Europe. They toned down this thesis after the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) in Ukraine, when a

[119] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleinstaaterei>, Jul 24, 2010.

[120] Bibó, István. 1986. *Misère des petits états d'Europe de l'Est*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

[121] Bibó, István. 1991. The Distress of the East European Small States. In: István Bibó. *Democracy, Revolution, Sell-Determination: Selected Writings*. Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs; Highland Lakes: Atlantic Research Publications and New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press.

[122] Bibó, István. 1992. *Die Misere der osteuropäischen Kleinstaaterei*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik.

[123] Bibó, István. 1997. *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága*. Bucharest and Cluj (Kolozsvár): Kriterion.

[124] Only a fragment of Bibó's essay is available in Polish: Bibó István. 1994. Nędza małych państw wschodnioeuropejskich (fragment) (pp 20-32). *Krasnogruda*.

tentative possibility opened for the future accession of this country into NATO and the EU. In territory and population Ukraine is bigger than Poland. Now, Warsaw prefers to state that Poland is on a par with Spain in the European Union.

The views presented above were mostly formulated during the Cold War. Their authors sought an explanation of their drab communist present, and a hope for a better future in models from the past. They saw World War Two as the zero hour, when the counting of time for Central Europe began anew. This war was the defining event to be remembered well so that a future could be built in which a repeat of this bloodbath would be unthinkable. No thought was given to the dynamics of the war, its causes and aftermath as defining of what Central Europe is now. This comfortable denial, or oblivion, continued until recently, when in 2009, the *New York Review of Books* published Timothy Snyder's article, 'Holocaust: The Ignored Reality.'[125]

The discussion of these issues is possible now, because a new generation reached adulthood in Europe. This is a generation of Europeans who have no interest in this war, and their memories of it are limited to the few stories heard from great-grandparents and to the couple of war films they happened to watch. The situation opens a space for discussion unfettered by the constraints that chained previous generations to one or other interpretation of various events as they unfolded during the Second World War. Such personally felt, vested interests have largely disappeared with those who held them dear. The danger is, however, that the fading of memories of the war may mean that the new generation forgets the roots and aims of the project of European integration. Doing so could pave the way for another all-European war. In this context, the rekindling of discussion on World War Two is as urgent as the need for new interpretations.

Among others, Snyder notes that most of the state-ordained mass killings and expulsions of civilians did not take place just in what can be blandly described as 'German-occupied Europe' and in the Soviet Union. The vast majority of the killings and expulsions were perpetrated by national socialist and Soviet administrations in Central Europe. And not only during the war but within the broader bracket of the two entire decades of the 1930s and 1940s. The singling out of the former decade may surprise the reader, because the Second World War commenced only in 1939 when Germany, Hungary and Poland seized their chunks of Czecho-Slovakia, and with the Italian invasion of Albania and the joint German-Soviet onslaught of Poland. But earlier, in the course of the 1930s, Stalin perpetrated the great famines of 1930-1933 in Soviet Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the Volga region to force the collectivization of the countryside on the uncooperative peasants. At the same time the entire intellectual elites of the Soviet Union's ethnolinguistically non-Russian nations were wiped out.

[125] Snyder, Timothy. 2009. Holocaust: The Ignored Reality. New York Review of Books, Jul 16. The text is available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/jul/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/>, Jul 23, 2004.

The 'engineering' of a Soviet people was wrapped up with the Great Terror of 1937-1938, which contrary to what is commonly thought, was mainly directed against 'kulaks' (or well-to-do peasants) and ethnic Poles living in the Soviet Union's western borderlands, that is, in Central Europe. Apart from the Holocaust that also took place in this region, between 1933 and 1944 the Soviets and the national socialists of the Third Reich exterminated twelve million people in what today is Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland and Ukraine. The mass killings did not take place in Germany or in Russia (that is, the Russian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic), but in between, in this In-Between Europe. In truth it was not the Soviet Union that suffered most casualties during the war, or Poland that lost the largest proportion of its population. Not at all. Between 1941 and 1944 ethnically defined Belarus lost half of its population, or four and a half million people.[126]

The mass killings and the Holocaust were accompanied by the innocuously termed 'population exchanges and transfers,' or in reality, brutal expulsions and uprooting of entire, ethnolinguistically defined communities. Between 1938 and 1950, about fifty million people had to leave their homes, and most never had a chance to go back.[127] The vast majority of this demographic ping-pong, where no respect was shown for those concerned, was played out in Central Europe. The year 1950 marks an artificial caesura. Afterward expulsions continued, though in a minor key, until 1989. Ethnic Germans escaped the Soviet bloc countries or were allowed to leave them. Ethnic Poles were 'repatriated' from Poland's former eastern territories incorporated to the Soviet Union. Jews continued to leave for the West and for Israel. In the wake of numerous pogroms, Roma were pressed to leave for Western Europe.[128] Communist Greeks and Macedonians fled Greece when defeated in the civil war and settled across communist Central Europe. Ethnic Turks were expelled from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The ethnic homogenization of the latter country was completed with the expulsion of 350,000 Turks and Slavophone Muslims (Pomaks) in 1989, but the collapse of communism reversed the tide.[129]

This expulsion, presented in the newspeak of Bulgaria's communist mass media as a 'Great Tourist Trip,'[130] could have sparked a major civil war, or even a confrontation with Turkey that would have pitted NATO against the Warsaw Pact, giving the

[126] Szybieka, Zachar. 2002. *Historia Białorusi, 1795-2000*. Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, pp. 363-364; Mironowicz, Eugeniusz. 2007. *Białoruś* (Ser: Historia Państw Świata w XX Wieku). Warsaw: Trio and Instytut Historii UW, pp. 224-228.

[127] Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, pp. 189-193; Engel. *Grosser historischer Weltatlas* (Part 3: Neuzeit), pp. 194-195.

[128] *The Limits of Solidarity: Roma in Poland After 1989* (Ser: Country Reports, vol. 11). 2002. Budapest: European Roma Rights Center, pp. 29-30.

[129] Crampton, R J. 2005. *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Ser: Cambridge Concise Histories). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 209-210.

[130] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turks_in_Bulgaria#The_.22Big_Excursion.22>, Jul 24, 2010.

latter, moribund organization, one final lease of life. I have discussed the matter with many Bulgarian scholars, and they have no clue how a war was prevented. I have found no article on this subject either. But a clear answer to this question would be of the utmost significance, because similar events of a lesser scale did lead to a series of bloody wars and ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, bringing about the protracted breakup of that country. According to conservative estimates in the course of the breakup between 1991 and 1999, 130,000 people lost their lives and one million and a half were internally displaced or became refugees.[131]

All these events that trampled the dignity of humans time and again in the course of the twentieth century appear to stem from the original sin of mass killings in the 1930s and 1940s by Hitler's Third Reich and the Stalinist Soviet Union. The perpetrators believed that they were acting for the greater good of either a 'racially pure' or a communist future. Had they been successful who would hold them to account, and if not, who would remember anyway? The massacres (or genocide as Armenians themselves speak of these) of Armenians suffered in 1915 at the hands of the Ottoman army, irregulars and administration were already old news in the 1930s. Nobody seemed to remember or care.[132] In the meantime the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution killed millions and changed Europe completely. Politicians and people at large had become immune to the prospect of mass death sustained or committed in the name of the nation or of a supposedly high ideal. Evil, even the greatest of them, is banal, as Hannah Arendt remarked.[133] People are appalled for a couple of days by what happened, and then they keep going on with their daily business as usual. This generalized, and all too human, rapid process of forgetting is so pernicious that even such a conscientious scholar as Snyder did not write about the Porrajmos in his article, 'Holocaust: The Ignored Reality.'[134] He dwelt on the extermination of 'Roma and Sinti' in the exchange of letters that followed his seminal article,[135] but unfortunately it was too late for him to incorporate the theme into his magisterial monograph *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, where only a single paragraph is devoted to the matter.[136]

As with many of the things of modern times, the wiping out of an entire population or community is an invention of the West, tried out first in the colonies, and

[131] <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jugoslawienkriege#Kriegsopfer>, Jul 24, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian_War_of_Independence>, Jul 24, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yugoslav_Wars#Bosnian_War>, Jul 24, 2010; <http://www.radstats.org.uk/no069/article3.htm>, Jul 24, 2010.

[132] <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/persecution/pch0028.html>, Jul 24, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hitler_Armenian_Quote.JPG>, Jul 24, 2010.

[133] Arendt, Hannah. 1963. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Faber.

[134] <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/jul/16/holocaust-the-ignored-reality/>, Jul 24, 2010.

[135] <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/aug/13/holocaust-the-ignored-reality-an-exchange/>, Oct 24, 2010.

[136] Snyder, Timothy. 2010. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. London: The Bodley Head, p. 276.

then perfected and applied to Europe, especially Central Europe. The British administration did not recognize Australia's indigenous population (or the Aborigines, as Europeans named them) as human beings, and let colonists exterminate them in the so-called Black Wars. The most infamous one unfolded with early skirmishes in 1804 in Tasmania. It came to an abrupt end in 1833 after for a couple of years settlers had set about the business of extermination in a methodical, almost industrial manner, creating a line of sharp shooters across the island and sweeping it from one end to the other.[137]

In the depths of the communist 1980s, I read Joseph Conrad's (originally Józef Konrad Korzeniowski, born to a Polish noble family in Berdichev, Russia, today Berdichiv in Ukraine) short novel, *Heart of Darkness*,[138] which was assigned reading for my Polish class. The teacher interpreted it for us as an allegory of (Western) European colonialism. Years later, I realized that it was a piece of reportage, and the dark character, Kurtz's, admonition 'Exterminate all the brutes!'[139] was for real. The reality dawned on me after I read Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*[140] on the title's monarch of Belgium and his private slave colony, the incongruously (or mendaciously) named Free State of Congo. It was there that Conrad met prototypes of his Kurtz. They pursued their mission civilisatrice in a very laissez faire manner, enriching themselves and above all Leopold II, who obviously never visited 'his' country. The Belgian monarch's benevolent rule over Congo cost ten to thirteen million people their lives and left millions maimed, the customary punishment for not meeting quotas and not observing regulations set by the civilizers, being the cutting off of one's hand, and ear, nose and even foot, if one persisted to misbehave.[141]

Belgium and Europe do not wish to remember.[142] It is forgotten that the concentration camp, that indispensable tool of Hitler's and Stalin's mass killings, was invented by the Americans for the subduing of Native Americans in the 1830s, and then perfected by the British in their war of scorched earth against the Boers in South Africa (1899-1902).[143] The expertise already in hand, between 1904 and 1907, the German Empire's colonial administration set about wiping out the 'troublesome' peoples of the

[137] Lindqvist, Sven. 2007. *Terra Nullius: A Journey Through No One's Land*. London: Granta Books; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_War>, Jul 26, 2010; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_massacres_of_Indigenous_Australians>, Jul 26, 2010.

[138] Conrad, Joseph. 1902. Heart of Darkness. In: Conrad, Joseph. *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*. London: W Blackwood and Sons.

[139] Conrad, Joseph. 1995. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Books, p. 84.

[140] Hochschild, Adam. 1998. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

[141] <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/hochschild_king_leo.shtml#afterword>, Jul 25, 2010.

[142] <http://www.howardwfrench.com/archives/2005/10/26/in_the_heart_of_darkness/>, Jul 25, 2010.

[143] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concentration_camp#Concentration_camps>, Jul 25, 2010.

Herero and the Nama in Berlin's South West Africa.[144] This genocide-scale massacre opened the bloody twentieth century of industrial killing, and brought it to the doorsteps of Central Europe, from where the perpetrators came.

In 2004, after one hundred years, Germany admitted its guilt at last, and apologized to Namibia, where the Herero and the Nama live today. But, unlike in the case of Jews who survived or lost their relatives in the Holocaust, Berlin excluded the possibility of paying any compensation to the victims' descendants.[145] Likewise, the indemnification of the survivors and the relatives of those who perished in the Porrajmos, is reluctant and sluggish at the best of times.[146] First, the victims need to make a persuasive case and make themselves heard in the world. Well, the Herero, the Nama and the Roma, living at the margins of the globalized world, or socially marginalized if residing in its midst, are perfect victims, whom one can pretend not to see or hear.

Another indispensable instrument of population engineering, as applied to Central Europe, was thought up in 1923 at Lausanne, in Switzerland. The euphemistically termed 'population exchange' was none other but legally enshrined ethnic cleansing, pure and clear. The implementation of such a 'solution' as they devised for others would be unthinkable for application in the case of Switzerland itself. After all diplomats and statesmen need a peaceful, stable and prosperous place in which to enjoy themselves. The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, contracted between Greece and newly-founded Turkey, stated tersely in Article 1 that '[a]s from the 1st May, 1923, there shall take place a compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Muslim religion established in Greek territory. These persons shall not return to live in Turkey or Greece respectively […].'[147] No objection was permitted or expected.

All the necessary technologies in hand, the twentieth century could commence, making Central Europe into the testing ground of a modernity that afterwards left the region quite un-Central European. The two totalitarianisms, nationalisms, idealism and Realpolitik, the final solution, total war, revolution, expulsions and forced labor made Central Europe into an ultra-modern place, the epitome of post-modernity (or is it post-mortem?). A pity that so many Central Europeans did not make it, and those who did hurried to forget what they had had to live through.

They prefer to remember the times before this near-terminal destruction of their

144 Olusoga, David and Erichsen, Casper. 2010. *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*. London: Faber and Faber; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero_genocide>, Jul 25, 2010.

145 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3565938.stm>, Jul 25, 2010.

146 <http://reocities.com/Paris/5121/compensation.htm, Jul 25, 2010; www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/sdruzeni5.doc>, Jul 25, 2010.

147 <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Convention_Concerning_the_Exchange_of_Greek_and_Turkish_Populations>, Jul 25, 2010.

Central Europe. It is so laughable now to read the ravings of nationalists against Austria-Hungary, which they castigated as a 'prison of nations.' In 1916, the future Czechoslovak president, Edvard Bene appealed for the destruction of the Dual Monarchy, which he branded as 'the oppressor of Czecho-Slovaks throughout history.'[148] And, surprisingly, his wish was granted. But, perhaps, it was the Czech national historian and politician, Franti ek Palacký, who was right when he wrote in 1848 that 'if the Austrian state had not existed for ages, in the interests of Europe and indeed of humanity itself we would have to endeavor to create it as soon as possible.'[149] Whatever its failings, from the vantage of today Austria-Hungary looks like a very humane polity. And whatever nationalists may criticize the Dual Monarchy for, it was not any prison but a veritable 'kindergarten of nations.'[150]

Will the European Union manage to replicate the monarchy's humane success on a larger scale?

THE POWER OF ANECDOTE

At times, I wonder whether the European Union that we envisage and strive for may become a Central Europe of the future? A ridiculous thought? Maybe, but why all this doe-eyed fascination of Western intellectuals with the Central Europe of the past (Mitteleuropa, really)? The region is more remembered and cherished in the Anglophone countries, Italy and France than in the present-day Central Europe of small jealousies and prejudices. Famously, the Austrian playwright and novelist, Thomas Bernhard, had little patience with his homeland of diminished, post-1918 Austria, and its stupidities. For his efforts, fellow citizens branded Bernhard as a Nestbeschmutzer, or the one who dirties and speaks ill of his own nest.[151] He reciprocated by banning the staging of his plays in Austria after his death.[152] Poles have been more indulgent of Sławomir Mrożek who, in his cartoons, stories and plays took on communist Poland and its absurdities, 'as if straight from Kafka.' He had to pay the price

[148] Bene , Edouard [Edvard]. 1916. *Détruisez l'Autriche-Hongrie! Le martyre des Tchéco-Slovaques à travers l'histoire*. Paris: Delagrave. The following year the text was published in an English translation but under a more level-headed title: Bene, Edouard [Edvard]. 1917. *Bohemia's Case for Independence*. London: G Allen & Unwin.

[149] Palacký, Franz [Franti ek]. 1874. *Gedenkblätter. Auswahl von Denkschriften, Aufsätzen und Briefen aus den letzten fünfzigen Jahren. Als Beitrag zur Zeitgeschichte*. Prague: F Tempsky, p. 152.

[150] Gellner, Ernst. 1994. *Encounters with Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 78. The German original reads: 'Wahrlich, existierte der österreichische Kaiserstaat nicht schon längst, man müßte im Interesse Europas, im Interesse der Humanität selbst sich beeilen, ihn zu schaffen.'

[151] This insidious term of Nestbeschmutzer, redolent of the narcissism of small [national] differences, (castigated as such by Sigmund Freud, another famous Central European, born in Alois Musil's Moravia) has its counterparts in other Central European languages, for instance 'ktoś kto kala własne gniazdo' in Polish. Cf <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissism_of_small_differences>, Aug 8, 2010.

[152] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Bernhard>, Jul 24, 2010.

for his 'disloyalty' to the communist regime when he denounced the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Mrożek could not return to Poland until the collapse of communism.[153]

In accordance with this post-Central European narrow-mindedness of today's Central Europe, at the time of the big bang enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Austria and Germany celebrated this momentous event by barring their employment markets, for at least seven years, to their immediate, postcommunist neighbors, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, and also to workers from the other postcommunist and post-Soviet states that joined the Union that year.[154] In this Austria and Germany became the very embodiment of the Klainstaaterei that they used to abhor. Britain, Ireland and Sweden turned out to be more truly Central European in this respect, because they welcomed Central and Eastern Europeans as neighbors from the first day of this historic enlargement.

Could there be a new working definition of Central Europe, bundling into a unit the British Isles, Scandinavia and the Central European polities from behind the former Iron Curtain? All courtesy of cheap flights and Skype? Five to six million people have already migrated from old Central Europe to the region's brand-new Atlantic part, and also to the Iberian Peninsula, France, the Benelux countries and Italy, countries that, after a bit of wavering, also if gradually opened their gates to the newcomers, including those from Romania and Bulgaria, which joined the EU in 2007.[155] In this novel view of Central Europe, the region is split again into West and East Central Europe, the divide in its midst being the recalcitrant Austria and Germany, the last, brave bastion of Western Europe. This may be an explanation why some Viennese seriously maintain that their city lies up to half a thousand kilometers away from the Slovak capital of Bratislava. In reality, both cities lie less than fifty kilometers from each other as a crow flies, and until 1945 were connected by a fast, sixty-kilometer-long, tramway line.[156]

After the trauma of the twentieth century, Central Europeans shun Central Europe, apart from some madcap enthusiasts. More convinced Central Europeans now live on the shores of the Atlantic than in the region itself. The self-consciously Central European intellectual from Ireland, John Banville, devoted three of his books to Mitteleuropäische subjects,[157] and continues penning prefaces and afterwords to volumes on

153 <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/mrozek.htm>, Jul 24, 2010.

154 <http://en.euabc.com/word/280>, Jul 24, 2010.

155 Grabowska-Lusińska, Izabela and Okólski, Marek. 2009. *Emigracja ostatnia*. Warsaw: Scholar; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_Europe#Migration_within_Europe>, Jul 25, 2010.

156 <http://www.wieninternational.at/en/node/6737>, Aug 8, 2010; <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pressburger_Bahn>, Aug 8, 2010.

157 Banville, John. 1976. *Doctor Copernicus: A Novel*. London: Secker and Warburg; Banville, John. 1981. *Kepler: A Novel*. London: Secker and Warburg; Banville, John. 2003. *Prague Pictures: Portrait of a City* (Ser: The Writer and the City). London: Bloomsbury.

Central Europe and by Central Europeans.[158] His fellow Irishman, Hubert Butler, had inaugurated this trend even earlier, when before and during World War Two he traveled across Latvia, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia and the Balkans. He analyzed his travels and findings in brilliant and, famously, politically incorrect essays that cost him successive positions, but luckily he had his Anglo-Irish family's big house to fall back on.[159]

The British historian and intellectual, Timothy Garton Ash, followed in Butler's footsteps. Serendipitously, he did research in and traveled across Central Europe when the Soviet bloc evaporated into thin air and the Berlin Wall fell. Garton Ash interpreted these events for the Western public.[160] He tends to equate Europe with Central Europe, as seen in his recent collection of essays on matters Mitteleuropäisch, *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s*.[161] In this, he is similar to another British historian (of Welsh origin), Norman Davies, whose opus magnum, *Europe: A History*, is quite Polono- and Central Europe-centric.[162]

Garton Ash went one step further than his predecessors, and tried his hand at recreating a Central European identity from the best that had remained from it, the region's literature. Under his editorship, the Central European University Press, published seven books in its Central European Classics series, three by Hungarian authors (Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Krúdy and Zsigmond Móricz), two by Polish ones (Bolesław Prus and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz), and two by a couple of Czech writers (Ivan Olbracht and Jan Neruda). In 2007 the series was relaunched, and five more titles have been added to it so far, by a Serbo-Croatian / Yugoslav writer (Ivo Andrić), a Lithuanian one (Kazys Boruta), a Slovenian one (Ivan Cankar), an Estonian one (Friedebert Tuglas), and a Polish one (Stefan Żeromski).[163] The series seems to be floundering, and no separate identity for it is evident even in its publisher's catalog.[164]

Surprisingly, in the tally of the twelve books not a single female author has been featured yet. The same myopia of the fairer half of Central Europe's population was replicated by Simon Winder, the editor of the brand-new series of Penguin Central European Classics. This series came to the market with a bang, secured by its international

158 Banville, John. 2009. Introduction (pp vii-xii). In: Gregor von Rezzori. *The Snows of Yesteryear* (Ser: NYRB Classics). New York: New York Review of Books; Banville, John. 2007. Introduction. In: Hofmannstahl, Hugo von. *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings* (Ser: NYRB Classics). New York: New York Review of Books.

159 Cf Butler, Hubert. 1996. *Independent Spirit: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, pp. 307-487; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubert_Butler>, Jul 27, 2010.

160 Garton Ash, Timothy. 1989. *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*. London: Granta and Penguin; Garton Ash, Timothy. 1990. *We the People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague*. London: Granta Books; Garton Ash, Timothy. 1993. *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*. New York: Random House.

161 Garton Ash, Timothy. 1999. *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s*. London: Allen Lane and The Penguin Press.

162 Davies. *Europe: A History*.

163 <http://www.ceupress.com/subjects/CentralEuropeanClassics.html>, Jul 25, 2010.

164 <http://www.ceupress.com/catalog/catalog2010_fallwinter.pdf>, Jul 25, 2010.

publisher. The all-male cast of ten authors include an Austrian (Thomas Bernhard), three Czechs (Karel Čapek, Ota Pavel and Josef Škvorecký), two Hungarians (György Faludy and Gyula Krúdy), two Poles (Czesław Miłosz and Sławomir Mrożek), a Romanian writing in French (Emil M Cioran), and Gregor von Rezzori.[165]

I did not classify the last writer, because like all genuine Central Europeans, his case eludes the usual pigeonholing by ascription to this or that nation or state. Rezzori, stemming from a Sicilian aristocratic family, was born in Austria-Hungary's crownland of Bukovina. He grew up in his homeland when it became part of interwar Romania. Rezzori received his education and worked both in Austria and in Romania. Shortly before the Second World War he moved to Berlin, but was not drafted to the German army on account of his Romanian citizenship. During the 1950s, the writer lived in West Germany, but in the following decade he embarked on a peripatetic way of life, shuttling between Rome, Tuscany, Paris and the United States. Rezzori wrote in German, but spoke also Yiddish, Ruthenian (Ukrainian), Romanian, Italian, Polish, French and English. In this he remained loyal to the multilingualism of Austria-Hungary and its reflection in miniature, Bukovina, after 1945 lost to Soviet Ukraine, and then well beyond the Iron Curtain. Like the equally polyglot writer of the previous generation, Joseph Roth, Rezzori, too, was deprived of his homeland, which he then strove to recreate in his writings.[166]

The same became the unsung fate of the multilingual villages and their inhabitants in the region of the one-time Hungarian capital, and today that of Slovakia, the city of Bratislava that used to be known as Posonium in Latin, Istropolis ('city on the Danube') in Greek, Preßburg in German, Pozsony in Hungarian, גרובשערפ (Presburg) in Yiddish, Prešpurk or Prešpurek in Czech, Prešporek or Prešporok in Slovak, and Požun in Croatian.[167] In each of these villages peasants tended to speak Croatian, German, Hungarian and Slovak (or the Slavic dialect employed in today's westernmost Slovakia and southern Moravia). Customarily, they were illiterate, but by reason of being neighbors they had to help out one another so all of them could survive the hungry period before the next harvest. To cooperate they needed to communicate. The two Slavic languages of Croatian and Slovak are mutually comprehensible. However, the triplet of tongues consisting of this Slavic dyad, the Germanic idiom of German and Finno-Ugric tongue of Hungarian are not mutually comprehensible. Neither the local temporal or ecclesiastical lords gave any thought to this dire predicament.

Peasants being peasants, they invented a cheap and extremely efficient method of scaling this multiple communication barrier. Simply, neighbors exchanged their children with one another. For a month or two the children made their home at

[165] <http://www.penguinclassics.co.uk/static/penguinclassicspubsets/europeanclassics.html>, Jul 24, 2010.

[166] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregor_von_Rezzori>, Jul 24, 2010.

[167] <http://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historick%C3%A9_n%C3%A1zvy_Bratislavy>, Aug 8, 2010; <http://www.bing.com/reference/semhtml/List_of_shtetls>, Aug 8, 2010.

their neighbors', sweeping floors, milking cows, cutting grass, and doing other chores around the household and in the fields, as they would do at home. In the process they acquired all the languages spoken in their village. Yiddish-speaking Jewish traders and artisans serving these communities, though separated from them by religion, also took up the local languages in order to stay in business.

The ethnolinguistic nation-states that emerged in the wake of the first Central European catastrophe of 1918, enforced ideologically motivated monolingualism, mainly with the use of their respective educational systems. National schools allowed for the teaching of 'proper foreign languages,' meaning French, English and sometimes German, and invariably Russian after 1945. Multilingualism, however, was an anathema to be discouraged and avoided at any cost. When language is the proof of one's belonging to a nation, one cannot speak more languages than one, one's mother tongue, otherwise one could belong to two, three or even four nations. And this is the sure sign of the cosmopolitanism of old Central Europe, the sign of national treason. And a taunt against the Jews – 'the rootless cosmopolitan Jew.'

Not surprisingly, the tradition of children exchange among neighbors had been extinguished by the 1970s. When it was on its last legs in communist Czechoslovakia, it became a unidirectional path. Hungarian parents from southern Slovakia sent their children to Slovak neighbors and kin living in homogenously Slovakphone central and northern Slovakia. Ethnically Slovak parents did not reciprocate; their children had no need to acquire Hungarian.[168]

I wonder whether the generalized silence on this and similar traditions of multilingualism transfer in Central Europe, a silence that continues to this day, may have other causes than outright ignorance or the national imposition of one language exclusively for the members of a single nation. In the European Union, of twenty three official languages today, the command of more than a single language though widely found, is not a norm apart from in the cases of Belgium, Finland and Luxembourg. The knowledge of English as a lingua franca is quite widespread but in most cases the use of this language by non-native-speakers is limited to when one is on holidays abroad, or to the rare perusal of a scholarly article.[169]

The acquisition of native EU languages other than one's national idiom rarely occurs in a natural manner, meaning when living in a country where the language to be acquired is the means of everyday communication, or by talking to a partner or relative who speaks it. Most do not so much 'acquire' but imperfectly and for long years 'learn' other EU and foreign languages, thus fueling the multibillion business of language schools.[170] What a waste of time, effort and money, if compared with the

[168] Liszka, József. 1996. Das Tauschkind-System im slowakischen Teil der Kleinen Tiefebene (pp. 58-72). *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie*. No 1.

[169] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eu_languages#Migrant_languages>, Aug 10, 2010.

[170] *Europeans and Their Languages*. 2006. Brussels: Special Eurobarometer and European Commission, p. 47.

meager success rate of, I dare say, less than ten per cent. The peasants of the Preßburg region would have been appalled.

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One could dismiss as baseless my musings that Central Europe is changing and evolving, due to the recent of influx of Central Europeans into the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the two fiction series of Central European Classics. But why, is Central Europe not what we make out of it, and how we decide to imagine it? Europe and its central or mid-section are as imagined as any state is. There is not a single polity with entirely natural borders in the world, even the island polities that approach this ideal, such as Australia, Iceland or Madagascar, lay claims to the oceanic shelf surrounding them, a piece of the Antarctica (as in the case of Australia), small islands around them, or even far-away ones (for example, Australia's Norfolk Island).

People build their world from words, agreeing or disagreeing on this or that course of action, believing they are peasants or aristocrats, maintaining that they belong or do not to a given nation, expressing their loyalty to polity X or polity Y. Central Europe and the European Union are no different. People keep imagining and re-imagining them. Both appeared as entities, have existed for a time, and will surely disappear as everything does in this world.[171] (A nice simile, as if there was some other world, this hereafter of the monotheistic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, inextricably intertwined in Central Europe.) What remains in the end is anecdotes that allow one to make sense of the past and position oneself on the (also largely imagined) axis between then and the future in this blurry moment-cum-period of now, fuzzily spread over a land or a collection of territories.

Central Europe today exists rather less than more. Some claim it disappeared for good with the dismembering of Austria-Hungary (and the Ottoman Empire), others disagree and maintain it faded out of view from 1918 to 1989, but remained in people's hearts, which would explicate the sudden reappearance of the region and the keen interest in it during the 1990s. But with the commencement of the twenty first century the fading has kicked in again.

Kafka's famous Josef K of *The Trial* remains surprisingly alive after the horrid capital punishment dealt to him at the novel's end by an unnamed and unknowable bureaucracy. He returned to Central Europe in the late 1970s, with his samizdat essay, *Střední Evropa. Anekdota a dějiny* (Central Europe: Anecdotes and History), that,

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf>, Aug 10, 2010.

171 Cf Anderson, Benedict Richard O'Gorman. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso; Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

typed and retyped, circulated clandestinely in communist Czechoslovakia. In 1981, when martial law was clamped on a restive Poland, the Czechoslovak émigré journal in Paris, *Svědectví* (Testimony), published a shortened version of this text, 'Střední Evropa. Torzo omílané historií' (Central Europe: The Rehashed Torso of the Past). In 1988 a samizdat publication came off a secret press in Czechoslovakia, entitled *Potíže s dějinami. 70 artikulí k věci* (Problems with History: 70 Paragraphs on the Case).[172] Two years later, in the wake of the Velvet Revolution that overthrew the communist system in Czechoslovakia, Josef K was identified as Josef Kroutvor, and his already legendary essay was legally published bearing yet another title, *Potíže střední Evropy. Anekdota a dějiny (Problems with Central Europe: Anecdote and History).*[173]

In his Postscript to the Polish translation of the text, Kroutvor reminds his readers that 'a united Europe already existed in the past, it was the Central Europe, as embodied by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, whatever our opinion may be of [this defunct state].'[174]

Does the resurrected Josef K have any hope for Central Europe? Whatever will or will not happen, anecdotes remain the region's hope, as 'a warranty and instrument for learning about and analyzing its reality.' This is of a special salience in Central Europe where 'ideas and clichés [dished out by the powers that be] frequently morph into anecdotes.'[175] With anecdotes people unpack the avalanche of mendacious officialese of politics that time and again engulfs them, emanating from the mass media, school and ministerial cabinets.

People live, create and see their world through the timeless medium of stories, anecdotes and jokes. At the Central European University, enjoying sunny evenings at the Hradčany Castle Hill in Prague, we spent innumerable hours with colleagues and our tutors discussing what Central Europe had been, was and might be. We invariably came to the conclusion that it was high time to eat something, have a good time, and swig a real Budweiser beer, or two.

One day our vexing problem solved itself, with no intervention on our part. Deus ex machina, indeed. At our digs, in the Hotel Ol anka, still under construction, it was lunchtime. In the spacious cafeteria, with its ceiling twenty meters above the floor, we queued diligently for our hovězí vývar, řízek s hranolkami, žemlovka and mattonka or kávička.[176] Small talk buzzed. Two languages surfaced more distinctly in the

[172] Kroutvor, Josef. 1981. Střední Evropa. Torzo omílané historií. *Svědectví*. No 63, cf Baluch, Jacek, ed. *Hrabal, Kundera, Havel… Antologia czeskiego eseju* (Ser: Poczet Czeski). Cracow: Universitas, p. 294.

[173] Kroutvor, Josef. 1990. Potíže střední Evropy. Anekdota a dějiny. In: Josef Kroutvor. Potíze s dějinami. Prague: Prostor.

[174] Kroutvor, Josef. 1998. *Europa Środkowa: anegdota i historia*. Izabelin: Świat Literacki, p. 118.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Hovězí vývar – beef consommé, řízek s hranolkami – cutlet with chips. Žemlovka – a kind of bread pudding made from white bread (or rolls), apples, sweetened milk and eggs. Mattonka – a bottle or glass of Mattoni mineral water from Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad), originally developed by Heinrich Mattoni in 1864. Kávička – a

multilingual din, English in conversations among Central Europeans, and Russian preferred by students from Eastern Europe, or the post-Soviet states. As the custom was, some workers toiled on the roof, clearly visible through large glass panes. Their moving shadows waxed and waned across the hall, depending on whether sunshine squeezed through clouds.

The noise of their work never bothered us, but on that day it was especially loud. And all of a sudden they happened to drill through the ceiling into the hall. A cascade of sparks went down on us, scaring the more faint-hearted into ducking for the exit. The workers swore 'Kurva!, Kurva!, Kurva!,' and we, the Central Europeans, laughed out mirthfully. Our Western and Eastern Europeans colleagues did not, which gave us a devilish idea. Central Europe is there where the word kurva is understood and employed. Soon it turned out that kurva in the function of a curse or as a pejorative reference to prostitute is known from Lithuania and Poland through Albania and Greece, and from Austria through Ukraine and Belarus. They do not know the word in Germany, Russia, Estonia and Latvia.

Kurva stems from common Slavonic, also *kurva*, and probably is derived from *kur* for 'cock.' Initially, *kurva* meant 'hen,' and only later acquired the secondary meaning of 'unwedded woman with a child,' before becoming a pejorative name for 'prostitute' and a generalized expletive, similar in its ubiquity to English 'fuck!' The word in question is written *curvă* in Romanian, *kurva* in Lithuanian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian (that is, today, in Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian), *kurvë* in Albanian, *kurwa* in Polish, it is transcribed from Cyrillic as *kurva* from Belarusian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Macedonian, and as *koure* from Greek. It is known in Austria, due to the Slavic and Hungarian cultural influence in the country. *Kurva* is not completely unknown in Russia, either, due to the cultural and linguistic influence from Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian.[177]

The word may be mystifying to other Europeans, because at first glance it appears to come straight from Latin *curvus* for 'curved,' 'bent.' This coincidence gave rise to the folk etymology that seeks to dignify Central European *kurva* with an illustrious origin. The purported explanation is that in Rome prostitutes tended to accost customers at the bend of a road. Hence, the term was said to denote the familiar figure of a streetwalker.

term of endearment for a coffee (literally 'little coffee'), until recently usually served in a thin glass tumbler with a likewise transparent glass saucer underneath. Such coffee, typically dubbed 'turecká kava,' or Turkish coffee, has nothing to do with the latter. To make it one or two teaspoonfuls of ground coffee are put in the tumbler and next, boiling water is poured – voilà, your kávička is ready, though you may care for some sugar and proper sour cream (not milk, though condensed milk is kosher).

177 Cf Bańkowski, Andrzej. 2000. *Etymologiczny słownik języka polskiego* (vol 1). Warsaw: PWN, p. 860; Boryś, Wiesław. 2006. *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 276; Brückner, Aleksander. 1927. *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*. Cracow: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza and Warsaw: M Arct, p. 685; Ciorănescu, Aexandru. 2005. *Dicționarul etimologic al limbii române*. Bucharest: Saeculum, p. 272; Snoj, Marko. 2003. *Slovenski etimološki slovar*. Ljubljana: Modrijan, p. 336.

I spent three years teaching in Trinity College in Dublin. In Ireland I found Central Europe in what I tended to miss over there. The first most obvious absence was that of the market square as the central urban feature of a proper town or city, as it is understood in Central Europe. In Britain and Ireland the northern European feature of the high street predominates, or the physical presence of a sea port that constitutes the city center, as in the Irish town of Galway. The market (or town) square, so 'normal' in Central Europe , was set in stone by the eastward spread of ius teutonicum from the Holy Roman Empire. In the late middle ages and in the early modern period, it constituted the legal and cultural basis for founding and re-founding cities, towns and villages by migrants from this empire, across the length and breadth of what was to become Central Europe.

Rynek in Polish, or *rynok* in Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian, stems from the German *Ring* (earlier *Rinc*, a cognate of English 'ring') for a specific kind of a market square with several blocs of houses in its midst, a good example of which is the market square in Wrocław (Breslau). Today, a market square is known as *Markt* or *Marktplatz* in German, *rinka* (literally 'system for exchanging goods') or *turgus* (literally 'market') in Lithuanian, *rynek* or *trh* (literally 'market') in Czech and Slovak, *trg* in Croatian and Slovenian, *tržišta* in Serbian, *treg* in Albanian, *turg* in Estonian, *tirgus* in Latvian, *főtér* (literally 'square') in Hungarian, *pătrat* (literally also 'square') in Romanian, *agora* in Greek, *pazar kare* (literally 'bazaar square') in Turkish, or *pazaren ploshtad* (literally 'bazaar square,' too) in Bulgarian.[178] Until World War Two town halls invariably graced Central Europe's market squares. Many of them are missing now, razed in the total war, and never rebuilt. The town hall's clock tower marked the locality's very heart alongside the spire of a church located in an extremity of the square, or modestly, a street away from the city center.

When visiting an old Central European town, one is sure always to find one's way by retracing one's steps to the market square and ask there for directions to one's destination. The town hall's tower remains visible from afar as a convenient guideline. In contrast, cities of northern Europe appear amorphous to a Central European, and require re-learning one's basic instinct on the organization of urban space. Grids of similar or even identical intersecting streets, repeated time and again, are confusing to the Central European eye, and sometimes may intimidate a foreigner from Mitteleuropa.

States come and go, but market squares stay. Political frontiers arbitrarily drawn and redrawn are fickle. Villages, towns and cities built by the patient toil of generations are more difficult to raze. They persist against all the odds. The military might of the Third Reich did away with interwar Poland in no time, but failed, despite so much effort and materiel expanded to this end, to erase Warsaw from the map. Former German cities in today's eastern Poland, denuded of their German inhabitants

[178] <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rynek_%28urbanistyka%29#Pochodzenie_nazwy>, Jul 29, 2010.

and repopulated with Poles, do survive, too. The solution nationalists came up to deal with this obstinate permanence of localities was to erase them directly from people's minds rather than from the face of earth.

German Königsberg became Russian Kaliningrad, Ottoman Yanya Greek Ioannina, Polish Stanisławów Ukrainian Ivano-Frankivs'k, or Hungarian Kolozsvár, Romanian Cluj. Renaming localities in accordance with more or less imagined lineages of the master narrative of a nation that happened to seize a town, and following the spelling system of a freshly standardized national language became the method of choice. As dripping water dissolves and remolds a rock, the patient naming and renaming of localities contained within the borders of Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nation-states has borne the desired fruit. Nowadays, when one asks even a knowledgeable scholar where the famous Napoleonic battle of Austerlitz took place, the swift and automatic reply is 'Why, in Austria, of course.' Next to nobody knows that today this Austrian Austerlitz is none other but Slavkov near Brno, Moravia, Czech Republic.[179] Forgetting, or false memory, in the service of nationalism.

In reverse of some Central European absences felt in Ireland, upon my return to Poland in 2010, in the midst of a summer heat wave, I experienced something that I had never consciously perceived before, namely, dust. This earthy quality of the soil on which we tread is unknown on the Emerald Isle. Rainy weather and a wet climate cause grass and bushes to grow ferociously all over Ireland, and make soil erosion a sheer impossibility. The carpet of grass keeps mud hidden away, unless one decides to cut for turf, and rains wash away particles the accumulation of which could rise as dust on a warm day. Not so in Poland that, despite the deceptive appearances, is an arid country, battling with a permanent, low-key drought.

That summer, when traveling to Warsaw, I got off the train at Warsaw East (Warszawa Wschodnia) rather than at Warsaw Center (Warszawa Centralna). I had not done so since my childhood, when I had taken a bus from there to my grandparents' farm, located in a tiny hamlet, Jaworowo, 150 kilometers northwest of the Polish capital. Warsaw East is a gateway to rural Mazovia that surrounds the city. The flat plain is divided into longish strips of fields permanently split with each generation of largely subsistence farmers. Poor quality, sandy soils do not yield much. Until twenty to thirty years ago, dirt roads were ubiquitous. Mud and slush prevented travelers from traversing them in spring and fall, while in summer fine sand engulfed a car's flimsy wheels. Sturdy carts, drawn by horses, or later, tractors were the preferred mode of transportation.

When holidaying in my grandparents' wooden house erected in the memorable year of 1789, my brother and I took cows to the pasture in the morning, and shooed them back to their shed in the evening, helped by the dog, Bryłka. Babcia (Granny) milked the cows, and we enjoyed the frothy, warm milk, which we dubbed as 'straight

[179] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavkov_u_Brna>, Aug 10, 2010.

from the cow.' When boredom struck, we chased hens and ducks, though once, when I was a small boy, a cock held me ransom in a coal shed before my uncle rescued me. They laughed; I was petrified. And when the time was right Babcia treated us to what we called 'yellow or sweet bread.'

It was a large, thick square of plain yeast cake with thin chunks of sweet pickled pear under its chestnut brown crust. Yolks dyed the cake deep yellow. A slice of this heavenly bread with homemade butter spread on it, and washed down with a glass of milk was a treat we craved during the whole year when we had to attend school. And now, when at Warsaw East, I bought a yeast bun filled with sweet cottage cheese that smelled and tasted exactly as my Babcia's yellow bread. I ate it sweating profusely because mercury pushed to thirty four degrees Celsius in the thermometer. Hot air shimmered deceptively, fine dust covered lawns and bushes and lined lanes and sidewalks around the train station with a fine grayish film. It changed the usual green of trees to a darker hue.

That was my Central Europe of yesteryear, solely demarcated as the transitional zone between maritime and continental climate that plays its weather tricks in the broad area where the Peninsula of Europe is attached to the Continent of Eurasia. It was my place on Earth, regained briefly, and then irrevocably lost. Lost to the relentless nomadism and rootlessness of post-postmodernity that typifies the period of post-post-communism in which Central Europeans now live. To earn a living so many of us need to establish ourselves on the windy coasts of Bohemia[180] in London or Dublin, of which William Shakespeare had a strange premonition in his *The Winter's Tale* (Act III, Scene 3).[181]

Czissowa,[182] July-August and October 2010

[180] This anecdotal trope of Bohemia's seacoast also features in the title of: Sayer, Derek. 1998. *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[181] <http://www.henryneville.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=19>, Aug 8, 2010.

[182] <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisowa_%28K%C4%99dzierzyn-Ko%C5%BAle%29>, Jul 21, 2010; and views of Czissowa: <http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=Kedzierzyn-Kozle,+Poland&sll=50.086737,14.405756&sspn=0.009431,0.019033&gl=uk&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=K%C4%99dzierzyn-Ko%C5%BAle,+K%C4%99dzierzyn-Ko%C5%BAle+County,+Opole,+Poland&ll=50.380948,18.244858&spn=0.154565,0.304527&t=h&z=12&layer=c&cbll=50.379723,18.250651&cbp=12,0,,0,5&photoid=po-23111694>, Aug 22, 2010 and <http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=Kedzierzyn-Kozle,+Poland&sll=50.086737,14.405756&sspn=0.009431,0.019033&gl=uk&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=K%C4%99dzierzyn-Ko%C5%BAle,+K%C4%99dzierzyn-Ko%C5%BAle+County,+Opole,+Poland&ll=50.379846,18.250008&spn=0.154568,0.304527&t=h&z=12&layer=c&cbll=50.381255,18.244021&cbp=12,0,,0,5&photoid=po-23184338>, Aug 22, 2010.

Tomasz Kamusella

VIDURIO EUROPOS SVAJONIŲ PILYS?

Santrauka

Vidurio Europa: kas joje realu ir kas vaizduotės sukurta? Kas istoriška ir kas išsigalvota? Kur realybėje ir diskurse baigiasi geografija ir kur prasideda politika? Blaivaus žvilgsnio Vidurio europiečio asmeniška ir mokslinė kelionė per šį diskursą, ne tik ieškant tikrų bokštų ir svajonių pilių, bet ir visa tai surandant.