INTRODUCTION

This book pursues several interconnected objectives. It is supposed to provide a historical account of the discipline that goes by the name of ethnology today and was once known as ethnography and folklore studies. More specifically, it is an analysis of knowledge production under state socialism. It aspires to show how state socialism, directly and indirectly, shaped ethnographers' practices, which, in the long term, crystallised into distinct habitus, and, ultimately, how the practices influenced disciplinary knowledge. The central notion around which the book revolves is what I call *epistemic arrest*, a specific mode of knowledge production observable in ethnography and folklore studies, especially in the late socialist period. The book aims to untangle the distinct medley of forces that brought about epistemic arrest and kept influencing knowledge production even after state socialism in Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. I attempt to offer a fresh perspective on issues that have been hotly debated since socialism fell.

In pursuing these objectives, the book aspires to convey something substantial about the nature of Czechoslovak state socialism (1948–89) in particular and the state socialism that once ruled Eastern Europe in general. As such, it tries to find a middle ground between two recently popular explanatory strategies. The first is derived from Hannah Arendt's (1968) classic work, which views state socialism as a totalitarian monolith, an efficient state machinery that, with the help of its vast coercive apparatus, encroached upon its citizens and stifled their civic freedoms, including the freedom of scientific research. The second works with the idea of 'islands of freedom' (Vaněk et al. 2002) and claims that in the space constricted by the seemingly all-powerful monolith, there were spaces of resistance, germs of the future post-socialist civic society, as well as spaces of relatively free and original scientific inquiry. Though either approach conveys essential insights about the nature of state socialism in the Eastern Bloc, neither employs a robust and convincing explanatory framework. Therefore,

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neither can explain the possibility of what it writes about, be it the omnipotence of the supposedly totalitarian state vis-à-vis its subjects or the sheer potential of the existence of 'islands of freedom' within an otherwise constricted social space. At best, these works offer insightful descriptions but fall short of explanation and genuine understanding. I aim to avoid these explanatory shortcomings by employing a perspective originating in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu adjusted for historical analysis (Gorski 2013b) and for studying state socialism. Sparse though Bourdieu's writings on socialism may be, I find his theory immensely useful for dealing with my subject matter. It allows us to see a complexity in the state-socialist situation that the proponents of either explanatory strategy above cannot capture. It lets us depict the state-socialist situation as a space of both oppression and leeway in ways that even defy the two popular approaches.

It is fair to add that my use of Bourdieu to tackle the problems of researching state socialism is nothing original. The best example, to which my book owes inspiration, is Verdery's (1991) groundbreaking book on national ideology under Romanian socialism. A year earlier, with the memory of the socialist regime still fresh, the Czech sociologist Ivo Možný (2022) attempted a penetrating Bourdieusian explanation of the demise of state socialism in Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, his attempt does not seem to have been followed up on and developed by later scholars, likely because his essay was written only in Czech. Nonetheless, in recent years, there has been a growing number of stimulating works on Czechoslovak state socialism, and the time seems ripe for a re-evaluation of Bourdieu's sociology. Though contemporary social theory has changed profoundly since Bourdieu's departure, this book aims to show that Bourdieu may be alive and well.

There is one more reason that I believe studying state socialism is important. State socialism rules over Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) no more, but as some rightly point out (Oates-Indruchová 2020: 43–44), some practices remained and continued to shape the postsocialist era despite socialism's demise. It is evident that the two Czech successors to Czechoslovak ethnography and folklore studies – ethnology and sociocultural anthropology – have inherited a great deal from ethnography and folklore studies without even being aware of it. By inspecting their repressed history, we can get to know ourselves better and tackle some problems that have inhibited the development of contemporary Czech ethnology and anthropology. As such, even though socialism fell in 1989, it continued to shape knowledge production up until recent times. This book, therefore, invites the past to lie down on

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the socio-analyst's couch and tell us something noteworthy about our present.

An inquisitive reader will likely ask the pertinent question of why a book that scrutinises state socialism, postsocialism and the history of Czechoslovak ethnography and folklore studies from a sociohistorical vantage point made it into a series specialising in the history of sociocultural anthropology. What does it have to do with sociocultural anthropology? And why should anthropologists find it worthwhile at all? The answer is more complex than what meets the eye. Since the early 1990s, a distinct discourse has flourished, aiming to capture the relationship between European ethnology and 'Franglus'[1] sociocultural anthropology, as well as the relationship between anthropology as practised in its traditional bastions and anthropology as practised in CEE. I call this *postsocialist discourse*. The discourse was joined by scholars of different intellectual bents and national and disciplinary origins and fostered by at least two coinciding events – the fall of the Eastern Bloc, which had allowed anthropology to spread in the largely virgin territory of CEE, and considerations about whether European ethnologists should be invited to participate in the European Association for Social Anthropology, freshly established in 1989 (Kuper 2015: 140–41; Martínez 2020). The common denominator of both events was the competition between the two closely related disciplines, ethnology and anthropology. Even after over three decades, the discourse still thrives, but I believe it has not reached any deeper understanding of the situation.[2] Regarding the mutual relations between anthropology and ethnology in Czechoslovakia and Czechia, I find that most accounts are genuinely spurious. They are almost entirely based on personal recollections and not supported by rigorous research. I have tried to show elsewhere (Balaš 2024a) that the primary motivation behind the unchecked growth of postsocialist discourse since the 1990s was the political struggle over resources between anthropologists and ethnologists within a single academic setting in the postsocialist situation. That has led both groups to misrepresent their disciplines to defeat their opponents. The tug of war involved a great deal of sugarcoating of one's own discipline and smearing of the rival one. Any genuine understanding has been lost in the heat of the fray. If I compare the written accounts to the evidence I gathered in my research and if I take the contributions to postsocialist discourse at face value, it would seem that not only do both opponents not understand each other's disciplines; they do not understand their own either.

Therefore, the final objective of the book is to rethink the differences between anthropology and ethnology to understand both better. I

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hope that it will become a bridge whereby ethnologists and anthropologists meet halfway. I believe that my exercise in disciplinary history will be useful to both groups, and especially to those who only have second-hand information from the local gatekeepers who have made their proficiency in English a valuable key to interpreting the local situation. *Traduttore traditore*! I hope my historical socio-analysis will shed a novel light on the history of Franglus anthropology too.

The book is divided into three main parts, each further divided into several chapters. The status of Part I is preparatory. It aims to acquaint the reader with the subject matter and provide the means of its analysis in four chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the discipline of ethnography and folklore studies and aims to dispel the terminological confusion related to its naming. I uncover sources of the confusion and clear the ground for the foundations of my argument. The chapter is especially important for those already acquainted with postsocialist discourse, as I expect those readers might be confused the most. The chapter additionally introduces the central problem of the book. It is the occurrence of what I call *epistemic arrest*, a feature that we perceive in ethnography and folklore studies in the late socialist period.

Chapter 2 lays the foundations of the Bourdieusian framework, which holds the book together. It presents the conceptual trinity of *field – capital – habitus* and several accompanying concepts crucial for the Bourdieusian sociology of science and for the objectives of this book. I adjust Bourdieu's apparatus for the purposes of studying Czechoslovak state socialism and science practised within its confines. The chapter also serves as a way of acquainting the reader with socialist Czechoslovakia and its realities. It offers an overview of the underpinnings of socialist rule – the role of the Communist Party, its economic policies, coercive apparatus and the Marxist–Leninist ideology.

Chapter 3 describes the intellectual content of ethnography and folklore studies. Although this book largely departs from the intellectualist framing present in postsocialist discourse, it cannot shun the intellectual content altogether. There are three reasons for including the chapter. First, the description of intellectual content is most suitable for introducing a scholarly discipline to a scholarly audience. Second, the chapter is set against contemporary opinion, which depicts the discipline as positivistic, portraying its practitioners as revelling in description and avoiding any theory. Contrary to the prevailing opinion, I argue that the discipline was infused with theory. I will describe two dominant theoretical frameworks – Marxism–Leninism

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and nationalism – which served as the conceptual backbone to which ethnographers and folklorists provided empirical meat. Third, I will show that these two theoretical frameworks represented two wider intellectual currents, namely materialism and idealism. Finding support in Marshall Sahlins's work, I will show that the presence of these two frameworks makes a good case for an argument that depicts anthropology on one hand and ethnography and folklore studies on another not as two incommensurable disciplines but as two closely related ones, growing from the same intellectual root.

Chapter 4 is a short one whose purpose is to complete the stage setting for Part II. The chapter describes the institutional framework of ethnography and folklore studies and its history between 1948 and 1968. It shows both the state support thanks to which the discipline expanded significantly and examples of the coercive measures that restricted the discipline's autonomy. The chapter briefly comments on the situation in Slovakia and concludes with a note on the so-called Czech school of anthropology.

Part II also consists of four chapters and focuses on the main subject matter of this book – the Czech subfield of ethnography in the late socialist period. The late socialist period is defined here as the era between 1969 and 1989. The Czech subfield is represented by what I call Prague ethnography – a university department and an academic institute.

Chapter 5 focuses on the restructuring of the Czech subfield in the wake of the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968. The chapter firstly employs the concept of the objective mode of domination, which, according to Bourdieu, accounts for the power relations in modern states, including socialist Czechoslovakia. After the invasion, the Communist Party consolidated its position and renewed its grip on science. The consolidation rearranged power relations in Czechoslovak society by creating a stratum of politically dispossessed individuals, who were either expelled from the Party or whose Party membership was suspended. Secondly, the chapter shows that contrary to their uncertain position, many of the dispossessed continued to be active in research and higher education and were even hailed as prominent scholars in ethnography and folklore studies. To explain this, I will resort to the so-called elementary mode of domination, which Bourdieu originally described among the Kabyles of Algeria. In the context of socialist Czechoslovakia, this mode of domination was parasitic upon the objective mode, giving rise to compromise and ultimately softening the state's power. In other words, in the heart of Czechoslovak society tightly ruled by the Communist Party, there ex-

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isted a space for a certain leeway based upon the existence of specific sources of power, which were not peculiar to Party rule.

While Chapter 5 describes how ethnography and folklore studies were moulded by the state, Chapter 6, on the contrary, focuses on powers that were intrinsic to the discipline and that accounted for its scholarly autonomy. The chapter proceeds to describe some basic features of ethnographers' daily bread. It inspects academic hierarchies, and comments on ethnographers' research methods, academic practices and language competencies. The chapter shows that the field of ethnography had its own ways and sources of power, which were not directly linked to state power but were peculiar to the discipline.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on two peculiar domains of ethnographers' scholarly practices. The former is interested in ethnographers' attitudes to writing and their publication strategies. It tries to locate the role of academic writing and publishing in the discipline and the forces that constrained them. The latter chapter functions as the climax of both Part II and the whole book. It inspects ethnographers' attitudes towards discussion and mutual criticism. The chapter does so by employing a concept called the *culture of contention* and offers a solution to the problem of epistemic arrest. The goal of the chapter is twofold – to account for the forces that brought about the arrest and to show its consequences.

Part III consists of a single chapter – the Conclusion. Its first part discusses the advantages of the Bourdieusian framework for studying state socialism. The second part serves as a postscript and sketches out the relationship between socialist ethnography and postsocialist ethnology and anthropology. When the Eastern Bloc fell in 1989, the political regime disappeared almost overnight. Despite such a tremendous change, we can identify strong personal continuities as well as continuities in scholarly practice between pre-1989 Czechoslovak ethnography and folklore studies and post-1989 Czech ethnology. Even though Czech anthropology had established itself in a conscious opposition to ethnology, it continued to be influenced by the same disciplinary heritage as Czech ethnology. This also helps us to understand why Czech anthropologists have not been quite like their colleagues in the UK, USA or France, though they profess the same disciplinary allegiance.

Before hurling the reader into the heart of the matter, several remarks are in order. First, each chapter has a single theme and may be read separately. However, there is a cumulative progression in the book, and the reader is advised to proceed in a linear way as some

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arguments and remarks appearing in later chapters are built on those appearing in earlier chapters.

Second, the book is designed for two scholarly communities at once. Therefore, I hope that experts on the topic as well as my Czech and Slovak readers will excuse my digressions into things they are well aware of. I indulge in these digressions to be maximally charitable towards audiences unfamiliar with the realities of Czechoslovak history and ethnography and folklore studies. By the same token, I ask my anthropological audience for a certain leniency while reading Chapter 8, as they will certainly find some of its parts banal. I hope that, however commonplace and banal some of my descriptions may be, they will shed a novel light on things that have hitherto been considered self-evident.

Third, Czech surnames in the socialist period were gendered, a practice that is undergoing some changes today but is still dominant. It is, therefore, easy to distinguish a female ethnographer from a male one by the suffix *-á* or *-ová*. Although this naming practice has had consequences for gender equality, it also has a fortuitous effect for non-Czech readers, who can easily distinguish between female and male protagonists.[3] As a matter of fact, ethnography and folklore studies of the late socialist period was a largely feminised discipline. In one of the institutions on which this book focuses, there were twenty women as opposed to eleven men in mid-1972, a fact that was then noted by the institute's head, who strove to balance out the gender proportion. He was not particularly successful, and the institute continued to have a higher proportion of women until 1989 and even after. Moreover, female ethnographers occupied high positions in various hierarchies, and many of them were celebrated as eminent scholars. I have therefore used the generic feminine everywhere that context allows when referring generally to ethnographers and folklorists.

Fourth, this book is based upon my conversation with three primary sources other than the secondary literature: ethnographers' scholarly works (including the works' materiality), a variety of archival sources, and interviews with forty-seven individuals that I conducted between 2015 and 2023. Thirty of my interlocutors were recruited from those who actively experienced the late socialist ethnography and folklore studies. Seventeen of my interlocutors did not experience the late socialist ethnography and folklore studies, as they began studying anthropology and ethnology after 1989. In this book, I do not quote from all my interviews, but where I do, I anonymise my interlocutor(s). A model reference is P0021: 2, where P0021 is the alphanumeric code representing a single interlocutor (P stands for

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'person' in English and for 'pamětník' – contemporary witness – in Czech). The number after the colon refers to a concrete page of the interview transcript. The full transcripts are otherwise unavailable as they contain a lot of personal information, a necessary price that I paid for my interlocutors' confidence. Only in rare cases do I quote my interlocutors directly without the quotation being connected to any alphanumeric code. However, in such cases, I obtained their approval to do so. The book additionally makes use of a compendium of interviews with ethnographers conducted by Jiří Hlaváček and Hana Bortlová-Vondráková (2018).

Fifthly, this book is silent about the technical staff who secured the daily existence of the institute. This was especially the case for the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which had its economic department, secretaries, photographers, technicians and a chauffeur.

Last, I sometimes directly quote from Czech sources, including the interview transcripts. I have provided the English translation myself. Some key terms are also included in the Czech original in italics in brackets. I also use some of the original Czech terms in italics. These terms usually refer to specific words (e.g. *národopis*), periodicals and book titles.

Notes

1. The term was coined by Katherine Verdery and refers to the three closely connected anthropological schools – the French, British and US ones (Hann et al. 2007: 48–51).
2. The most recent contributions to the discourse come from the recent issues of the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, *Cargo: Journal for Cultural and Social Anthropology* and *Cultural Analysis* (Brković 2020; Godina 2020; Gradišnik 2021; Kürti 2020; Martínez 2020; Skalník 2020; Testa 2020; Woitsch 2021). The articles and edited volumes that constitute postsocialist discourse are many. The following list is by no means exhaustive and includes only English and Czech-language contributions (Bošković and Hann 2013; Buchowski 2004, 2005, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Červinková 2012; Dracklé et al. 2003; Ghosh et al. 2007; Hann 2005, 2009; Hann et al. 2005b, 2007; Holubová et al. 2002; Mihăilescu et al. 2008; Nešpor and Jakoubek 2004, 2006; Sárkány 2002; Skalník 2002a, 2002b, 2005b, 2018a, 2018b; Skovajsa 2008; Woitsch 2011).
3. There are non-gendered surname suffixes, such as the suffix -ů as in Věra Kovářů, who was a Moravian ethnographer. Male or female, you will

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always be a Kovářů. If it was not for her female first name, one would not be able to distinguish the gender, as is the case with English unisex names. Her surname differs from a related surname that has its male (Kovář) and female (Kovářová) versions. Fortunately for the reader, there are no such surnames in this book.

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