

Cold War Radio as Mediator Between Government and Society in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1969

This dissertation explores the relationship between sound and power in postwar Czechoslovakia through an analysis of state broadcaster Czechoslovak Radio's output between 1945 and 1969. By examining the work of a number of popular radio reporters and their written correspondence with listeners, my study recovers the limited but nevertheless real autonomy of journalists in an authoritarian regime, and explores the social capital they possessed. It enriches the interdisciplinary field of sound studies with a concrete historical example of how sound has been employed as a tool for governance, and highlights the investment Central European communist governments made in soft power during the Cold War.

Histories of Cold War radio written by former reporters in the West often contrast the "truth" of their broadcasts to Central Europe with the lies propounded by domestic communist stations.¹ My dissertation, however, draws from the extant audio, correspondence, and radio scripts of prominent Czechoslovak Radio journalists to explore how reporters in a dictatorship negotiated with authorities and listeners to introduce varied perspective into their broadcasts. In so doing, I undermine a neat binary narrative that presents censored media output and its producers under communism as entirely unfree; the polar opposite of a democratic, free press. Rejecting the premise of communications theorists and propaganda scholars who posited the manipulation of listeners by a medium, I follow Michel de Certeau in attempting to reconstruct the meanings mass cultural products might hold for listeners in a socialist regime. I ultimately ask why listeners might feel a connection to broadcasts they themselves knew to be censored and biased.

Outline: Chapter One explores how language politics, programming and transmission jamming were employed by the Czechoslovak authorities and journalists themselves to keep particular voices and stations out of the Czechoslovak ether between 1945 and 1953. In this way, I investigate how radio was used as a means of creating physical borders in postwar Czechoslovakia, as well as how it was harnessed to

¹ See Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom* (University of Kentucky, 2000), George Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy* (Yale, 1997) and the views of Pavel Pecháček presented by Prokop Tomek in *Nejlepší propaganda je pravda* (Lidové noviny, 2014)

manage the country's postwar population – for example by keeping the German language off the air.

Chapter Two focuses on the radio reports of those who – despite these sound barriers – managed to broadcast from beyond Czechoslovakia's borders. I analyze the travelogues made by Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund in Africa and Latin America between 1947 and 1952 and their popular reception, both of which challenge the notion of a closed East opposed to an open West in the first decade of the Cold War. Indeed, while the rhetoric of officials in the Cold War's two centers of power (e.g., Zhdanov and Eisenhower) may have depicted the Eastern bloc as isolated from the outside world, Hanzelka and Zikmund's tremendously popular radio reports from the period championed the possibility to trade with and learn from foreign states and their citizens.

Chapter Three continues to explore radio's relationship to space and populations by considering how emigration was discussed on Czechoslovak Radio in the 1950s, and specifically how such discussions were shaped by the emigrant-staffed broadcaster Radio Free Europe, located in Munich, West Germany. While Czechs and Slovaks could not talk about their relatives abroad with ease, for fear of denunciation, Czechoslovak Radio frequently did. Intriguingly, Czech- and Slovak-language radio coverage diverged sharply in this. While Czech-language broadcasts discussed emigration as a contemporary phenomenon, Slovak programming largely celebrated the reduced need for seasonal migration in the socialist economy. Chapter Four returns to the official voice of Czechoslovak Radio abroad: its foreign correspondents. It examines the work of Věra Šťovíčková, Karel Kyncl and Jiří Dienstbier, who were considered Czechoslovak Radio's reporting elite during the broadcaster's "golden era" of the 1960s, and who insisted upon their international expertise to influence the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia, a state that Western onlookers termed a mere Soviet "puppet."² In one example, Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková, citing interviewee and listener opinion, petitioned officials to cease arms sales to Nigerian government forces during the Biafran War in 1968. When her pleas fell on deaf ears, she criticized the sales on Czechoslovak Radio, leading to protests outside the Foreign Ministry in Prague.³ However, this leverage and social capital had its limits: every one of the reporters mentioned here was dismissed as a result of the role she/he played at Czechoslovak Radio during the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Chapter Five looks at these events, which set the stage for the period of so-called normalization. Their dismissal ended the broadcaster's two decades of prestige, and marked the dawn of the television age, described by Paulina Bren.⁴ In this period, Czechs and Slovaks turned predominantly to television for their entertainment and news.

² For a thorough debunking of this idea, see Philip Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

³ "Čs. letadla nebombardují" in *Svoboda*, April 28, 1968, in box 'Věra Šťovíčková Afrika 1958-1960, 1965, Střední východ 1968.' Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

⁴ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV* (Cornell, 2010)