

Denunciation as Social Practice in the Bohemian Lands, Part I (1938–1945)

Since the aftermath of the Second World War, Czech historians have perceived the denunciation as a product of national betrayal and collaboration of morally weak individuals. This perspective could have followed on from the deeper layers of memory formed already during the Austria-Hungarian Empire. Although Nazism and Stalinism represented governmental systems that ascribed relatively greater importance to denunciation, they were different from other state regimes only in the quantitative extent of their perceptiveness about denunciations and by their extraordinary scale of possible repressive consequences. In my project, I would rather capture the phenomenon of denunciation as a specific kind of social communication between state authorities and other members of the society. State authorities created a demand for denunciations and they were determining the targets and conditions of intended repression at the same time. On the other hand, the denunciators pursued their personal interests and they were creating complex social strategies – no matter how unpredictable the result might have been. In the first part of my paper, I will focus on the explanation of mechanisms that constituted denunciation as a practice within the professional state network that was gathering information on supposed or real security risks. After that, I will analyse particular cases of denunciation that occurred in Bohemian Lands during the pursued period. The focus will be the reconstruction of both individualities of certain involved actors and their social interconnections within the society as a specific social group, or as the case may be within the governmental systems.

Although in the original theory of totalitarianism the development of state oversight of the population has received special attention, we cannot assert with certainty that it was a unique phenomenon compared to the practices of other systems of governance. Denunciation occurs in more or less developed form in all organized societies, with some governance systems creating better conditions for its development than the others do. These conditions are characterized by the existence of consolidated power bodies, recognizing importance and having sufficient executive power to derive real consequences. The Nazi and Stalinist dictatorship represented precisely such systems of government, which gave relatively higher importance to denunciations, distinguishing them primarily in quantitative terms. Denunciation represents a complex phenomenon forming in the power field between the state and society, in the interaction between the controlling and the controlled. Interpretation of such conduct is largely dependent on the varying degree of legal-

ity and general sympathies attributed to the system of governance. In the Czech environment, for example, the appalling idea of the name "udavač" was predominantly associated with the period of the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Indeed, in the context of post-war justice, denunciation was defined by a separate criminal definition, from which it also derives its association with traitors and collaborators.

The specific practice of state supervision, completed in the Soviet case in the state security of the KGB, and prevailing subsequently in the entire Soviet bloc, combines some contemporary scholars with government practice developed early on by the police of European absolutist states. With the development of modern bureaucratic states, whose official agendas are already based on the Weber classical definition based on anonymous structures and formalized rules, state security services are transformed into bureaucratic institutions operating according to their own rules. With the gradual consolidation of their structures, bureaucracy, on the basis of ritualized official acts and conception of reality, becomes a closed mindset. When analysing the social practice of denunciation, it will be necessary to reconstruct the specific rules that state security institutions have created for enemy categories as well as the mechanisms for the subsequent collection and processing of information. The research will also focus on censorship as a social practice between the state and the society by analyzing the process of establishing the estate (normative framework, image of the enemy, everyday life of repression and terror) and supervisory mechanisms (secret police, networking of confidants, and mutual discipline of citizens). Equally important is the concept of censorship as a headlong act that the actors have learned within the scope of the power field and through which they monitored the fulfilment of their own interests – which was true for both the power authorities and ordinary citizens.

In the research project, I set up the denunciation as a specific social practice and practice of state security information services at the same time, connected with it as two basic research fields. In the first research field, I would like to uncover the relationships between the actors – between the controlling and the controlled, their whispering mechanisms in everyday life and the mutual communication as an intentional negotiation with the uncertain outcome between the state and society. From an analysis of loyalties, motivations, and strategies that accompanied the involvement of specific actors of denunciation, I would proceed to evaluate the role of denunciation practices in the stabilization or destabilization of individual power domains. I would like to ask about the general relations of these strategies with the development of forms of state security services and modern bureaucratic states. On the concrete example of the development, continuity and discontinuation of these practices in the Bohemian Lands between 1938 and 1953, I would like to examine the relationship of denunciation to specific mechanisms of social supervision, gathering information and constructing reality within the state security apparatus. Research of denunciation could uncover new perspectives on the development of Czech society from the deep crisis of the Czechoslovak statehood, through the Nazi occupation to the post-war formation of the state security apparatus of the Communist dictatorship.