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Say it in rimes Hits below the belt in Czech village politics

Birgit Müller

The distinctions between right and left, between political objectives that are pro-market or pro-communism are blurred in Czech village politics today. Political fights there are intensely linked to relations of love and hatred dating far back into the communist era and to moral convictions and material interests going beyond conventional political-ideological boundaries. Having 'a communist past' as well as being at present member of the communist party matters in the unfolding struggle for power in the village, but it does not correspond to political convictions generally attributed to communism, such as a critical attitude towards privatization, markets and foreign multinational companies. The intense fight between two factions in the village Mokrovous, that I will analyze here, plays precisely with the political categories of communism and democracy. It is characterized by a complex blend of political traditions and newly emerging interests and preferences mixing them with personal feelings and resentments.

This dynamic finds a pointed expression in anonymous poems written during the term of office of the first mayor of the opposition in the village in 1994. They were produced by both factions and hung out for everybody to read in front of the village administration. These poems will be the starting point for unraveling the complexities of post-socialist village politics and the emotional involvement of the main political actors. I am particularly interested here to examine how the expression of emotions in public space is linked to social and political judgement and political engagement. What does it tell us about the signifi-

cance of emotions in the period of post-communist transformation?

Politics always involve emotions and emotions have played a central and controversial role in political theory. On the one hand they were considered contrary to reason and thus damaging for a reasonable public order. Already in the *Republic*, Plato wanted to ban the poets from the ideal city because they provoked emotions like fear, sorrow, and pity, that should not be encouraged among reasonable people. On the other hand emotions never entirely disappeared from the inquiries in the social and political sciences. Despite rationalization, most authors acknowledged, affective bonds are necessary for creating and sustaining society.

Behavior in public space should be governed by a code that excluded emotions as disruptive. As Albert Hirschman uncovers, between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, during the rise of capitalism - and contributing to its expansion - the notion of passion was replaced by the notion of interest. Emotions and feelings, known then as passions, came to be perceived as noxious to the proper orderly conduct of political and capitalist affairs. While passions came to be associated with unruly human impulses that would lead to social conflict and economic decline, interest became synonymous with rationality and the ability to rein in the irrational (Hirschman 1977). What was initially a normative projection by a number of thinkers including Adam Smith - that 'negative' passions should be checked and replaced by virtues or 'positive' passions and transformed into interest - was

later standardized as the principal assumption of economists and political scientists: humans are rational beings motivated by the pursuit of self-interest (Smith 1976).

However, commitment to social norms necessarily involves emotions. Without emotional involvement man becomes indifferent to his environment (Nietzsche quoted in Habermas 1981: 355). All value judgements contain emotions and those provide the meaning and the orientation to life that allow man to act (Elster 1995: 48). In social movements the political awakening is always also accompanied by an emotional response. Insult and anger at secrecy and political duplicity, an empathetic strive for justice establish connections between personal experiences and events of global consequence (Berglund 1998: 113).

Also, in reverse, social norms influence the expression of emotions and sometimes the emotions themselves. The expression of political commitment to a cause or a conviction, for instance, without the display of a certain degree of emotional involvement makes it appear untrustworthy in the eyes of the public. Or, as Paperman pointed out, the absence of emotions in circumstances that are socially defined as highly meaningful, such as elections or debates on moral principles, can be regarded as an offence (Paperman 1995).

Emotions are thus vital for political life and in particular for a lively democratic system. It is impossible to protect democracy entirely from the antagonisms and even hostilities, that are part of political life (Mouffe 1994: 11). Democratic politics always consists in domesticating potential antagonisms, without eliminating passions or relegating them back to private life. To perceive politics only as a rational process based on negotiation between individuals means to neglect the dimension of power and conflict of the political and thus to be mistaken about its nature (Mouffe 1994: 151). Conflicting emotions and opinions have to be given a forum where they can be expressed and acted out. There is a convention, however, in most democratic societies to avoid

in public political discourse criticism *ad hominem* and the relationship of offence and aggression it establishes (Thévenot 1995: 150).

In the particular context of post-socialist village politics emotionally loaded attacks *ad hominem*, however, play a decisive role. In the sudden power vacuum after November 1989 personal struggles take place for political power, economic gain and career opportunities. At the local level, slander attacks happen simultaneously with appeals for social justice and economic well-being that cut across the ideological divide. Political engagement seems to go together with crusades against others, while disengagement is justified on the grounds that it is necessary in order to live in peace with one's neighbors. Gossip thus becomes an instrument for settling personal and political accounts that are inextricably linked. As even those villagers who do not want to take sides in political conflicts, engage in gossip about their fellow villagers, it is an important tool for defining and redefining the social position that the individual - and especially the prominent one - occupies in the community. Blame-gossip (Svašek 1997: 102) is here inseparably linked to praise-gossip. To what extent, however, does gossip strengthen the social bonds in the village, as Gluckman pretends (1963: 308)? And under what conditions can it serve to enable the village to act together in the face of adversity? Can it dissolve or does it rather exacerbate the tensions and divisions that the post-socialist transformations bring about?

Political morality and economic need

In the period of deep social and political change the Czech Republic has been going through since the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the values advocated by communist ideology, such as, the principles of equality and solidarity and the principle of absolute truth incarnated in the Communist Party, have been replaced in the official discourse of the new de-

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democracy by values such as, liberty, plurality and competition. However this change in the official normative system encounters a complex reality at the local level. Protagonists of the communist regime find themselves seeking protection and support from multinational companies, while opponents of the regime now require regulation of economic activities from the state. Neither of them fits entirely into either of the opposing normative systems.

One of the reasons for this seeming contradiction is linked to the fact that in communist times the official share in the central distribution was never sufficient for the village. It was therefore considered a moral act in the interest of the village and its inhabitants to circumvent the channels of centralized distribution and to pay lip-service to the official discourse while advancing particularistic interests. The official ideology was discredited as a mere chimera, a tool used by the powerful to give themselves the appearance of legitimacy. No village could expect to get a fair share in modern infrastructure if the members of the village council did not succeed in establishing close personal links with bureaucrats and party officials on the regional and national level and to manipulate the regional investment plans to their advantage.

Taking materials and tools from work to use for community projects, using equipment of collective enterprises for special tasks in the community brigades was considered part of a positive engagement for the community and thus highly valued. A close formal or informal link between the local enterprises and the village council was indispensable to advance what most villagers saw as the primary interest of the village, for example the modernization of infrastructure.

The link the communist mayor of Mokrovousy, Stepan, still in power in the beginning of the 1990s, tried to establish with a German company that wanted to build a large cement factory near the village, was in the same pragmatic spirit. Surrounding Mokrovousy, is a nature protected area, the Cesky Kras, famous

among geologists for its geological formations and coveted by foreign investors for its reserves of pure limestone. The factory was to be built next to an extended quarry and limestone factory, that had been exploiting the limestone since the middle of the 1960s. Environmental activists from inside and outside the area objected that the planned cement factory was to accelerate the depletion of the precious limestone resources and to pollute the air. However for the inhabitants of the surrounding villages it also promised an inflow of new resources, jobs and money, in a time when financial resources were extremely scarce at the local level.

The local population was thus divided in their support or opposition to the factory. The communist mayor, Stepan, supported the project wholeheartedly as it appeared like the realization of a dream from communist times when, in the 1970s, a gigantic cement factory had been planned by the Czechoslovak state to tower over Mokrovousy. Nobody had objected to this project at the time. In the 1990s, mayor Stepan set hope in the new project. He expected the foreign company to provide the village with financial help as the new Czech state devolved new responsibilities to the local communities without granting them the necessary financial means. He counted on the foreign investor to assume some of the functions the new Czech state had failed to take over from the socialist one. He wanted the company to finance the gas piping, get the waste water system under way and equip the school with the badly needed pedagogical materials.

The villages around the quarry were poor in spite of the fact that precious limestone was extracted from their territories. The possibilities for action at the local level were limited as only few financial resources were devolved from the state to the local communities. The laws about the extraction of raw materials, that still dated back to communist times, attributed only a small portion of the already low tax on raw materials to the local communities. The

institutional reforms after 1989 did not introduce a democratically elected government at the regional level of decision making as an intermediary instance between national government and the local communities. Financial resources for infrastructure, schooling, distributed at the regional level to the communities, were thus attributed on an entirely administrative basis.

The opponents of the factory project saw the foreign investor and his communist supporters as continuing the old system when decisions about the future of the local communities were taken behind their backs and imposed on them by the bureaucrats in Prague and Beroun. What made the investor especially unpopular, was the fact that he had initially ignored the opinion of villagers and had not consulted them about the investment project. Also the fact that the company had its headquarters in Germany arose suspicion and revived memories of the Second World War, when the Czech main-lands were a German protectorate and its productive capacities were to serve the German war effort. The opponents of the cement factory argued that the Germans were exploiting the beautiful Czech countryside to keep their own 'Bavarian landscapes' intact. 'You would never have such a project in Germany', was an often heard argument. The issue was taken up by the two most important ecological groups on the national level and received wide coverage in the newspapers. A nation-wide petition was circulated against the cement factory, and solidarity concerts were organized around the quarry. The cement factory became known as a symbol for the destruction of the beautiful Czech countryside by foreign capital. The area of Mokrovousy became famous in the Czech political landscape after 1989, for its capacity of determined resistance.

The conflict about the investment project was in full bloom when the nation-wide local elections were scheduled in the autumn of 1994. In the three villages surrounding the quarry the citizen initiatives set up their own

electoral lists and defeated the lists set up by the communist mayors. The majority of inhabitants of Mokrovousy supported the citizen initiative. However, not all of them did so because they had strong ecological convictions.

The two factions that opposed each other in the local elections had their supporters in different sections of the village population. The communist mayor Stepan was supported mainly by the families in the village that had had for generations a tradition of limestone mining and chalk burning or had been manual laborers in agriculture. He had been a tractor driver in the agricultural co-operative before dedicating most of his time to politics and joining the communist party. After 1989 he changed the designation of his profession from tractor driver to 'agricultural technician', an embellishment laughed about by his opponents. He was popular among his supporters as they counted on his well-established relations from communist times to the regional administration in Beroun. To have him as a mayor was seen as a safe bet, as a warranty for continuity in spite of all the upheavals.

The citizen initiative led by Bina was supported by inhabitants from old peasant families and by the newcomers who had settled in the village because of its relative proximity to Prague. They were attracted by the attention the initiative received in the regional and national media. For them it represented the new times when open criticism could be voiced and when the old power structures were shaken and questioned. While they opposed fervently or for the most part moderately the building of the cement factory, their opposition was like an attempt to explore whether opposition and also change were possible in the new political system. The idea of change became an aim in itself and had no tangible purpose attached to it.

When the challengers obtained a five seat majority of the nine seats in the village council they had to choose the mayor among their ranks. This proved a problem as most of them were working during the week outside the vil-

lage. The head of the... came home only on... ing for a company ins... all over the country... choice fell on Brany... two local shops, who... lage as a member of a... laborers - the Black B... thirty years ago.

Mirror images: t

A month and a half af... cember 1994, the first... peared on the notice-b... council and the post of... the newly elected ma... second poem was hur... ing the new mayor. Th

After elections

Stepan's Clan
December 1994

People are staring with... How the people on the... changing
We cannot see a differ... after a while we will ju

What about the mayo... for how long will he b... he does not know
he has remote control

Dear buddy, hold your... so that none of the aff... there are enough troubl... to the joy of the grey e

He will manage to giv... he will manage to play... he will help even the w... he is a big scrounger... He has no good intent... he waits until somethi

lage. The head of the citizen initiative, Bina, came home only on weekends, as he was working for a company installing telephone wiring all over the country during weekdays. The choice fell on Brany, the owner of one of the two local shops, who had arrived in the village as a member of a work brigade of forced laborers - the Black Barons (*cerny barony*) - thirty years ago.

Mirror images: the poems

A month and a half after the elections, in December 1994, the first anonymous poem appeared on the notice-board next to the village council and the post office, fiercely attacking the newly elected mayor. A few days later a second poem was hung up this time supporting the new mayor. The poems read:

After elections

Stepan's Clan
December 1994

People are staring with amazement
How the people on the post of the mayor are changing
We cannot see a difference
after a while we will judge it all

What about the mayor, dear people
for how long will he be laughing
he does not know
he has remote control

Dear buddy, hold yourself firmly in the saddle
so that none of the affairs can move you
there are enough troubles waiting for you
to the joy of the grey eminence (Bina)

He will manage to give you advice
he will manage to play the devil
he will help even the widow
he is a big scrounger
He has no good intentions with you
he waits until something goes wrong

then he will step in, juchhu
we will have eunuchs in command

So there is one good advice for you
learn how to count, learn how to greet,
be correct in the shop
or it will soon happen that your customer will hit you
if you can't be advised
even the impartial Cada can't help you
Tell to yourself: "isn't it in me,
even the Deti Zeme won't help".

Now there will be only a lot of work, little time
there will be no time for poems, before it was
easy to laugh

After elections 2

Binas Clan
December 1994

Communists are staring with amazement
how the people on the post of mayor are changing
a big change it really is
the used-to-be mayor was from the manure

The used-to-be mayor, dear people
already will not be laughing any more
he did not know, he had no idea
he had remote control

He was keeping firmly in the saddle,
he thought that no-one could get him out
he had enough troubles
to the joy of the opposition

He was controlled by the grandfather who
knows everything
but he was an old bear
over the fish pond on a nice hill
he was giving advices in his little house

He had good intentions with him
but he did not know that something will go
wrong

he was a big StB agent
and also a big swine

that's why there is one good advice:

Learn how to not be envious, learn how to
control yourself
the mayor knows very well how to sell
you are worse than him
wake up a bit
even mister Cada will help him
any advice will be good.
Despite your hate
we will have a good time, communists

Now there will be only a lot of work to put
everything back into order
to fix up their work, so that we will be able to
laugh

The two poems 'After elections' and 'After elections 2' are striking in their similarity creating mirror images of mutual personal accusations. They do not refer to any of the political and ideological arguments used in the environmental struggle that sparked off the election result. In spite of what divided ecologists from the communists, they used the same level of language and argument. Their elaborate worldviews seem to disappear behind emotions of hurt pride, envy and hatred. Both sides direct their attacks against the person of the opponent, trying to hurt him in his personal pride and ridicule him in front of the village. Claiming moral superiority the authors of the poems offer incipient advice to the protagonists of the opposing groups. They pretend to speak in the name of the whole village and to know the hidden mobiles of power.

The poem 'After elections' addresses the new mayor as an incompetent unfriendly shop owner manipulated by the head of the citizen initiative, Bina. It is written in the form of an ultimatum engaging the mayor to take an independent stance and to conform to the ways of politeness prevalent in the village thereby

integrating himself into the network of personal relations that govern the village affairs. If he would not conform so the poem menaces, he will be all alone and nobody in the village will support him.

The issues raised are indeed central to the ambivalent position of the new mayor in the village. He arrived in the 1960s as a member of a work brigade in the village that included political opponents and petty criminals declared inapt and untrustworthy for military service. A 'rebel' at secondary school, he had to leave school without a degree and was not allowed to study or go into advanced professional training. Instead of military service he was then constrained to do the worst jobs in the quarry.

He broke with his parents who were convinced communists and married a girl from the village whose family name he adopted to mark the rupture with his family background. After 1990 he became the first private entrepreneur in the village setting up a shop which entered into competition with the co-operative store that the villagers had built in the 1970s. A neighbor and confidant of the equally rebellious but intellectually superior founder of the *obcanske* forum (citizen forum) in the village, Bina, he had stood in his shadow until he became mayor in 1994.

When elected, the mayor Brany was confronted with the difficulty of understanding the decision-making processes and administrative procedures necessary to run the village affairs. The old secretary who had already served the communist mayors was of no great help to him, as she clearly supported the outgoing mayor. She was not prepared to help Brany who had been regarded as an enemy of the state and an asocial element in communist times. Feeling surrounded by enemies, Brany replaced the old secretary by the wife of the head of the citizen initiative Bina.

The main target of the poem is indeed Bina, the outspoken aggressive head of the citizen initiative, also called *Bertik* (small devil) by his enemies. This name was given to him, be-

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cause he was disguised as a devil for a protest action on the 6th of December 1994, when the protesters in costumes of *Mikulas*, devil and angel distributed leaflets against the cement factory. A fervent anti-Communist he systematically answers the phone: "Here anti-Communist center Mokrovousy!" By referring to Brany as an "eunuch in command" his opponents tried in a clumsy way to appeal to his male pride and provoke a split between the two men, that would make the mayor more vulnerable and easier to influence.

The style of the poem 'After elections 2' written as a reply is not more sophisticated in style and contents than the first one. The communist mayor is ridiculed because "he is from the manure", from the farm, and was once a simple tractor driver in the agricultural co-operative. The authors present him as the tool of the secret service (STB) in communist times, though they do not dare to claim that he collaborated knowingly and directly. Such an assertion would have been equivalent of accusing him of a crime that excluded him from holding public office. The term 'Communist' is used as an insult here.

The out-going mayor owed indeed most of what he had achieved in life to the communist regime. Originating from an extremely poor family he had started as a young boy to earn his living as an agricultural laborer on a private farm. The setting up of an agricultural co-operative greatly improved his economic and social condition. The position of a simple agricultural worker was in communist times an honorable one. Workers were - at least according to the official ideology - the leading class of the communist state and encouraged to take up political office. Stepan was thus promoted from a representative on the local council to a councilor on the regional level. For Stepan, the loss of his political position in 1994 meant also loss of the social status he had acquired.

Both poems address the issue of agency and the authors seem to imply that their favorite was brought to power by the majority of the inhabitants, while some manipulating gray

eminence stood in the back of his opponent and pulled the strings. It is the issue of support or isolation in the village community that stands out most clearly in the argument. While the supporters of the new mayor insist on the large support from all sides he can count on and the big changes he is thus bringing about, his opponents depict him as potentially isolated and unable to make a difference.

The troubles of a 'new democracy'

As anonymous expressions of slander the poems are a cowardly form of gossip. The slanderer is safe, as he or she does not even have to draw another person into his/her confidence. These poems would not qualify for what Jim Scott calls 'hidden transcripts', that is discourses that the powerless develop among themselves about and against those in power and that are only voiced behind their backs (Scott 1990). The poems were written by the two factions of the village that were almost equally powerful and whose protagonists were in open opposition to one-another. The fact of keeping the poems anonymous avoided the outbreak of open hostilities. Although everyone in the village could guess who might have written them, the authors could benefit from the doubt and were able to continue to function normally with both factions in the village on a day to day basis. However at the same time a spiral of hate was set into motion as gossip moved, with the open exposition of the poems, into the public space and replaced the exchange of political and practical argument.

The controversy between the two opposing factions of the village, based on personal attacks illustrates aspects of the problems involved in learning how to make a democratic representation work at the local level. The election of 1994 in Mokrovousy, was the second democratic election in the village since 1990 but it was the first one to oppose clearly defined factions and to have been preceded by a

full fledged electoral campaign. Their outcome poses the problem for the losers, who had been 'keeping firmly in the saddle' for over forty years, to come to terms with their loss of power and for the winners to reach out from the high moral ground from which they advanced their criticisms to problem solution on a day to day basis.

The priority of the faction linked to the citizen initiative was a moral renewal in the village through a settling of accounts with the past. The change of regime involved high expectations among those of them disadvantaged by the previous regime. They were therefore morally outraged that communists could still wield power. By co-operating with citizen initiatives on the national level in a committee that studies the files of the communist secret service StB, Brany and Bina wanted to perpetuate the memory of what 'the communists did'. Only if the past was not forgotten could the new political regime become a more open and transparent one. In his fight against the foreign investor and his supporters, Bina resented bitterly that again 'the truth' was covered up and distorted and that deliberately false information was given to the public. Involving media and legal council, the group, that constituted itself as an opposition to the communist mayor denounced his pragmatism as amoral, accusing "The Communists" of seeking alliance with power whenever it served their interest and no matter where it came from. Their accusation proffered against the communist mayor Stepan, however, of having co-operated with the StB agent in the village lacked factual evidence, as many of the StB accusations did. As StB archives were neither complete nor was access open to the public an accusation of collaboration could rarely be entirely proved or disproved. The lists of alleged informants circulated in the beginning of the 1990s created a seedbed for rumors and hearsay emotionally loaded with suspicion and fear.

On the other side, the supporters of the communist mayor Stepan saw the action of the

ecologists against the investors as fanatic, unrealistic, and contrary to the common good. In another poem stuck to the notice board they enticed the new mayor

Keep your analysis to yourself
Don't get the donors involved

Instead of continuing to criticize, so his opponents told the new mayor, it was now up to him to show some concrete results and to solve the dire problems of the village.

Start to build
And thanks to that
Let the waterpipes lead
From nowhere to somewhere

After you start to do something
then it will be hard
Be so severe to yourself
Like you are to others.

His opponents challenged the new mayor Brany on his own high moral grounds. He was to prove that his practice could stand up to his own standards. In reality, however, the new mayor and his supporters seemed strangely disoriented when they finally obtained power. In the face of the need to take action their ideals seemed to be non-operational guidelines. In order to solve day to day problems, that were most of the time trivial and only rarely of a fundamental nature, the mayor would have to step down from his high level of self-righteousness and to sit down with his opponents to negotiate, to achieve compromises and common solutions.

Throughout his term of office however the new mayor continued to inscribe his actions in terms of opposition and moral expiation. High on his agenda, apart from the resistance against the construction of the cement factory, was the retrieval of property formerly owned by the village and now administrated by the regional authorities. The apple of discord became the manor house of the village,

which had been transferred to an old people's home for the handicapped adults. A campaign against the new mayor accusing her of maltreatment and of using the money for the maintenance of the village of befriended ecologists that the control over the village devolved to the ecologists. The issue caused a stir in the village and beyond, when it was reported in the regional media. It motivated the handicapped people who they suspected him of mistreatment. The handicapped people who lived in the manor house for the women working for the village, mostly from the village, as he was discredited and could not judge, after having spoken to many people. Brany proffered at least to some extent that the manor house had been the property of the previous regime. The regional administration around the manor house had a roar in the village, opposing Brany's resignation. The council only ten members in the office, thus prompted the ecological faction.

Brany's term of office was ended by those who opposed him. He had voted him in a leadership was described as uncommunicative. At the decision-making level he had to rely on his wife to become able to handle the simplest of the administrative tasks. It was at a clear disadvantage for the communist predecessor to count on excellent skills at the council in communist

which had been transformed in the 1980s from an old people's home into a home for mentally handicapped adults. Brany launched a campaign against the manager of the hostel accusing her of maltreating the people under her care and of using the funds at her disposal for the maintenance of the building, to the advantage of befriended entrepreneurs. He claimed that the control over the building should be devolved to the exclusive authority of the village. The issue caused outrage in the village and beyond, when it was published in the regional media. It mobilized the parents of the handicapped persons against the mayor as they suspected him of wanting to get rid of the handicapped people in the village and use the manor house for other purposes. The women working for the hostel, who were mostly from the village, also stood against him, as he was discrediting their work. As far as I can judge, after having visited the hostel and spoken to many people about it, the accusations Brany proffered had been motivated at least to some extent by the fact that the director of the hostel had been a communist under the previous regime and influential in the regional administration in Beroun. The scandal around the manor house caused such an uproar in the village, that the four councilors opposing Brany resigned from the village council only ten months after he had taken office, thus prompting new elections which the ecological faction lost.¹

Brany's term of office has been described by those who opposed him and by many who had voted him in as a disaster. His style of leadership was described as authoritarian and uncommunicative. As he was unfamiliar with the decision-making processes on the regional level he had to rely entirely on Bina and his wife to become able to cope even with the simplest of the administrative procedures. He was at a clear disadvantage compared to his communist predecessor who had been able to count on excellent contacts on the regional level as he had been serving on the regional council in communist times. Stepan had been

able to use his old networks of influence as the key positions in the administration were occupied to a large extent by persons who had worked there during the communist period. Good personal relations to the administrators were then and continue to be of crucial importance in order to obtain financial resources, undertake infrastructure projects or get construction permits.

Brany, on the contrary, had to most members of the regional administration a purely formal relationship. He was suffering from what Herzfeld (1992) would call the social production of indifference. Administrators would ignore him, inform him late and make him pass all the procedural obstacles they could possibly apply. They showed him that he was an outsider who was not playing by the informally set rules of establishing links that would be of mutual interest.

The social norms that regulate at least to a certain extent the political confrontations on the local level were controversial in Mokrovousy in 1994. No explicit or tacit agreement existed among the opposing fractions about what would have been an appropriate behavior for members of a democratically elected village council. It is the precondition of a functioning democracy, though, that on the one hand the looser of the elections accepts that the other party has won and continues to work nevertheless for the community. On the other hand, the winner takes into account the opinions of the minority that lost the elections, developing a sense of responsibility for the community as a whole. In Mokrovousy the debate over diverging political opinions and material interests was outweighed by emotions of envy and hatred. After the elections of 1994 the two opposing factions acted as if these had been the last election that were to be held in the village. The idea of an elected office, that could be gained and lost at the whim of the majority, had not yet become part of the political habits. Political power was still seen as a total force not as the result of a communicative act (Arendt 1986: 62). The public space

was thus the home of attacks *ad hominem* and not the forum for an engaged exchange of ideas and opinions. This led many villagers, who had been interested and active in the beginning of the 1990, to withdraw again from the public arena into their private lives observing and commenting on what is going on in the village council from afar.

Since 1995 things have calmed down in Mokrovousy. Stepan is now vice-mayor and shares with the new mayor the salary that the council pays for this job. The wife of Bina has been laid off and now fights against this decision in the courts. The faction opposed to the cement factory no longer participates in collective actions to embellish the village. They are organizing instead their own activities, like cleaning once a year the nature protecting area close to the quarry from rubbish. Brany is an elected councilor, but hardly ever goes to the council meetings whereas Bina tries not to miss a single meeting in order to monitor, as he says, what is discussed in the village council. Uncompromising in his political views he gets actively involved outside the democratically elected structures where more radical positions get prominence in the media. He finds larger networks of supporters on the national and international level for his environmental concerns and remains the trouble maker on the local level who tapes the discussions on the village council and wages legal battles even about trivialities.

Conclusion

In the open confrontation of two value systems and in the reversal of the relations of dominance between them lie the roots for the intense emotional outbreaks after 1989. Norms imposed through the consistent and regular constraints of daily life and social interaction cause persistent fear, and at the same time they convey also a feeling of security (Elias 1976: 325 and 447). When the coercive normative system changes, this fear transforms itself into

aggression and insecurity. The humiliation suffered by the opponents of the communist regime even in aspects of their daily lives affected the future course of political relations and loaded them with strong emotions. The desire for vengeance for past humiliations and the settling of accounts made them look for a public process that would draw a thick line between the victim and those accountable for the injustice and thus reestablish their dignity (Borneman 1997: 103). As long as this public settling of accounts does not take place the undercurrent of hatred remains.

On the other side, the claim of the opponents to the cement factory to have a higher moral standard enraged the communists who had enjoyed the monopoly of morality and truth in society for decades. Their ideological viewpoints being contested, they made the material well-being of the local community their point of moral reference and demonstrated that their opponents were unable to care for it and remained outsiders without the means to influence society.

The political debate *ad hominem*, reflects an aspect of the democratization process, that puts in the forefront feelings of hate and envy and a desire for vengeance. Bringing down the enemy at all costs and by all means then becomes an end in itself. The use of anonymous poems in public space avoids the direct confrontation between persons, but instead of dissipating tensions in public space, it raises them while at the same time preventing an effective exchange of claims and arguments. For a democracy to function effectively, emotions and passions do not need to be suppressed; rather they should go beyond the level of the personal to the plane of general ideas and concepts of the good society. Only if different standpoints about society and the common good are openly expressed and passionately discussed in public without fear of personal reprisal, be it from public authorities or fellow villagers, can a democratic society flourish.

Note

1. If more than one person is called from the village, the person who is called.

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Note

1. If more than a third of the councilors resign from the village council, new elections have to be called.

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