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Tracks of History

A historical narrative analysis on the memory of the First World War and creation of the Czechoslovak state in the 21st Century Czech Republic



Czechoslovak Legion Post - Postage stamp (1919)

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Abstract

Swedish title: “Spår av historia - En historisk narrativ analys av minnet av första världskriget och skapandet av den tjeckoslovakiska staten i Tjeckien på 2000-talet”

The following thesis is an attempt to analyse the concept of narrative in and around retellings of the events surrounding Czechoslovakia during the First World War and how they are subsequently depicted. This is done by primarily looking at three primary source materials: in English Czech historiography from the past 20 years, an autobiography from WWI and a modern video game on the same subject. All these cover in greater or lesser capacity WWI and the Czechoslovak Legion who played a crucial role in Czech history as well as historic memory and the subsequent creation of Czechoslovakia. WWI played an important role as it set the stage that allowed the Czech independence movement to gain momentum and the Legions' contribution in the war gave the cause much needed prestige to work with during negotiations.

The three areas analysed provide a glimpse into how the history surrounding the war and independence has been used in different narratives during Czech history from independence following WWI, the communist regime post WWII, and the post-Velvet Revolution modern Czech state. This thesis in particular focuses on what these narratives are and how these used narratives affect observers and readers' understanding and perception of Czech history and involved events. Some of the results that came of this thesis might not on their own be considered surprising, but provides insight into how prevalent and entrenched certain narratives are and have been in society at large. Older narratives such as those present during the early Czechoslovak republic and later communist Czechoslovakia were much more active in using their shared history in, among other reasons, gaining legitimacy and support. The modern Czech state has up until recently been in a grey area and limbo-like state in regards to their past, especially so when it comes to the communist period and only just in the past few years have opened up to it.

Keywords: Czech, Czechoslovakia, Czech history, Czechoslovak Legion, WWI, Communism, Nationalism

Acknowledgements and foreword

In memory of Magnus, we shall see each other again.

I would like to extend gratitude to both my friends and family for their continued support during the process of writing this thesis. A special thanks is extended to my supervisor whose feedback and suggestions have been invaluable.

1. Introduction

“...the cards were not all on the table and will not be until the passion of this whole situation dies out and the truth is allowed to come forth.”

-Raymond Robins on the Czech uprising, *Bolshevik Propaganda, Hearings* (1919)

The above quote is from a number of committee hearings taking place between September 1918 and June 1919 whose primary purpose was to investigate German but also Bolshevik elements in the United States. This one in particular is related to the unrest caused by the revolution taking place in the former Russian Empire. Not just the revolution however, in the midst of it at all a third actor was trying to make its way across the war torn country in order to reach the eastern coast where transport awaited to take them back home to Europe. This third actor was the so-called Czechoslovak Legion. Originally a volunteer army of Czechs and Slovaks within Russia itself but eventually would compose itself with former prisoners of war and deserters from Austria-Hungary. With the First World War coming to a close for Russia's part, the Legion would come to find itself in the precarious situation where they were essentially a foreign army on another nation's soil, far from their own homeland.

While the mere presence of a foreign army on another nation's soil in itself is not particularly novel, it is what this army came to represent and fight for which is interesting. The Legion's journey across the former empire and their actions along the way became crucial in championing for an independent Czech and Slovak state to be born out of the crumbling Austria-Hungary. In Czech history, the Legion has thus achieved a semi-legendary status as a result and has been prominent in propagandic purposes ever since the First Czechoslovak Republic, through its brush with communism all the way to the dissolution of the combined Czechoslovak state into the modern Czech Republic.

This thesis is in particular interested in exploring the way in which the memory and legacy of World War I, the Legion and, the creation of Czechoslovakia is depicted in Czech historiography and popular memory in order to uncover what narrative or narratives are present. While the case of the Czechoslovak Legion as a template for semi-legendary events throughout history when talking about any countries is not unique in and of itself, it serves as a fascinating example as to how events like it become ingrained in a country's canon and foundational history. It also serves as an even greater example as to why narratives matter when depicting history in any medium as it can drastically alter the popular perception of the

source material and what it tells us. This is doubly so when we look to one of this thesis' sources, the video game *Last Train Home*. Its primary purpose is to provide entertainment, yes, but it also serves to reinforce what the history of the society the product represents in many ways, intended or not.

1.1 Purpose and questions

The purpose of this thesis is to narratively analyse how history is deployed and used in the matter of Czechoslovakia predominantly during and soon after the end of the First World War. Emphasis will be placed upon how narratives are presented in retellings of the events depicted. This will be done by analysing both historiographical material on Czech history, an autobiography, and also by examining more recent digital material such as a historical video game. Through these means, the thesis aims to explore how history and memory is utilised by a society in both academic work and popular culture and how it subsequently is remembered by said society as a whole.

As for why the centrepiece of this thesis is the modern day Czech Republic is due to a number of reasons. A primary of these is that the topic of World War I is once again on the rise in popular interest in the country and the release of a very topical video game proved an excellent opportunity to expand the narrative analysis to other material. In any case, the combined material proved to be excellent firestarters from which questions could be formed. These are as follows:

- What is the overarching narrative on the First World War with emphasis on the Czechoslovak Legion and the creation of Czechoslovakia as depicted in Czech historiography?
 - How does it compare to the narrative told in popular media such as the video game *Last Train Home*?
 - How does it compare from the account provided by *The Lost Legion; a Czechoslovakian Epic*?
- Is there, and if so, what is the historical narrative throughout Czech historiography?
 - To what extent does this retelling of history affect the reader's understanding of the origin and creation of Czechoslovakia?
 - What narrative holds the greatest influence on *Last Train Home* and does it align with any established narrative?

1.2 Sources

The primary sources for this thesis are divided into two categories. The first one is the more traditional type in the form of Czech historiographical material published in English between roughly 2000-2024.¹ This is from a range of authors who in varying capacity have published their research in English as opposed to Czech. The general trend in the material is that the chosen material has been written in English as an original rather than having been translated from Czech. In this I have also chosen to include the memoir *The Lost Legion; a Czechoslovakian Epic* by Gustav Bečvář, first published in English in 1939, a first-hand

¹ The full list of texts used for the purpose of this thesis numbered roughly 25 in total. Of these 25, 16 have been directly cited in one way or another throughout the text. As part of the purpose was to primarily use Czech sources, these were the ones who are ultimately cited, there are however some outliers, primarily Slovak in origin. The complete list of historiographical sources are as follows:
A Heath, Joseph, *Masaryk's Nation: How Czechoslovakia's First President Redefined the Czechs*, 2014
Benes, Eduard, *My War Memoirs*, London, 1928.

Chargos, Maeva, *A Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War*, Central European Papers, 2020

Chargos, Maeva, *Czech Victimhood Nationalism (1900-1920): Between Myth and Memory*, Council for European Studies - International Conference, 2021-05-21

Drábik, Jakub, *A very long shadow. The Munich Agreement in post-war Czechoslovak communist propaganda, ideology and historiography, 1948–89*, 2021

Ebersole, Amy, *Czechoslovakian History and Humor: A Fight Against Forgetting*, 2012

Hálek, Jan, Štofanič, Jakub, *Interpreting the Creation of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Shifts and Changes in the Politics of History and Memory*, *Soudobé dějiny / Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, 2022
Havlíček, Jakub, *History, Memory, and Religion in the Czech Lands*, *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities*, 2015

Holubec, Stanislav, *Golden Twenty years or Bad Stepmother? The Czech communist and post-communist narratives on interwar Czechoslovakia*, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 110, 2014

Hudek, Adam, *Slovak Historiography and Constructing the Slovak National Story up to 1948*, 2006

Hudek, Adam, *The Prague Spring and its legacy. The Slovak perspective*. (not dated, but post-2017)

Hudek, Adam, *Twenty years wasted ? Constructing a narrative of 1989 in Slovakia. In Overcoming the old Borders : beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History*, 2013.

Hutečka, Jiří, *A Missed Opportunity? Czech Historiography of Modern War in the 21st Century*, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2023

Hutečka, Jiří. “‘Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored’: Czechoslovak Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918-1919.” *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 4, 2021

Janík, Zdeněk, *Twenty Years after the Iron Curtain: The Czech Republic in Transition*, 2010

Konrád, Ota, *Post-war Societies (Czechoslovakia)*, 2021.

Kopeček, Michal, *Czechoslovak interwar democracy and its critical introspections*, 2019.

Pabian, Petr, *Inventing the Hussite Nation: Liberals, Catholics, and Protestants in Conflict over Czech National Identity*, 2007.

Rechcigl, Mila, *Czech America in the Struggle for Independent Czechoslovakia*, (either 2019 or 2018)

Sekerák, Marián, *Czechoslovak intellectual debate on the crisis of democracy in the 1930s*, 2022

Šima, Karel, *Who was the Czechoslovak State? A Re-presentation of the State in the Hands of the People*

Šmidrkal, Václav. “THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA.” *Habsburg's Last War: The Filmic Memory (1918 to the Present)*, edited by Hannes Leidinger, University of New Orleans Press, 2018

Vomela, Lukas, *The History Politics in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in Conflict - Competition - Cooperation in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries: The Intricacies of the Polish-Czech Relations*

Žatkuliak, Jozef, Hudek, Adam. *The Dissolution of Czechoslovakia: The Slovak Perspective*. In: *The Czech and Slovak Republics : Twenty Years of Independence, 1993-2013*, 2016

Zeman, Zbyněk Anthony Bohuslav & Klimek, Antonín, *The life of Edvard Beneš. 1884-1948: Czechoslovakia in peace and war*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1997

account and autobiography by one of the Legions many members. At large it is a recollection of the lived experiences of the author, probably but not confirmed, partially drawn from his own war-diary or journal. Gustav Bečvář himself seems to be your typical young man turned soldier. What sets him apart is that he chose to publish his memory and experience of the war to the public. The second is the less traditional and relatively new form of material to be considered a source of history, namely a historical video game of Czech origin: *Last Train Home* published in 2023, walking the fine line between entertainment and a retelling of historical events. The contents of both categories have something in common, they both share a focal point on the memory and perceived knowledge of Czech involvement in World War I and its relevance in the creation of Czechoslovakia.

What all of the used material have in common, other than dealing with Czech history, is that they try to in retrospect “reconcile” the relatively recent history in which the origins of the modern Czech state rests upon; the foundation and origins of Czechoslovakia and its connection to the First World War.²

Clearly, not everything concerning World War I in Czech history will be relevant however as I am looking at the material in the way of how it retrospectively remembers the past. By the time Czechoslovakia was no more, the state had undergone radical changes in its internal politics. Going from a republic after World War I, to a communist regime in the aftermath of World War II, and finally into a republic once more as a result of the Velvet Revolution. Suffice to say, the way history has been written internally has undergone changes alongside its politics. With this in mind, the historical memory has had some time to adjust to both the dissolution and the return from communism. I also wish to look at relatively modern historiography for the most part, where a majority being older would be counterproductive to the purpose.

1.3 Previous research

Historiographical analysis on both the history of Czechia and Slovakia are commonplace and readily available in both their native languages and in English, the latter of which will be used for this thesis. Due to this abundance, a selection has been made that primarily focuses, in whole or partially, on and around the formation of Czechoslovakia, the Great War, the Czechoslovak Legion, and nationalism. An example of this is the Slovak historian Adam Hudek who has written extensively on the subject of Slovak history and the construction of

² A full list of sources will be provided in the end but will otherwise be listed when mentioned.

its national story. Respectively, on the Czech side, there are historians such as Jiří Hutečka who for example has written about what he calls a “missed opportunity” in the historiography of war in Czech history. He claims that scholarship on the subject seems to be stuck in place “...rarely venturing beyond a mere description of key events of ‘everyday experience’.

Intuitive Alltagsgeschichte or positivist, often heroizing biographies written from the Czech national perspective, prevail.”³

Beyond this there is also research on the subject of the Czechoslovak Legion itself. The previously mentioned Victor Fic wrote extensively on the subject during the past century. Two of his most important pieces of research are the similarly named books *The origin of a conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovak Legion, February 1918-May 1918 : a study in the Russian Civil War* published in 1958 and the more rigorous *The Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovak Legion : the origin of their armed conflict, March-May 1918* published two decades later in 1978.⁴ Both of these titles, as their respective titles suggest, deal with the onset and origin of the conflict with the bolshevik regime that defined their odyssey across the continent towards Vladivostok. Building upon Fic is another frequently mentioned name, John F. N Bradley, whose most important contribution to the field is his doctoral dissertation, written in French, which has since been rewritten somewhat and republished in 1991 in English as *The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914-1920*.⁵ While an important addition in building onto Fic, his work from 1991 has met some criticism however. Evan Mawdsley at the University of Glasgow in his review directs critique towards the meagre historical background provided which impedes readability to anyone not overly familiar with the subject while also remarking the lack of any real new contribution to the field due to its similarity with his pioneering efforts earlier in his career. The earlier work in question, *La Legion Tchecoslovaque* (1965), is written in French and would, according to Mawdsley, have been a greater contribution if it had been translated to English.⁶ While not specifically adding anything new, Bradley’s *The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914-1920* is in all but name

³ Hutečka, Jiří, A Missed Opportunity? Czech Historiography of Modern War in the 21st Century, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 36:3, 2023, 271-293, DOI: 10.1080/13518046.2023.2288977 , pp 279.

⁴ Fic, Victor M. *The Origin of a Conflict between the Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovak Legion February 1918-May 1918 : A Study in the Russian Civil War*. Chicago: Czechoslovak Foreign Institute in Exile, 1958.

Fic, Victor M. *The Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovak Legion : The Origin of Their Armed Conflict March-May 1918*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1978

⁵ Bradley, John F. N. *The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914-1920*, East European Monographs, Boulder, 1991.

⁶ Mawdsley, Evan, Review of *The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914-1920*., by John F. N. Bradley, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 52, no. 3, pp, 619–620, 1993, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2499749>.

said translation, thus reaching a wider audience both within and outside of academic circles. Despite its flaws, Bradley's work is extensive and, quoting Mawdsley, is "important" to the subject.⁷

Furthermore there is also previous research on the matter of history, memory, and narrative. Just to give some insight into the field, I would like to mention two examples and what they are about.

First there is *Why remember? Representations of the past in non-fiction films: fabrication, re-construction and interpretation of the collective memory(s)* written by Roberto Arnau Roselló is a study of documentary film first and foremost but with a niche towards interpretation of the past in the audiovisual medium of non-fiction events. Of particular note here is its concluding remarks regarding memory in this context. When placed outside of its otherwise strict academic environment, memory and its production has been emancipated in some regard: "constructed collectively, bringing together subjective voices around a story with no bounds on its interpretation."⁸

Furthermore there is also the 2009 book *Nations and their Histories: Constructions and representations* by Susana Carvalho and François Gemenne. In the book, the authors asked the question whether or not how important both the past and the writing of national histories is to modern nations. With this question they wished to highlight how the past is, real or imagined, to shape "national maps of identity."⁹ In summary, the primary argument of the book is that the past is crucial in shaping national stories. The past does not need to be real, it can be imagined and socially constructed to influence national histories and identities significantly.

1.4 Disposition

Going forward with this thesis an outline of the theoretical as well as the methodological framework will be provided in regards to what is being used and how it is being applied in practice. Subsequently an historical background covering the general prehistory of the thesis' subject matter with a focus on the build-up to WWI and Czech independence movements. The analysis will then be divided into three sections, each one focusing on different parts of

⁷ Ibid, pp. 619.

⁸ Arnau Roselló, Roberto, *Why remember? Representations of the past in non-fiction films: fabrication, re-construction and interpretation of the collective memory(s)*. *Studies in Documentary Film*, 16(1), 2022, pp. 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2021.1877388> , pp 65.

⁹ Carvalho, Susana. & Gemenne, François (red.), *Nations and their histories [Ebook] Constructions and representations*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, pp. 289-290.

the source material used. This will be followed by a summary and a dedicated discussion regarding results.

1.5 Theoretical framework and methodology

The chosen framework for theory and methodology can in part be found in the aforementioned works of Smith and Cubitt respectively. I will however also borrow theoretical approaches from the Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson.¹⁰

1.6 Nationalism and national memory

Beginning with Anthony D. Smith, who in this thesis is credited with laying the foundation for theory on nationalism but also providing insight into the role nationalism has in the construction and reconstruction of nations using a common ethnic past. Smith argues that nationalism is one of the most powerful and influential phenomena in the contemporary world. Of interest for my purposes are his discussions made around primarily ethnic myths and symbols but also ethno-history and its uses. Before going further with these however, I first wish to outline what Smith identifies as the core doctrinal tenets of nationalism and how to define them:

1. The world is divided into nations, each with its own particularities and characteristics that defines them and their peoples.
2. These nations are the sole source of political power in the world.
3. Loyalty to the nation is paramount.
4. Real freedom can only be achieved through the machinations of the nation
5. Global peace is only achievable through free nations.

Smith further defines “nationalism” not as a general sentiment but as: “a definitive ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, identity and unity of a social group, some of whose members deem it to be an actual or potential nation.”¹¹ In turn, the nation Smith would call a social group going by a definitive name with common history, collective memories, and culture which in turn has proceeded to occupy an historic territory

¹⁰ The areas in which Karlsson is active have also been touched upon by the likes of Jörn Rüsen.

¹¹ Smith, Anthony D., *Myths and memories of the nation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 188-189.

and possess a single entity which guarantees legal rights and duties for all members.¹² This can be expanded further upon by separating nationalism further into the distinction of ethnic and territorial nationalism. These are by no means mutually exclusive and often coincide with one another.¹³

This core of nationalism that Smith outlines is the baseline from which nations people orient themselves to varying degrees. Claims to hegemony over land based on descent, *Jus Sanguinis*, and of historic habitation, *Jus Soli*, are not uncommon. It serves to legitimise identity and belonging. Smith mentions how, for example both the Romans and later the Franks claimed Trojan descent to legitimise their respective claims to rule both land and people.¹⁴

Returning to the aforementioned ethnic myths, symbols, and ethno-history, Smith outlines how the latter first ethno-history in origin is highly dependent on the former two. Myths concerning origin and how the group developed into a singular entity, a people, is highly relevant as it sets the stage for an ethnic account of history.¹⁵ With this stage set, stories, myths, and memories concerning a so-called “Heroic Age” defined by valorous acts against what commonly is a “foreign yoke” and how this was overcome. Heroes in national stories serve as models of virtue. They symbolise a golden age and serve to dramatise the uniqueness of the people's past.¹⁶ This can both precede and be preceded by similar myths, such as one of decline or why a “fall” occurred in the national story, such as oppression or loss of self-rule.¹⁷ Equally it could be a myth of reconstruction which is concerned with how a return to form occurs and a move towards the days of old unfurled.¹⁸

Mentioned also, Smith provides insight into what role nationalism has in the construction and reconstruction of nations. Smith outlines two stances of approach for this, either the nation is an artefact of time immemorial that simply is waiting to be uncovered by archaeologists and historians, called the geological approach. The other approach, called gastronomical, is that it is a more “recent artefact” created by popular imagination in part by the media and thus a creation of social engineering.¹⁹ The latter argues that a nation's history is a “cobbled together” collection of historical resources that explains the modern nation and

¹² Smith, Anthony pp. 189.

¹³ Smith, Anthony, pp. 190.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 59-60.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 63-65.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 65-66.

¹⁷ Ibid pp. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ Ibid pp. 163-164.

justifies its present. Smith exemplifies this through an example of a multi-ethnic society: “they often select elements with diverse origins, particularly if, as so often happens in modern societies, the state's boundaries include various ethnic communities.”²⁰ The former approach views a nation's history akin to strata in the earth. Generations upon generations are built upon with political and cultural remnants that make up the foundation of the modern nation. In this view, similar to the later mentioned Geoffrey Cubitt, the contemporary is a product of past experiences that have accumulated over time.²¹ One example Smith provides for this was the Indian resistance to British rule in 1905 where a resistance leader turned to Hindu history for inspiration in his resistance against the British. Going by the geological approach, they rediscovered a layer of history in the strata of time allowing it to influence their understanding of the temporary struggle. Smith argues that it is nigh impossible to understand modern India without factoring in the struggle against the British and the strata before accumulating a complete understanding of Indian history.²²

As for why Smith's framework is included, its relevance lies in its overall usefulness in not just defining what the otherwise unpredictable and, to be blunt, whimsical nature that is the *feeling* of nationalism. Smith manages to grasp this fleeting and abstract notion in a way that makes sense when applied in practice, i.e how it manifests itself in say literary works and history. When applied alongside the narrative method of analysis, it becomes easier to see not only nationalism in writing, but also how it affects the greater story being told in the given text.

To complement Smith I have also taken to using elements from Geoffrey Cubitt's *History and Memory*. One of his main arguments is that history is the social memory of society, and history as an academic discipline is geared to the production and extension of this memory.²³ This is explained through the example that the present produces the past, through an effort of the creative or analytical imagination in the sense that a memory is something reminisced upon after something has already happened. To quote Cubitt;

The past, in this understanding, is not the totality of all past happenings - for this is a totality we can never hope to apprehend - but the past that we have a 'sense' of, the past as it exists in current awareness, a past constructed through the complex mixture of reflection and

²⁰ Ibid pp. 165.

²¹ Ibid pp. 171.

²² Smith, pp. 172.

²³ Cubitt, Geoffrey, *History and memory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, pp. 26.

recollection, research and imaginative representation, that allows us the feeling of conscious retrospection.²⁴

With this it is surmised that the past makes sense of the present, both in the way that we look upon our current situation but also *how* we look to the past. With this in mind, Cubitt argues that history is in many ways a resource for society. Much like in the way any one individual uses memory as a resource to orientate themselves, society as a whole draws upon it in a similar way.²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm once wrote that “historians compile and constitute the collective memory of the past.”²⁶ To this, Cubitt theorised that what he meant by this is that history is the vehicle through which societies accumulate relevant practical knowledge to aid in the present.²⁷

Additionally, Cubitt leads a discussion on the nature of history. If we follow the line of Maurice Halbwachs, who argues that collective memory, usually oral, ends where written history began. If this is the case, history as we know it is a phenomenon is but an artificial creation. “It seeks to repair the effects of memory's breakdown, but can never reproduce the kind of connection to the past that memory itself embodies.”²⁸ To this, Cubitt argues that history aspires to be universal and monolithic in nature whereas things such as collective memory exist in the plural. History attempts to unify the scattered memory of the past into a collective and thus common past.²⁹

This is where I wish to diverge somewhat from Cubitt. He writes that history acts as a preservative against oblivion where we safeguard our past from the fickle machinations of the common memory. To this he also adds that history is a collection of what is and is not remembered. It is not a whole mass, it is but a selection of the past.³⁰ Does this however not place history as a byproduct of collective memory? This “written history” that Cubitt speaks of is also no longer limited to just academics. Written history extends to masses and is expressed and memorialised in all different forms of media, of which a video game and a memoir are two of them relevant for this thesis.

Similarly to Smith, Cubitt’s framework is a valuable analytical tool when combined with narrative analysis but also Smith’s framework itself. Where Smith aids in grasping the

²⁴ Cubitt, Geoffrey, *History and memory*, pp. 27.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, E. J., *On history*, 2nd impr., Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1997, pp. 25.

²⁷ Cubitt, Geoffrey, pp. 41.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 43.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.

notion of nationalism in writing and so forth, Cubitts' relevance lies in how it is practically applied in society at large. If history is a resource in the way Cubitt argues, said resource is prone to a modicum of interpretation, be it highly influenced by a nationalistic take on history or otherwise. The same historical material can be used in unfathomably different ways depending on how this resource is remembered and applied in practice.

1.7 Use of History and *Historiekultur*

Klas-Göran Karlsson who, among other things, is credited with introducing the concept of *historiebruk*, roughly translated to “use of history, into the Swedish education system. I will make use of Karlssons framework regarding the use of history in the analysed material. A central analytical tool used by Karlsson is *historiekultur*, meaning the culturally hegemonic way in which a society as a whole in broad strokes understands and appreciates history.³¹ A good example of this is something the historian Chris Holman makes in regards to Machiavelli and Florence. He refers to something he calls the “conservative reading of Rome,” which in essence was the domineering way in which history was understood and which also helped uphold the current power structure of the Florentine Republic.³² Karlsson further defines *historiekultur* as a phenomenon wherein history as a product is produced and generally understood similarly by its recipients in any society.³³ This can be viewed as a matter of control or hegemony over history as a media as it dictates what and how it is depicted and replicated. Karlsson writes that:

Historio-cultural processes can be described as strategies for asserting historical values. The most basic of them is historicisation. This could mean that a phenomenon that has not previously been understood historically is placed within a historical framework.³⁴

Karlsson mentions how this is not limited to new findings or the like of which has never been put beneath the magnifying glass. Older or otherwise previously researched topics can be reevaluated in this manner in order to exhume or extract value.³⁵ In the case of this thesis where World War I in Czech history is centrepiece, it is of the latter, older and well

³¹ Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (red.), *Historien är närvarande: historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, 1. uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2014, pp. 57-85.

³² Holman, Chris. "Machiavelli's Constellative Use of History." *Theory & Event* 19, no. 2 (2016) muse.jhu.edu/article/614369.

³³ Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (red.), *Historien är närvarande*, pp. 65-66.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 66. Personal translation.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 66.

researched topics. Despite this, as the frame of history is constantly reevaluated, its meaning and depiction differs over time.

What Karlsson practically provides in the case of this thesis is an explanation how a continuous stream of self-replicating of historical understanding helps shape society as a whole when used, knowingly or unknowingly in society. While similar to Cubitt it is also distinctly different in the sense that it handles more directly how this “culture of history” is consumed in a society and affects a persons sense of history. This consumption comes in many forms, most prominently in societies, in the form of movies and more recently video games.

1.8 A narrative approach to history

To make the analysis of both text and a video game feasible in practice methodologically speaking, two separate lines of method will have to be employed. The first will be more well known as it will be a qualitative text analysis with a focus on narrative. As the name alludes to, narrative analysis dissects text in a certain way, by looking at the narrative. By this it is meant that by looking how a text narratively is structured and how it twines fact and fiction to make sense of past and present reality. A good analogy for this is how stories depicting “good versus evil” are spun into real events thus putting them in a more easily digestible position in contrast to the pure unappealing fact. If we are to believe the implications of the “narrative turn”, people are narrative creatures. This means that as individuals and as a society we are constantly being shaped and reshaped by narratives, thus also changing our perception on matters surrounding us. To clarify this somewhat: a narrative can be viewed as a power through which understanding of the world is regulated.³⁶ Alternatively, it could be defined as an account of something which has occurred, real or otherwise, organised in such a way that it constructs a story.³⁷

It could be argued that humans in general are predisposed to the narrative mode of viewing the world and its story. All cultures in varying capacity have through generations immemorial brought with them stories from the past, either orally or written, all making some sense of the past through a narrative. While narrative analysis lost favour among historians for a period, it has since the narrative turn regained some ground as a viable tool for analysis.

³⁶ Robertson, Alexa, Narrativanalys, in Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina (red.), *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 3., [utök.] uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2012, pp. 219-221. 224-225.

³⁷ Robertson, Alexa, pp.. 229.

One of its perks useful in this thesis is the renewed interest in what is commonly known as transmedia storytelling. The idea is that a “collective intelligence” is formed through the trade of knowledge and experience via multimedia such as video games, movies, radio, books etc, etc.³⁸ But in order to properly be able to utilise this narrative method, I believe it is prudent to be aware of the intricacies of a narrative. In 1928, Vladimir Propp identified what he called *functions* while analysing Slavic folk sagas. These functions are in essence actions and their consequences as carried out by the actors in the story. These functions could be things such as “origin situation,” “acts of heroism,” and so on.³⁹ These functions would, in theory, become more clear and visible by employing the narrative method. This is attributed to that by searching for a narrative, we look for the human input in the material. “To look for the particular and specific” is one way of wording it.⁴⁰ By looking for this input at length, we may also be able to discern patterns in regards to how widely spread they are and how often they occur. Through this mode, one can acquire insight into how in this case a culture or society remembers their history through narrative. “Some histories may only have one narrator; others could be pluralistic.”⁴¹

I propose that these functions Propp identified could be employed in a similar fashion to how Smith identified myths prevalent in ethno-history. These myths and functions would in this case be two sides of the same coin. In non-academic literature this could be identified as literary tropes used to bring the narrative in a certain direction while also giving the story meaning. This would further be operationalised by including Cubitt and his reasoning surrounding how the past makes sense of the present. Combine and further this end by employing Karlssons theory on *historiekultur* and how the past is generally understood in society at large.⁴²

Smith, Cubitt, and especially Karlssons frameworks become highly relevant when employed alongside this method. Any given narrative, as mentioned above, is affected by its narrator(ors). Be it fictitious or real, the story, direction, results, and understanding of said results will be up to said narrator to make sense of. Regardless of individual, we are all equally susceptible to clarify events in such a manner we understand them which in itself is a direct result of the historical culture we live in and how history is generally understood and

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 222-223.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 227.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 226. Personal translation of citation.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 234.

⁴² Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (red.), *Historien är närvarande: historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, pp. 70-85.

replicated at any given time. Cubitt's resource is affected by the notion that is a people or nations history as defined by Smith to the extent that it becomes the dominating *historiekultur*. All this ultimately affects the given narrative of retellings and historical accounts.

1.9 Approaching and analysing video games as history

The second method employed will turn to both Spanos and Chapman, but Chapman in particular as he has constructed a framework for actual practical analysis of a video game meanwhile Spanos provides an approach to how a game can be viewed as a source. As mentioned previously, Chapman provides the terms framing narrative and ludonarrative. As to not fall into repetition, let us simply remind ourselves that the former is the set narrative while the latter is the emergent player narrative.⁴³ Having these in mind while exploring narrative is imperative as the previously mentioned "particular and specific" can and will be different than a more traditional and static source material. Not just through the ludonarrative affected by player input but also through the developers (or developer-historian as Chapman puts it)⁴⁴ vision and portrayal of the narrative via the framing narrative. For example, Chapman points out that developers often reward a certain narrative "outcomes they wish to promote and punish actions that conflict with this interpretation."⁴⁵ By this, he further argues that by applying these rules to the narrative, the developer can still push the narrative in their preferred direction while still allowing for agency through the ludonarrative. Keeping this in mind it should be noted that this is not too dissimilar from how Smith portrays ethno-history and national narratives. Both of these productions are historical in nature in the sense that they portray the past. But their portrayal is heavily influenced by both the individuals, historian or otherwise, interpretation of the past, and the collective societal interpretation of history. Both of these factors invoke the earlier mentioned concepts of historical consciousness and *historiekultur*.

With this in mind, it should be somewhat clear that if we turn to what Spanos argued for, namely that culture is not only expressed in games and play, but it emerges from them, we should consider a video game as an expression of its cultural context.⁴⁶ This means that

⁴³ Chapman, Adam, *Digital games as history [Ebook] how videogames represent the past and offer access to historical practice*, Routledge, New York, 2016, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lund/detail.action?docID=4523750>. pp. 119-121.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 40.

⁴⁶ Apostolos Spanos, *Games of History: Games and Gaming As Historical Sources [Ebook]*, Routledge, 2021, pp. 3.

within the scope of this thesis, the video game *Last Train Home* shall not be regarded as a lesser source as it is not necessarily the authenticity of the material that is interesting, but how it portrays the history. This applies somewhat similarly to all material used for this thesis to some extent. This is not to say that historical authenticity and accuracy is to be thrown under the bus. Context and actual historical background shall be provided and also mentioned alongside the analysis of portrayal and interpretation of the historical narratives.

To summarise the methodological approach of this thesis; I aim through the use of a combination of narrative analysis on both digital and analogue material to break down the overarching narrative that they hold in common. This in regards to national myth and memory as presented at large through Klas-Göran Karlssons *historiekultur*. Certain attention will be given to how I approach the digital material through Spanos framework on digital sources, and further how to analyse narratives in these sources via Chapman.

Since we also have a video game to deal with in this analysis, I will turn to the framework which primarily Chapman but also Spanos have developed. Beginning with Chapman I will look at what he argues are the two primary forms of narratives in historical video games: the framing narrative and the ludonarrative.⁴⁷

The first of which is the narrative given to the player, remaining wholly unaffected by player choice. This is most simply described as the story the game feeds the player much in the same way a movie or book does. It cannot fundamentally be altered. Chapman exemplifies this via another video game: “in Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare the framing narrative is the requirement for you and a computer-controlled character partner to crawl and sneak your way through the irradiated farmlands of Chernobyl in order to assassinate an arms dealer.”⁴⁸ The second is the narrative that emerges through player input and choices presented in the narrative. This is where video games as in this case a product is fundamentally different, As mentioned, this ludonarrative is where the player through input and choice can within the broader framing narrative change the course of the game to a lesser or smaller extent. The ludonarrative in the situation given in the example above is in this case the very actions and input the player provides to make progress within the situation presented to them in the game.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Chapman, Adam. *Digital Games As History : How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lund/detail.action?docID=4523750>. pp. 119.

⁴⁸ Chapman, Adam, pp. 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 121.

Chapman further introduces the concept of *lexia*. Lexia is most easily understood as a charged player input created in the ludonarrative. It can be something simple as merely observing something actively or overhearing a conversation. It can also be something more complex which Chapman equates to an actor using a prop, gesture, or line of dialogue. The bottom line is that the players' agency is needed for this to occur.⁵⁰

As mentioned, in addition to Chapman I will also turn to Apostolos Spanos. This especially to help understand a video game as a source of historical knowledge. In his introduction, Spanos opens by asking a rather simple question: “I would like to open the book by connecting the concept game to our very lives. Why is it so that we tend to call a lot of our activities games?”⁵¹ Spanos goes on to argue that “it is not only life that presents striking similarities to games; the same does culture. This is probably the main reason why a number of researchers, from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, have claimed that culture is not only expressed in games and play, but it emerges from them.”⁵² To this I would like to add the following question: Could the same then not be said for history in general if we look at more technologically sophisticated games presenting a narrative? If we take into account what Spanos writes that Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel have argued, namely that “games and their equipment are social and cultural phenomena” which “reflect (and influence) the values of societies.”⁵³ Spanos goes on further to argue that because of this games are themselves first-hand witnesses of social and cultural development.⁵⁴ In the case of this thesis, I will look at it somewhat differently. I will look at the development in written / expressions of history, but Spanos’ point still stands.

This is further strengthened by an example from the French Revolution that Spanos brings to the table. An ordinary deck of playing cards has, as should be known by most, cards depicting royal figures such as kings and queens. During the revolution however, these images were replaced by other figures of symbolic force. For example, Rousseau replaced one of the kings. The same is true for the rest of the cards. Now, this was done in a deliberate move to communicate political rhetoric, but regardless of motive, it speaks for how important visual and symbolic value can be in something so widely appreciated such as a game.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Chapman, pp. 123-124.

⁵¹ Apostolos Spanos, *Games of History: Games and Gaming As Historical Sources [Ebook]*, Routledge, 2021, pp. 2-3.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 3.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 4.

⁵⁵ Spanos, pp. 89.

Spanos further also attributes games as a bearer of cultural history, not too dissimilar to how historians record memory as history proper. This is exemplified through the Sami board game *Dablot Prejjesne* (which means simply “board game” or “gameboard”). Spanos explains how the game is supposed to reenact the battles between the Sami people and Swedish peasant settlers who were trying to establish themselves in the Sami areas of what is now northern Sweden. The game in essence thus became a medium that keeps the cultural memory and identity of the Sami people alive.⁵⁶

A similar case could be made about any game regardless of form as long as it falls into this category of bearer of cultural history. *Last Train Home* as is the case in this thesis, most definitely falls into this category as it, similarly to *Dablot Prejjesne*, ultimately reenacts a dramatised version of events crucial and important to Czech history and national identity. It also serves the purpose of keeping that memory alive for future generations displaced far into the future and thus distant from the original events.

1.9.1 Thoughts, considerations, limitations, and critique

I have primarily looked for papers, books, and research analysing primarily Czech understanding of their own history with special attention to material concerning the years 1914-1920 and the early Czechoslovak state but also its dissolution. Here the issue of translated material is more relevant than previously. Research and material from before the year 2000 is to a lesser extent available in English than newer publications. The working theory however was that the impact of this would be lessened somewhat due to what could be attributed to what the Czech historian Václav Šmidrkal wrote in his essay *The First World War in the Czech and Slovak Cinema*. Therein Šmidrkal mentions how from 2014 and onwards interest in particularly the Great War and Czechoslovak history has surged. This was due to a broadcast hosted by Vítkov National Memorial that “urged the Czech government to fund a new feature film about the Czechoslovak Legionnaires, Legionaries in this case is the volunteer Czech force who fought on the side of the allies. The speaker was Colonel Jaroslav Vodička, Chairman of the Czech Union of Freedom Fighters who argued that:

We lack a film in our cinema that would show the audience the heroic campaign of the Legionnaires and their fundamental influence on the recognition of Czechoslovakia. It is one of the brightest points in our modern history, deserving of a high-quality film adaptation. It

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 53.

would be a great thing for 2018's hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War and would pay tribute to our brave ancestors.⁵⁷

With the hundredth anniversary now behind us and its memory having had time to digest, it would be easy to assume that there would be an abundance of, assumedly, Czech research surging from this. From what I can tell, the interest has risen to an extent, especially if we look at the material available to us in English. This also demarcates where I draw the line for most of the historiographic material. With the exception of Victor Fic's *The Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovak Legion* and Bečvář's account, all material of this nature will have been published after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Most material used will be from at the very least from the year 2000 and onwards up until 2024. Originally this material would have extended to Slovak historiography as well, but upon going through the Slovak material I found its focus to be of a different nature and thus not really applicable to my case. Some outlier Slovak perspective might find its way into this for the purpose of context and nuance but it will not be part of the primary material used.

As with any source material available for any purpose, I have to position myself to be critical of its nature rather than just blindly diving right into it. While I have to be aware that neither the historiography, memoir, nor the game are perfect in their representation of the past and are prone to flaws and errors, I also have to keep in mind that it is not necessarily the "truth" in the broadest sense I am after. What is sought is instead the shared understood "truth" and knowledge of the past. While each of these mediums have a different purpose in essence, they all share this factor of conveying a certain knowledge, a legacy of the past.

There is also the matter of the memoirs and the author on a deeper level that needs some addressing. The most obvious of which is the language of which has been read for this thesis. The memoir itself was originally written and published in Czech (date unclear) but first published in English 1939 which is the one used here.⁵⁸ An argument can be made when looking at something so literally charged as narrative that the language is important. When an account is transferred from one language to another certain aspects or nuances are lost,

⁵⁷ Šmidrkal, Václav. "THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA." *Habsburg's Last War: The Filmic Memory (1918 to the Present)*, edited by Hannes Leidinger, University of New Orleans Press, 2018, pp. 69–92. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22zmb1c.7>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2024. pp. 69.

Speech by the President of the ČSBS, Jaroslav Vodička, given October 28, 2014 at Vítkov in Prague, <http://www.ceskenovinky.eu/2014/10/29/projev-predsedy-csbs-jaroslava-vodicky-predneseny-dne-28-rjna-2014-na-prazskem-vitkove/>.

⁵⁸ Despite my efforts, I have failed to find the original as much as mentioned in relation to the 1939 edition.

hurting the account at large. While this fact has not alluded me, I would argue that the narrative as a whole, its impression and greater purpose is not something that can be classified as lost in translation in the same way individual words or isolated sentences can. Bečvář's account and retelling of events is not a lesser source in this regard when compared to a Czech original. With this in mind however, it would have been preferable to read a Czech original had I had the opportunity and fluency in Czech.

As mentioned there is also the matter of the author himself as a source. What makes his account special or relevant to take into account? At large Bečvář's account is highly dependent on his own point of view of things as events unfolded which makes him unreliable as a source. However, since Bečvář became one of those that lived past the war, able to write their memoirs, he also proves to be an invaluable insight into the mind of a common soldier. While he has his biases towards Austria and a clear patriotic outlook on the actions of the Czechoslovak Legion, that adds a certain level of depth to his account, as it is how he understood the war in which he was fighting. Granted he has some degree of hindsight as certain pieces of news and information about the war at large or politics would not exactly be readily available to the common soldier at a moment's notice. Regardless, Bečvář serves as an early entry point into the earliest of views, opinions and understandings of the war from which later academic work draws from. The same can be said about the game used in this thesis, *Last Train Home*. Its developers, much like Bečvář all have a somewhat common understanding of the world they depict in their game. This understanding is affected in how they view history and which interpretation or narrative they are disposed towards.

With this in mind I believe Bečvář and his account should not be regarded as a source in the matter of what factually happened and why, but rather to serve as an example of insight for the common soldiers and their beliefs and see how this has been interpreted in later pieces of work.

2. Historical background

In order to evaluate in any capacity the general narrative and memory of the First World War in Czech history, a general background stretching back roughly to the middle of the 1800's is needed. Much of what sets the stage for what shall be discussed further finds its origin from this point in history.

2.1 Austria-Hungary, the Revolutions of 1848, and World War I

The Habsburg led Austro-Hungarian Empire was at the onset of the First World War one of Europe's, if not the most ethnically diverse, state on the continent. Not attempting to make an exhaustive list all peoples, the heartland of Austria was dominated by German-speaking Austrians, the rest of the empire was demographically dominated by the Hungarians to the east, Czechs and Slovaks to the north, and Slovenes, Serbs, and Croats to the south. While there were pockets of ethnic groups of i.e Austrians in the Czech lands and so forth and other smaller ethnicities, these were numerically the largest ones within the empire.

Other than being ethnically diverse, entering the 1900's, Austria-Hungary was also territorially speaking one of the largest states in Europe. In no small part due to its sheer size and diverse populace, combined with a conservative stance on governance, this had over the past century led to popular uprisings centred on and around the question of liberal reform and national independence. Out of these uprisings, the so-called "springtime of the peoples" during the revolutionary year 1848 left the greatest legacy.⁵⁹

The year of 1848 saw widespread popular uprisings and revolutions spread across the European continent. Tracing its own ideas back to the first French Revolution 1789, the dominant ideals of these revolutions can be found in the ideological framework of liberalism and nationalism. These two ideas combined in practice had made political participation at all levels possible. It also asserted the idea and principle that all sovereignty resides in the nation, in other words, its people.⁶⁰ While the first French Revolution ultimately failed and the old European order was restored by the Congress of Vienna, the genie was already out of the bottle so to speak. Attempts to quell further dissent was however made across Europe, primarily by one of the guarantors of the Congress, Russia but also Austria.⁶¹

Acting as the prime symbol of conservative governance in Europe was Prince Clemens von Metternich, Austrian foreign minister and close advisor of the emperor Francis I. Metternich was vehemently against liberal reform and had experienced one of the consequences of 1789; the invasion of the Austrian Netherlands where his father had been governor. Suffice to say this allegedly influenced him towards a more reactionary and conservative stance. Any liberal reform would in his mind end in anarchy similar to that of

⁵⁹ Merriman, John, *A History of Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to the Present*, 1996, pp. 715.

⁶⁰ Evans, Robert, *Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Coming of the Revolution*, in Evans, Robert, and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction*, Oxford, 2002; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199249978.001.0001>, accessed 5 Mar. 2024. Pp. 10-11.

⁶¹ Evans, Robert, *Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Coming of the Revolution*, pp. 12.

the revolution of 1789.⁶² As news reached Vienna of the fall of the French monarchy the 29th of February, a meeting of the estates was scheduled for early March during which matters concerning what to make of the situation. Portions of the population spearheaded by intellectuals, students had during the time up to this meeting assembled a list of grievances to be sent to the meeting. There was at a very early stage hope that the regime would make some concessions in the form of liberal reform. However this hope was promptly shattered as the demands were outright refused which ultimately led to clashes between civilians and government forces, resulting in a death count of dozens. Metternich eventually had to make for England facing both external as well as internal pressures. This was seen as a victory of sorts and news spread quickly by way of messengers across the empire. The perceived weakness of the regime in Vienna riled up the many peoples of the empire. Prominently Czechs as well as the Hungarians quickly seized this opportunity and presented their own demands ranging from increased freedom in press to “constitutional and national rights throughout the Habsburg lands.”⁶³ An example of this would be increased local governance and autonomy as well as linguistic rights for regions such as the Bohemian Crownlands and Galicia.⁶⁴

From a purely martial point of view, the revolution of 1848 can be seen as a failure. Austria as well as other affected states reasserted their monopoly on power through military might and snide concession only caving to demands on paper. This is probably one of the reasons why A. J. P. Taylor proclaimed 1848 as “the turning point when Europe failed to turn.”⁶⁵ This is both true and false simultaneously. While the grander and more ambitious goals of the revolution failed, Austria ultimately, at least on paper, became a constitutional state in which the different peoples of the empire gained increased recognition. While only the Hungarians gained full recognition through a later compromise, other peoples such as the Czechs gained extensive rights.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid, pp. 12-13.

⁶³ Evans, Robert, *1848–1849 in the Habsburg Monarchy*, in Evans, Robert, and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848–1849: From Reform to Reaction*, pp. 181-183.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 188. Also, Agnew, Hugh LeCaine, *The Czechs and the lands of the Bohemian crown*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., 2004, pp. 117.

⁶⁵ Evans, Robert, *Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Coming of the Revolution*, pp. 23.

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 24.

The compromise mentioned was reached in 1867 as part of the “Basic State Act”. It states that: “All races of the empire have equal rights, and every race has an inviolable right to the preservation and use of its own nationality and language. The equality of all customary languages (*“landesübliche Sprachen”*) in school, office and public life, is recognized by the state. In those territories in which several races dwell, the public and educational institutions are to be so arranged that, without applying compulsion to learn a second country language (*“Landessprache”*), each of the races receives the

As mentioned above, many of these rights only existed in theory, but having them codified in law is a concession in and of itself. Its lasting legacy was that it proved what things could and should be.

2.2 Panslavism

One item note that took place in the Czech lands during 1848 was the call for the Congress of Slavonic Peoples in Prague. This rose in part due to a need for more political clout among the Czech leadership but also as part of a wider national romanticist view of a grand Slavic brotherhood. The Congress assembled in Prague in early June the same year, attracting well over 300 participants.⁶⁷

This gathering is noteworthy due to its implications, namely *panslavism*. Panslavism is in essence the same sentiment found in roughly contemporary Scandinavia. To borrow a description from Klas-Göran Karlsson it is a: “flow of ideas that emphasises the cultural and sometimes also political unity of the Slavic peoples.”⁶⁸ Karlsson also mentions how word itself as a general term can be traced back to roughly the 1840’s but its origins as a sentiment can be traced back to at least 1601 with Mavro Orbin’s (1563-1614) book *Il regno degli Slavi* (The Realm of the Slavs.) The movement seen in the 1800’s was in part also inspired by a similar movement in the German states that ultimately led to the formation of modern Germany. Some Slavic intellectuals, especially Russian panslavs, saw the movement and its implications of a potential Slavic state as an extension of Russian nationalism. This notion was however rejected at the Prague Congress and was never seriously considered outside of Russia. However, the movement became a useful tool for Russian foreign affairs and used in rhetoric concerning liberation of Slavic brethren in for example the Austrian and Ottoman empires. Whether or not the notion of panslavism as an extension of Russia worked or not, the sentiment of unity it carried brought the Slavic peoples on at some level closer to one another. This would become highly relevant during the First World War as prisoners of war from Austria-Hungary of Slavic origin were treated generally better than their German

necessary means of education in its own language. “

Translation through Encyclopedia Britannica. Archived from the original on 15 June 2013, accessed 2024-03-12.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130615030732/http://www.verfassungen.de/at/at-18/stgg67-2.htm>

⁶⁷ Evans, Robert, *1848–1849 in the Habsburg Monarchy*, pp. 190.

⁶⁸ *Nationalencyklopedin*, panslavism.

<http://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/panslavism> (read 2024-03-13)
Personal translation.

counterparts.⁶⁹ There was also an internal pressure as well as external pressure on the Russian government during the war to allow slavs such as Czechs and Slovaks to form their own national brigades in Russian service to aid in the war effort against the Central Powers. Both Gustav Bečvář and Henry Baerlin make a note of this apparent enthusiasm to fight for national liberation. Desertion to the Russian side was rather common among the Slavic forces fighting for Austria-Hungary.⁷⁰

2.3 Russia

In similar fashion to Austria-Hungary, the Russian Empire was no longer in its prime and faced a multitude of internal as well as external problems that ultimately led to its downfall in the 1917 revolution. During the reign of Alexander III (r. 1881-1894) and his successor, and last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, Russia underwent a somewhat half-successful modernisation period in an attempt to economically as well as politically catch up with their counterparts in Europe. This was in large part masterminded by the Minister of Finance Count Sergei Witte, described by Paul Bushkovitch as the “last really dynamic and thoughtful statesman in the Russian Empire, a man with great plans and abilities as well as a giant ego.”⁷¹ Wittes great project and legacy was the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway aiming to connect the continent spanning empire from St. Petersburg in the West to Vladivostok in the East. Increased Russian presence in the East put them at odds with Japan who also had geopolitical interests in the region.⁷² This ultimately led to the Russo-Japanese War between 1904-1905 that ended with a humiliating defeat for Russia's part. This occurred alongside widespread unrest during what is now known as the Revolution of 1905 which pressured the tsar to make some concessions, establishing the Duma, a representative body with limited authority.⁷³

2.4 Austria-Hungary and Russia at War

Going into the Great War, both the Austrian and Russian governments were in precarious situations. Austria faced great internal ethnic problems while Russia and its monarchy stood on shaky ground and declining prestige. The war could potentially serve as a form of saving

⁶⁹ Stergar, Rok, Panslavism, *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2017 (Accessed through ResearchGate 2024-03-14) [10.15463/ie1418.11123](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311111231_Panslavism) , pp. 1-3.

⁷⁰ Baerlein, Henry, *The march of the seventy thousand*, L. Parsons, London, 1926, pp. 28.

⁷¹ Bushkovitch, Paul., *A Concise History of Russia [Ebook]*, 1, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 275.

⁷² Bushkovitch, Paul., *A Concise History of Russia*, pp. 276-277.

⁷³ Ibid, pp 283-285.

grace for both. With Russia presenting itself as the saviour and protector of slavs everywhere it gave their war effort and national government some legitimacy behind which many could sympathise.⁷⁴ Austria-Hungary had similar hopes that the war might rally the population of the empire. This hope was however shattered as the war against their old 1848 ally never gained the popular support that the fight against Serbia and later Italy gained.⁷⁵

Most of the heavy fighting between Russia and Austria-Hungary took place along the Carpathian mountains where Russian forces held the advantageous ground and were well dug in. This ultimately led to a territorial stalemate where no side could offensively gain the upper hand at a terrible loss of human lives, both in terms of combat casualties but also cold weather and hunger. This is also where a significant amount of Czech and other slav deserters made their way across to the Russian side through various means, a common tactic seems to have been to be taken as a prisoner of war without putting up a fight.⁷⁶ Most territory gained for the Austrians on their half of the front against Russia was made possible primarily through German initiative. However generally speaking, the Austrian-Russian front was plagued by an endless back-and-forth fighting where neither side made any lasting breakthroughs.

2.5 The Czechs, the Czechoslovak Legion, and the Trans-Siberian Railroad

The Czechs were involved not only on the Austrian side of the frontline but also on the Russian side. There were a rather considerable number of Czechs having lived in the Russian Empire for generations prior to the war. Their enthusiasm in which they signed up for service is best exemplified by those who lived in St. Petersburg. Out of the 180 males eligible for service, 84 signed up on the first day when the news of war had reached them.⁷⁷ There were also several Czech interest groups in Russia who lobbied the Tsar and his government to allow for a volunteer army of Czechs to serve the Russian war effort. This was approved in July (or August going by the old calendar) 1915 and the Czech Družina, later known as the Czechoslovak Legion, was established. The Czech committee within Russia who stood for most of the lobbying effort was at least outwardly influenced by panSlavic and russophilic sentiments as they accepted a proposed name for the possible future free Czechoslovakia:

⁷⁴ Jeřábek, Rudolf, *The Eastern Front*, in Cornwall, Mark (red.), *The last years of Austria-Hungary: a multi-national experiment in early twentieth-century Europe*, Rev. and expanded ed., University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 2002, pp. 149.

⁷⁵ Jeřábek, Rudolf, *The Eastern Front*, pp 149.

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 156-158.

Bečvář, Gustav, *The Lost Legion: A Czechoslovakian Epic*, London: S. Paul & Co, 1939, pp. 24-27.

⁷⁷ Baerlein, Henry, *The march of the seventy thousand*, L. Parsons, London, 1926, pp. 19-20.

“The Czechoslovak Kingdom liberated by Slavonic Russia.”⁷⁸ Initially this brigade was limited to Russian born Czechs and did not accept Czech and Slovak prisoners of war to bolster their number. But the large number of Czechs who willingly surrendered to the Russian forces speaks that there was a will from these prisoners to fight against their former masters. There was however opposition within the Russian Army High Command whether or not it would be wise to outright recruit former enemies into their own ranks. While conceding to allowing Czech prisoners to work in factories and other war-time industries, the matter of enlistment was not settled until the Kerensky-regime allowed for full-scale conscription of Slavic prisoners into the brigade.⁷⁹

The Legion in the service of Russia was not to last however. With the rise of the bolsheviks arose an entirely different question for the Legion, who was now in all but name an army without a country on foreign, and potentially hostile, soil. Eventually it was decided that the entirety of the Czechoslovak Legion would be placed under Allied control through the French Army High Command, thus giving the Legion a new goal; leave for the Western Front and continue the fight from there. This gave rise to another problem, the way west was controlled by the Central Powers. While formidable, the Legion’s roughly 70 thousand members could not hope to break through that way. It was instead decided that by way of train across the Trans-Siberian Railway reach Vladivostok and ferry back to Europe. While there were initial signs of amicable sentiments between the new bolshevik regime seated in Moscow and a will from them to make the exodus east as painless for both parties as possible, relations eventually soured over logistical matters and the right of the Legion to bear arms.⁸⁰ It had been decided that the Legion was to attempt to remain neutral in these circumstances, but it was also decided by the Legion themselves that should it be necessary, to move on to Vladivostok independently despite the opposition of the Bolsheviks.⁸¹

There is also the matter of the so-called “home army” of the First Czechoslovak Republic which in this thesis and in the sources is regarded as different from the Czechoslovak Legion. The home army was essentially the main military force that would come to comprise much of the independent Czechoslovakian armed forces. However, the distinction between Legionary and home army soldier is made as the latter were those that

⁷⁸ Baerlein, Henry, *The march of the seventy thousand*, pp. 21-23.
(Družina roughly translates to fellowship or group of comrades)

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 43-47. 68-78.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 90-105.

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 113, 127.

could not “boast” and glory or contribution to the cause outside of Austrian service.⁸² These were men who mixed together neither had, opportunity, will, and/or interest in deserting the Austrian army to join in resisting their previous overlords. If their only contribution had been fighting for Austria, or worse, perpetrating acts of violence against said population both during the war and afterwards while securing the new state, their actions would largely be chosen to be forgotten under the umbrella of victory.⁸³

2.6 The National Tale of the WWI and the Interwar period in Czechoslovakia

The modern day Czech Republic and its history have undergone radical changes during the last century. Gaining independence following World War I, falling to German occupation during World War II and endured a communist regime from its end to the late 1980’s before finally splitting with Slovakia in the 1990’s. Subsequently, their history and lens through which it is observed undergone radical changes. Naturally, World War I held an important place in the national story up until post-World War II and the establishment of the communist regime. A new struggle for the nation had come and gone waiting to be analysed in a new light while at the same time a new understanding of the struggle during the first war emerged.⁸⁴

This is most apparent in the media depiction of early Czechoslovakia during its communist era where through movies on the subject material, in this case the Czechoslovak Legion, “the state sought to build a new national identity by supporting an interpretation of history that would help to cement the contemporary social order.”⁸⁵ While this quote refers to the first Czechoslovak Republic it still applies to the later communist period as similar methods were employed for practically the same reasons. While WWII was a far more popular motive for a movie at the time, the movies being produced changed focus in terms of what they conveyed. While the movies during the interwar period focused on the heroic deeds of the Legion in Russia and elsewhere, the movies produced post-1945 told the tale differently with a strong Marxist-Leninist influence attached. This sort of movie generally made its first appearance in the 1960’s and onwards as Stalinist influence waned in the

⁸² Hutečka, Jiří, *A Missed Opportunity? Czech Historiography of Modern War in the 21st Century*, pp. 271.

⁸³ *Ibid*, pp. 271-272.

⁸⁴ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁵ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 11.

communist bloc.⁸⁶ Movies being made on the subject of WWI were more often than not focusing on more ideologically applicable stories with ties to the Czechoslovak state rather than outright tales of the Legion as they directly fought the bolsheviks in Russia.⁸⁷

In terms of media presence during the communist era, WWI, the Legion and their contribution to Czech independence seems largely forgotten compared to WWII in at least the Czech lands of Czechoslovakia. Historiography during the period 1948-1989 was in a not too dissimilar situation, given the task to in large legitimise the communist regime or as Lukas Vomela puts it: “The interpretation of history was confined to the strict rules of Marxism-Leninism.”⁸⁸ This can in part be seen in how, at the very least, the interwar First Republic and by extension the entire struggle for it was considered in communist history. The Czechoslovak communist regime regarded the First Republic as an oppressive bourgeois state who oppressed its working class.⁸⁹ As stated this extends to the entire struggle by default as it helped establish the nation.

There is however a surviving myth going either by “the golden twenty years” or simply the “myth of the First Republic” which both include how the interwar period Czechoslovakia was an island of democracy in a Europe that slowly turned towards more authoritarian states. While the myth itself is not central here, some arguments from it were claimed by the post-1945 communists, especially those about the first president, Tomáš Masaryk. This was however before Stalinization truly was brought up to speed in the country.⁹⁰ A prominent narrative found on the subject of the First Republic once Stalinization had taken root was that the state would never even have come into existence if it were not for the Russian October Revolution, thus claiming the struggle for independence from the comparably democratic Czechoslovakia in favour of the Marxist-Leninist ideology.⁹¹ In an article by the then Minister of Information Václav Kopecký titled “The Truth about the

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 84-85.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁸ Vomela, Lukas, *The History Politics in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in Conflict - Competition - Cooperation in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries: The Intricacies of the Polish-Czech Relations*, pp, 32.

⁸⁹ Holubec, Stanislav, Golden Twenty years or Bad Stepmother? The Czech communist and post-communist narratives on interwar Czechoslovakia, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 110. 2014. pp. 25.

⁹⁰ Holubec, Stanislav, Golden Twenty years or Bad Stepmother? The Czech communist and post-communist narratives on interwar Czechoslovakia, pp. 27-28.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 31.

Creation of the Republic” he claimed “that the decisive factor in the liberation was the ‘powerful influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917’.”⁹²

A contemporary historian even went as far as reject the efforts of the Legion and foreign allies by claiming that:

“For some years now we have remembered the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic in the spirit of ‘No 28 October 1918 without 7 November 1917, no Czechoslovak Republic without the October Revolution’. [...] But this truth was deliberately kept a secret by the bourgeoisie in the interest of maintaining its power.”⁹³

3. Analysis

3.1 Disposition

The analysis will be divided into four sections. The first section will concern the historiographical material, focusing on what the overarching narrative on the First World War at large is depicted in Czech historiography and *The Lost Legion*. The section following will serve the question how it compares to the narrative told in popular media in the form of *Last Train Home*.

The third section will deal with the matter concerning whether or not there is a historical narrative throughout the analysed Czech historiography while the fourth and final section shall aim to discuss to what extent retellings of history affect the readers/players understanding of history and which narrative holds the greatest influence on *Last Train Home* and whether or not it aligns with any established narrative.

All of the above will be followed by a general conclusion discussing my findings through the analysis and what it means in the grand scheme of things and what can be built upon in further studies of this kind.

4. The Narrative of *The Lost Legion*

Chronologically speaking, I believe it is wise to begin with the memoir itself as I believe it forms a kind of baseline understanding post which all others are built upon. While Bečvář’s

⁹² Hálek, Jan, Štofáník, Jakub, *Interpreting the Creation of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Shifts and Changes in the Politics of History and Memory*, *Soudobé dějiny / Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, pp. 772-800, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.51134/sod.2022.044>, pp. 774-775.

⁹³ Ibid, pp 774-775.

account *The Lost Legion* is primarily a memoir of his time serving in the Austrian forces during World War I but primarily his time in the Legion, it is written surprisingly similar to how a fictional story may well play out. Chapter I starts *in media res* during a march along the Austria-Russia frontline. While Chapter I provides less for the narrative as they primarily occur before Bečvář's entry into Legion service, they paint a clear picture of a general stance more common in older historical pieces work. It is made clear as day that "the armies of His Imperial Majesty Franz Josef the First, Kaiser of Austria and King of Hungary, had no love for their Czech regiments."⁹⁴ This brings us straight back to something mentioned by Smith. He argued for the idea of "ages" in the historical record, not in the sense of Iron Age or Stone Age, but perceived ages.⁹⁵ If we also bring Cubitt into the equation and his idea that the past makes sense of the present, we can somewhat surmise that Bečvář understood his present as something akin to an extended age of oppression by Austria.⁹⁶ This is reinforced further by a digression back to the author's childhood during which he is said to have witnessed "brutal treatment" carried out by Austrian police, said to be a not too uncommon occurrence periodically flaring up due to what the author describes as deliberate racial hate from the side of the Austrians. This is further described as an example of the many indignities that were commonplace occurrences against the Czechs all over the Czech lands. The author expresses amazement over the fact that the ordinary Austrian seem infuriated by the, to them, ingratitude and resistance shown by the Czechs despite forgetting "that they had never given us [Czechs] reason to desire closer union with the Fatherland than was politically necessary."⁹⁷

Thus far, the author has provided a very strong origin narrative as to why the common Czech would find reason to wish to break away from the greater Austrian state. If we are to identify a baseline of nationalism so far, it will undeniably be the first and fourth characteristic provided by Smith, that is that the world is divided into nations in which all peoples are inherently different but also that real freedom can only be achieved through a nation. While it is too early to draw any decisive conclusions on the matter, I think it is rather clear that the author draws upon the idea that the Czechs and Austrians are incompatible in a single state of the kind the power in Vienna desired. To the author, this general anti-Austrian attitude is a foregone conclusion to an extended age of hegemony held by Austria.⁹⁸ Going by

⁹⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, *The Lost Legion: A Czechoslovakian Epic*, pp. 9.

⁹⁵ Smith, pp. 67-68.

⁹⁶ Cubitt, pp. 27.

⁹⁷ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 11-12. 13.

⁹⁸ Baerlein, Henry, *The march of the seventy thousand*, pp. 20-21.

Klas-Göran Karlssons theory on *historiekultur* but also *historiebruk*, Bečvář has made a translation of what he considers his people's past experiences in such a manner that it makes sense of the present situation he and his countrymen find themselves in. A continuation of the already existing narrative of Austrian oppression is created in the written words of the author. Sentiments like these are allegedly what drove so many, the author included, to eventually desert to the Russian side. At the very least according to Bečvář, Austrian High Command attempted to place as few Czechs as possible to fight the Russians in fear of scenarios such as these.⁹⁹

Note here that I am in no way denying there was a legitimate cause for wanting to secede from the Austrian state, legitimate grievances can coexist alongside any narrative which this case should make all the more clear.

While the tensions between Czechs and Austrians on its own is very interesting, I fear it only provides so much to the analysis at large. It serves a function in the broader narrative that is told to readers. The Czechs had reasons to wish to turn away from Austria and panSlavic sentiments present along the Slavic soldiers on the eastern front both facilitated and provided the opportunity.¹⁰⁰

Having eventually deserted with many of his comrades during a Russian attack on their line, going into Chapter II Bečvář and many others were detained as prisoners of war albeit apparently separate from say the Austrian or Hungarian prisoners who were seemingly shipped eastward. There was an alleged initial shock among the captured that they were in fact not going to be allowed to take up arms in the Russian forces to fight for the freedom of their country. The Czech Brigade that had formed in the Allied nations who fought for the cause that they had heard of from the Austrian side was only open to diaspora-Czechs. That is Czechs who for whatever reason were living in these countries at the start of the war, the newly arrived prisoners were regarded with suspicion. Russian authorities did to an extent however allow Czech prisoners to work in their war-time factories ,being considered skilled labour, as supplies such as munitions were always in short supply.¹⁰¹ Through this method, the author managed to make some like-minded contacts during his time as a tile factory worker who had petitioned the local town commandant to be allowed to fight. While not refusing their request outright he was not able to accommodate them fully, only pointing

⁹⁹ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 14. 20-21. 25-27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp 18.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 30-32.

them in the right direction: an internment camp in modern day Ukraine where it was said Czech prisoners were to be allowed into service.¹⁰²

I am rather sceptical whether the author had as much sway or outright luck in seemingly coming into contact with not just like minded Czechs on the factory floor but also to manage to get into direct contact with authorities who also happened to be of similar opinion in that the prisoners who wished to fight should be allowed to do so. While not impossible that this is the case, it leaves out important information that is happening behind the scenes. As discussed by Baerlin beneath a previous heading it was not until after the fall of the Tsarist regime that the floodgates for prisoners to enter service was removed entirely. The author does however mention how the Russian Duma, while being sympathetic to allow for expanded recruitment, was hesitant to walk the extra mile as Bulgaria, a country liberated from Ottoman rule by Russia, had joined forces with the Central Powers.¹⁰³ In 1916, roughly simultaneously to Bečvář's narration, limited individual requests to join the Legion were granted by Russian High Command, in no small part due to political lobbying and a rather stellar performance on the front by the Czech Brigade.¹⁰⁴

Due to the very literate nature of Bečvář's account, chains of events and the like are laid out rather neatly so as to not be all too confusing. This is most likely an unconscious decision on the part of the author but reinforces the idea that people are prone to organise recollection of events as a logical narrative. This emerging narrative has so far given way for the narrative functions identified by Propp that can be considered literary tropes in the wider sense. Chapter I and II have so far been a very traditional beginning of a tale, combining both personal and nationalistic motives, painting both the enemy and goal clearly on the wall. Starting from a low point, literally as the first page of *The Lost Legion* the author states he has never "felt so miserable," the narrative takes an upturn going into Chapter II where albeit more obstacles lie in wait, but nonetheless an upwards trend symbolised by the rather large amount of like minded comrades Bečvář finds on the Russian side.¹⁰⁵

If the origin and creation of Czechoslovakia and involvement in World War I was to be written purely from the perspective given by Bečvář, it would depict a one sided image of how the struggle for national independence looked like. This is something that will be returned to later when historiography is discussed but it fits to at least mention it here. Jiří Hutečka wrote in "*Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored*": *Czechoslovak Veterans of the*

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 39-42.

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 43.

¹⁰⁴ Baerlein, Henry, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰⁵ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 40-41.

Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918-1919 how narratives from soldiers, both those who did and did not join the Legion, that “tried to retell the story of the transition, and why their proposed narratives ill-fitted the official discourse of the war as the ‘national struggle for independence.’”¹⁰⁶ In this regard, Bečvář’s account falls outside this category of being completely forgotten and is, if anything, very much fitting the greater national narrative post-independence thus far.

After some time being confined to performing civilian labour in Russian service, Bečvář and some of his comrades eventually made their way into actual military service in the Legion, which had recently opened up further for prisoner recruitment.¹⁰⁷ The journey to the town of Boryspil outside of Kyiv is stated to be “the happiest that we had ever had in Russia.”¹⁰⁸ This can then be considered the literal highpoint of the story as opposed to the lowest being the quote from the beginning of the book. Bečvář’s group of volunteers would be part of what made up the Second Division of the Czechoslovak Legion. The First was already deployed in the field, partaking in, among others, the Brusilov Offensive wherein the Legionaries did distinguish themselves.¹⁰⁹ While this did wonders for morale among Bečvář and his comrades in the Second, it was described as a short lived victory as it did little to turn the tide of war. Bečvář described the victory as a failure in the attempt to “reawaken the conscience of the Russian soldier.”¹¹⁰ Note how Bečvář chooses the term “conscience” rather than morale or spirit. This might have gone by unnoticed if it was not for the fact that he explicitly used the term “inspiration” for the Legionaries, implying raised spirits. This can be read as Bečvář seeing a lack of enthusiasm or solidarity for the cause from their Russian allies, as opposed to the ever valiant efforts of his brethren in the Legion who seemingly fight with a clear goal in mind ever driving them forwards.

Due to the frontline against the German and Austrian forces had all but collapsed, it was almost inevitable that the First Division would have to make their way back to rendezvous with the Bečvář and the Second.¹¹¹ This alongside the fall of the interim government headed by Kerensky and the seizure of power by the bolsheviks placed the Legion in a precarious situation; an army without mandate on foreign soil. However, praising

¹⁰⁶ Hutečka, Jiří. “‘Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored’: Czechoslovak Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918-1919.” *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 4, 2021, pp. 629–645. <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1017/nps.2020.41>.

¹⁰⁷ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 54.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 54.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 58.

the genius of Masaryk, it was decided that the Legion in Russia would be placed under French military command, thus giving the force more leeway in making the trek east. “Our cause, said Masaryk, is to be the cause of the Allies.”¹¹² During this, Bečvář makes a point of noting how the forces of the Legion were assailed by bolshevik propaganda intended to sow dissent and gain their support. Despite this “only our utter faith in the brotherhood of the Legion saved” them.¹¹³ This statement falls into what could be defined as an anti-communist narrative, something which will be discussed at some length during the historiographical analysis. Suffice to say, Bečvář takes a stance on the matter, bolshevik influence would shatter the Legion and in extent the Czechoslovak unity present as it will be made clear how difficult it would prove to be to align so-called hussite nationalism with bolshevik approach to its history.

Regardless of bolshevik attempts at influencing the Legion, its cohesion held and it did not stop the German advance eastward. During the departure of the Czechoslovak forces eastward, the Second Division successfully repulsed several German attacks, giving time for the First Division to make their escape.¹¹⁴ The journey eastward is in many ways characterised first by solidarity in face of adversity, but also an ever present “we versus them” in its appearance. While all this was set during a world war but also a civil war this might come as no surprise considering Bečvář being in the middle of it all. But his choice of words describing his future adversaries are rather telling of his opinion and perception of the bolsheviks. Many stations they came across along the rail were run by this faction or another, all vying for some semblance of local power. The reception of the Legion can at best be described as a mixed bag, as Bečvář claims that “every town, almost every station, had set up its own small republic, and every local soviet, and each petty Bolshevik commander, issued orders which not infrequently directly conflicted with each other.”¹¹⁵ They are presented here as wanting to give an air of legitimacy through organising locally but simultaneously failing to organise regionally across Russia.

Most regions were either run by the bolsheviks or their foes, proponents of Kerensky’s forces, allies or otherwise White forces. During a stop in a station in the town of Balashov, the balance of power between the Red and White forces was still hanging in the air

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 60-61.

Kennan, George F. “The Czechoslovak Legion.” *The Russian Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1957, pp. 3–16. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/125745>. Accessed 16 July. 2024, pp. 5.

¹¹³ Ibid, pp. 61.

¹¹⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 70.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 71-72.

at this point in time. White forces controlled the station while Red forces held parts of the town. The Legions' arrival forced an armistice as they had no intention of being embroiled in the civil war. As a part of establishing this temporary truce, both sides had to be talked to. Not much is said of White forces other than that outright wanted military support from the Legion as soon as they disembarked the train, hinting at their desperation.¹¹⁶ The Red forces on the other hand are depicted in excruciating detail in comparison. The first words chosen were directed at “the amazing clumsiness” the guards posted at the local headquarters displayed towards the en route Legionary envoy. A distinct lack of discipline and otherwise common military mannerism spoke of their lack of training and simple backgrounds.¹¹⁷ While Bečvář previously stated that the reception by several bolshevik leaders both before and after was a mixed bag, the Legion was at this moment able to make the local Red forces to hold their attack until they had departed.¹¹⁸

At this point in time, the relationship with the both sides could be described as cordial at best and sceptical acceptance at worst. The bolshevik forces around Russia had as of yet not received any orders to outright hinder the Legion as negotiations were still underway in Moscow between Legion representatives and the bolshevik leadership. At first it was decided that the Legion was to leave Russia as fast as possible, but a constant fear among the bolshevik leadership was that the Legion would join forces with the Japanese present in and encroaching in the east.¹¹⁹ This fear probably, but not outright confirmed, aided the bolshevik leadership to press for harder concessions in the agreement with the Legion. Around the time Bečvář and his train arrived at the town of Penza, an agreement was signed that the Legion was allowed passage, albeit without any relevant amount of weaponry to speak of.¹²⁰ Despite the Legion honouring the treaty (some guns beyond those allowed were hidden) the aforementioned disparity between what could be expected from each station reared its head as early as early as the city of Samara, just shy of 430 KM east of Penza. There the train Bečvář was aboard needed a replacement engine. As stipulated by the treaty which had gone into effect as of Penza, “by agreement in Moscow [the Legion] are to be given free passage to Vladivostok. In return for this concession [the Legion] surrendered [its] arms in Penza.” The

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 72.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 73.

¹¹⁸ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 74-75.

¹¹⁹ Kennan, George F. “The Czechoslovak Legion.” *The Russian Review*, Pp. 7-8.

¹²⁰ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 77-78.

Kennan, George F. “The Czechoslovak Legion.” pp. 8.

answer was simple, no. If the Legion wanted an engine, they had to pay for it, with guns. The reasoning was that “this is Samara, not Penza or Moscow.”¹²¹

While there were cries to outright seize an engine with force, the agreement and orders to stay neutral was still fresh in the minds of the Legionary leadership so the issue was left without further discussion. But the outright disregard for the treaty occurred over and over, leaving a bad taste in the mouth for many Legionaries, Bečvář included.¹²² It was eventually decided at a conference of the Legion at Chelyabinsk as a reaction to the situation to continue east towards Vladivostok, with force if need be. Neutrality was ruled by the Legion themselves to be unsustainable.¹²³ This decision came in part as a skirmish with forces in Chelyabinsk before the conference as well due to intercepted telegrams ordering any and all bolshevik forces to apprehend the Legion.¹²⁴ From this point onward the Legion was in open conflict with the bolsheviks and thus proceeded to occupy sections of the railway en route east.¹²⁵ This indirectly made the Legion nominal allies with the White Army whose strongest hold was in the eastern parts of the country which the Legion was headed towards. While the White Army as a whole is not necessarily seen as nearly as competent as the Legion, they are shown in a more favourable and positive light in Bečvář's writings. They are depicted as more human and complex emotional beings than any bolshevik ever was. The scarce interactions in the entire book involving bolsheviks in person are often crude and seen as arrogant, amateurish, and otherwise demonised. A good example of recurring humanity among the White Army is the repeated interactions between the author and a group of White soldiers and officers who are encountered several times along the journey. Their first interaction with the author is them offering him a cup of tea, calling him “brother Czech.”¹²⁶

These same men were later encountered during a stop at Mariinsk station, greeting the author with joyous demeanour, sharing stories and experiences thus far. They were united in cause by their common enemy despite their differences. A football match even took place between Bečvář and his comrades and their White counterparts.¹²⁷ While this event certainly brings to mind the football matches having taken place in the trenches along the French-German frontline back in 1914, it also highlights the camaraderie believed to exist

¹²¹ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 80.

¹²² Ibid, pp. 83.

¹²³ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 91.

Baerlein, Henry, pp. 113, 127.

¹²⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 91.

¹²⁵ Ibid, pp. 92. 115.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 94.

¹²⁷ Ibid, pp. 118-119.

between the Slavs regardless of nationality.¹²⁸ But this camaraderie was in this instance not extended to an enemy of arguably way closer ties than the Brits and Germans. It is true that Bečvář wrote this all down after returning home and having the benefit of hindsight, living in the Czechoslovak Republic after having had to fight against the forces of bolshevism. Thus it is relatively safe to assume he would be more lenient to those he regarded as brothers in arms rather than the common enemy who had in his experience shown nothing but animosity to a cause he saw as sacrosanct.

Despite making mentions of stopping at several stations for one reason or another, be it for supplies or rest, the reception from the greater civilian population is usually not mentioned that much. The scarce few examples are however not of a singular attitude towards the Legions' presence. While securing a length of rail towards Irkutsk close to Lake Baikal, Bečvář and his unit of soldiers pass through a small Siberian town on foot en route to a battle with the Red Army at Seberta. At this town in particular they are treated almost as liberators as they seem relieved to be rid of the previous bolshevik forces stationed there. Bečvář mentions how he and his men have been hounded by mosquitoes, to which the towns populace brings them relief from this plight by offering a some form of black liquid in which they are to smear the skin with.¹²⁹ This kind of attitude did not repeat itself once Irkutsk had been captured however. When the population was told that the Legion had no intention of staying for long and getting deeper involved in the war that they already were, the townsfolk gave them the cold shoulder.¹³⁰ Regardless of reception it is mentioned the great importance of the Legions' actions along the railway. By late 1918, the majority if not all of the Trans-Siberian railway was in the Legion and thus Allied hands.¹³¹

While this in theory was great news to the Legion in general and Bečvář in particular, this success came with a price. Due to being subordinate to the French army, the Legion had been tasked with guarding the line and establishing an "anti-German frontline in Russia."¹³² What this in practice meant was that large portions of the Legion was to stay behind along considerable lengths of railway to keep it in allied hands. What made this action anti-German was more or less an afterthought in the grand scheme of the war. The primary purpose was to support the White Army. The anti-German aspect has however been gleaned in Bečvář's own

¹²⁸ Dash, Mike. The Story of the WWI Christmas Truce, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2011-12-23. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200527080222/https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-story-of-the-wwi-christmas-truce-11972213/>

¹²⁹ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 127-128.

¹³⁰ Ibid, pp. 133-134.

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 155.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 158.

account. As part of the peace treaty between Russia and Germany, many prisoners of war from the central powers would be allowed to make their way back to the western front. Many of these had been placed in Siberia during their imprisonment. As early as Penza the Legion saw “trainloads of Austrian and German prisoners returning home from the huge Siberian prison camps (...) almost every day.”¹³³ This came with the caveat of fighting in previously travelled western parts of the track.

Unlike the eastern troops. The western bolshevik forces were considerably more experienced, better armed, and greater in number. Bečvář describes the fighting as fierce and at times somewhat hopeless as the odds were not in their favour.¹³⁴ A driving factor that drove the Legion back east was the promise of support from the Allies in terms of men and firepower. The Czechoslovak troops had been assured of support:

‘Stand firm. The Allies are sending troops to your assistance,’ the men of the 1st Division had been told again and again. ‘An army corps of Japanese troops is on the way; the vanguard of the British contingent is already in Omsk; America will not permit Japan to enter Siberia alone, and so has decided to send forces as well.’¹³⁵

However this hope was crushed rather soundly when it turned out that the “support” promised was lacklustre if not outright worthless in a firefight.

These were the words upon which we had built, and still built our hope. (...) Our shock was great, therefore, when we learned the truth behind these promises. The facts were that the Japanese had occupied Far Eastern Siberia, but solely for their own selfish purposes, that the British had sent one huge naval gun from Vladivostok, but had omitted to include with it the very necessary shells, that the only Americans we were likely to see were the Y.M.C.A. uncles' with their chocolates and cane fruits. I must not forget to mention, however, that there was in fact one detachment of Allied troops which eventually had the heart to come as far as our fighting line. This was a small body of the Middlesex Regiment.¹³⁶

The above-mentioned regiment from Middlesex was if at all possible a greater disappointment than the unarmed Y.M.C.A contingent from The United States. According to

¹³³ Ibid, pp. 83-84.

¹³⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 160-173.

¹³⁵ Ibid, pp. 175.

¹³⁶ Ibid, pp. 175.

Bečvář, they retreated at the first taste of shelling from the bolshevik line.¹³⁷ It is thus not surprising that the representative of the Y.M.C.A accompanying Bečvář and his comrades is presented in a better light. Going by the name of Duncan, he is presented as a “good fellow” that despite not taking part in actual fighting took risks of equal danger to the rest of them which made him very popular among the Legionaries.¹³⁸

4.1 “To Hell with Intervention”

Bečvář and most likely the vast majority of his comrades in the Legion joined up with the goal of fighting for an independent state. This goal was to be achieved via participation in first Russian and later Allied service. But many came to realise that as the war dragged on and more and more Legionaries were dispatched back west rather than east towards Vladivostok, their chances of reaching the French-German frontline became more and more of a pipe dream. Bečvář raises some of the concerns prevalent among his fellow Legionaries. “We have been willing tools in the hands of the Allies for too long (...) have we not done our share?”¹³⁹ To many this seemed a reasonable thing to ask considering the vast quantities of Central Power troops having been hindered to return to bolster the enemy. While no exact date is given, it is implied that this occurs at least some time after the 1918 armistice, the war was in a practical meaning over. This along with news of Admiral Kolchak’s seizure of power of the White forces truly made the Legions efforts seem pointless. The war in Russia also served to establish a democratic state, not one ruled by bolshevik terror. Kolchak was in the author's words not deemed any better in this regard. They were essentially assisting in “imposing just another kind of terroristic dictatorship.”¹⁴⁰ Even their own leadership insisted the Legion stay until total victory was achieved, something which undeniably left a feeling of betrayal among many.¹⁴¹

The feeling of betrayal and the fight for a cause no longer deemed just in the eyes of the troops is highly prevalent in the last few chapters of the book but is at its most vocal right in this instance. Because their cause was no longer deemed worthy, it might not be surprising that some troops outright refused to keep on fighting and following orders. In other words, mutiny.¹⁴² The ever changing attitude of the Legion as a whole also seems to have agitated

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp. 187.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 185.

¹³⁹ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 194.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 196.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 197-197.

¹⁴² Ibid, pp. 198-199. 203.

some of the White forces who accused them of having gone “soft.” The author does not make it clear whether or not this is widespread or isolated incidents, but the troops he was with endured a rather large amount of comments in regards to their bravery and how ultimately useless they have been to the cause. Everything that went wrong was in the eyes of the White forces deemed the Legions fault.¹⁴³

4.2 Going Home at Last

Around the time of Christmas 1919, the news finally came that they were to move east in order to evacuate.¹⁴⁴ This was essentially the order everyone was looking forward to, and also contributed to the hurried and chaotic collapse of the frontline against the bolsheviks in the east.¹⁴⁵ These last moments are not accompanied by fighting for Bečvář and his fellow soldiers. Instead, the author and his comrades are among those charged with escorting the now more or less powerless Admiral Kolchak, essentially a prisoner. He was to be handed over the governing body in Irkutsk where he would eventually be executed. The details of this venture are not all that interesting in terms of the greater narrative other than being interesting for the sake of the prospect of the author meeting and speaking with Kolchak as he was in his care up until the end.

This part of the story essentially served as a transitioning to actually, finally leaving Russia. The regiment Bečvář was assigned to was finally sent east with Vladivostok as the destination, not much is said of the journey other than how anxious all those present were. Then on the 25th of March 1920 they finally boarded an American vessel which by route of China, India, and through the Suez canal entering the Mediterranean allowed them to dock in Trieste. It was the 20th of June that they finally entered the independent Czechoslovakia for the first time. “After a few days I at last arrived in Brno. Here, after six and a half years of weary exile, I saw my mother again.”¹⁴⁶

4.3 Subdiscussion

The narrative of the *Lost Legion* is, despite it at heart being an autobiography, a tale not at all too dissimilar in concept from Homer’s *Odyssey* in the sense that it is the return story from a great war. The protagonist in this case was the author himself and thus the eyes through

¹⁴³ Ibid, pp. 211-213.

¹⁴⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 231.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 233.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 249.

which the reader understands the story. While the story does have its moments where it feels like the author should not have access to certain information regarding the outside world this can be explained by the fact that Bečvář wrote the finished product in Czechoslovakia after the war had ended. His finished and published product is in many ways a product of the sphere of collective thought it found itself. By knowing and judging the product with the knowledge that: 1), it is a story, 2), it is influenced by the contemporary *historiekultur* and the political landscape, and 3), Bečvář's personal insight weaving into the narrative, we can thus make some deeper inquiries.¹⁴⁷ Bečvář has knowingly or not, by structuring and presenting his experiences in the form they are available to the reader, by doing so, he has laid the foundation for arguments and narrative with his primary source material, that is personal experience and opinions.

The beginning of Bečvář and his story gave a very heavy anti-Austrian impression as they were at the time the primary oppressors and the largest obstacle to what Bečvář wanted, national independence. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had at that point in time been the great antagonist in the Czech national tale. But as the journey progressed, the antagonist in the narrative underwent a not too sudden shift. The war presented an opportunity to confront the old foe yes, but it also inadvertently introduced another. One which would come back to the very heart of independent Czechoslovakia. Regardless of foe, the goal was the same and regardless of antagonist they served the same function as an obstacle reaching this goal. Smith mentions the term *ethnoscape*, a homeland, an ancestral land. Through this term it is argued that only an ancestral homeland can provide "the emotional as well as physical security required" by the citizens of a nation.¹⁴⁸ As the Czech lands had at that point never truly been independent, always ruled by outside forces, this security had never truly been felt and aided in the creation of, by Smith called, *ethno-historic myths*. The First World War may have brought, in this case, an age of heroes fighting for this security, but as events unfolded in Russia and the greater war came to an end, this bled into an age of extended struggle that in its own way made way for an age of reconstruction.¹⁴⁹

Cubitt argues that memory, here almost synonymous with Smith's concept of myth, is necessary for society itself. It is the baseline for a society, the concrete on which laws, customs and the very national idea is built upon.¹⁵⁰ The very memory and existence of these

¹⁴⁷ Robertson, Alexa, *Narrativanalys, Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, pp. 233-234.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, Anthony, pp. 149.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 63-68.

¹⁵⁰ Cubitt, Geoffrey, pp. 119.

collective memories, being first recorded by those having lived them, later became a crucial element in the creation and continued existence of the nation, something which will be discussed further during the historiographical section. Bečvář's account and those like it are but small pieces that make up the entirety of the universal memory being created post any event, similar to the gastronomical approach mentioned previously by Smith. History and memory by its own nature can be argued to attempt to unify the scattered memory of the past into a collective and thus common past.¹⁵¹ While Bečvář, being the memory in this simile, is an individual and has written from personal memory, it is hard if not outright impossible to confirm whether or not he was influenced by the collective memory of society while putting his own memory to the pen. Looking at it from a narrative perspective, it would seem reasonable to believe this is the case. If we recall what Vladimir Propp identified as functions in Slavic sagas, Bečvář's account is laden with these in a similar fashion. Functions according to Propp were actions and their consequences as carried out by actors in the story. Bečvář is the primary actor in his story and him being a driving force behind many actions. Many events that drove Bečvář and others closer to, say joining the Legion, had Bečvář as a central force moving them in that direction.¹⁵² This can of course be chalked down to him slightly exaggerating his role but it can also be interpreted as how he remembers turns of events. His functions being those of "national solidarity" and later on being a rather "model soldier" due to volunteering for missions where he would be isolated.¹⁵³ The very presence of these functions and how they affect how the biography is written also affects how it is perceived and read. By being as literary in style as it is, it is hard not to feel the growing suspense in moments, and the sympathy garnered for the "good guys" and the apathy towards the "bad guys."

This all leads back into what kind of narrative is told throughout the *Lost Legion*. While Homer's *Odyssey* has been mentioned on more than one occasion, it is more than just that. It is a narrative of opposing an ever present enemy standing in the way of a just cause. An obstacle refusing to move while you have no wish to be there. While concepts such as ideology is an important factor as to why the story unfolded as it did, it never goes beyond the enemy being "bolsheviks" in name only. Rarely if ever is much of their political leanings discussed beyond their revolutionary nature. Features such as soldier councils and regimental committees, those being sent to the Conference of Legionaries in Chelyabinsk, was directly

¹⁵¹ Cubitt, Geoffrey, pp. 32.

¹⁵² Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 38-40.

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 92-100.

attributed to the bolshevik example, albeit with wiser implementation, implying the bolsheviks were somewhat stupid.¹⁵⁴ In any case, there were harsher words being directed towards Kolchak as he was described as leading a “terroristic dictatorship.”¹⁵⁵ Regardless, the account of Bečvář and those like it indirectly influenced a precedent of animosity with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, being further reinforced in post-communist Czechoslovakia.

5. Czech Historiography on the First World War and its Legacy and Memory

The historiographical material produced over the past 20 years in the Czech Republic available in English on the subject of WWI is not as focused on the war itself as, say, similar material produced with a focus on WWII. The reason for this is anything but strange as the “The War to End All War” clearly did not do so and was outdone in both sheer destructive force and propagandic value to its contemporary world. So, when Czech historians, and I make this clear once more, in English write about WWI and the interwar period it is usually in a way trying to reconcile and reevaluate the past half century as a whole considering how their history as a whole has undergone quite drastic changes.

It is the mentioned reconciliation that is the most common theme observed in the studied source material from the past two decades that truly sticks out like a sore thumb. This directly raises the question as to why this is the case. It has been mentioned briefly earlier but in summary it is a matter of power and hegemony over the written history to ultimately claim contemporary legitimacy. This exact issue is discussed by Jan Hálek and Jakub Štofáník citing first a central reason why it has been impossible to ignore: “It was a singular founding act. The event had to be captured in the professional historiographical output, as well as in the public space and in the process of shaping collective historical memory”¹⁵⁶ It was simply, and still is not, possible to ignore the founding of the relatively young Czechoslovak and even younger Czech state if anyone truly wished to understand and make sense of its history. While Hálek and Štofáník have paid additional attention to how history has been redefined into political arguments, it plays perfectly into the discussion on why and more importantly how this has come to pass.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp, 61. 85.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 196.

¹⁵⁶ Hálek, Jan, Štofáník, Jakub, *Interpreting the Creation of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Shifts and Changes in the Politics of History and Memory*, pp. 772.

5.1 Relationship and approach to the communist past

With the advent of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia following the events of February 1948, historians in the country were faced with a new reality for writing national history.

While there of course was an official interpretation of the events that led up to the declaration of independence on the 28th of October 1918, there was previously at least some form of plurality in narratives and academic discussions allowed on the matter. This coexistence of narratives however disappeared when the new regime took power. Leading academics and other figures of authority were practically ousted from their respective positions unless they willingly left their offices.¹⁵⁷

This line of events has a lot to do with the historic as well as symbolic value the declaration carried for the continued legitimacy of any state apparatus in Czechoslovakia. The declaration had become a borderline event, a watershed moment in Czech as well as Slovak history which could not be overlooked.¹⁵⁸ Due to its significance in national history it carries a certain amount of power in society, translated into political power, as mentioned by Hálek and Štofáník.

One narrative aspect of special interest for our purposes that arose from the post-Stalin communist era of Czechoslovak history was how the entirety of WWI was viewed as a whole in historiography. On the 40th anniversary of Czechoslovakia, published in the paper Red Law, one could read that the pre-Munich republic fashioned itself as a product of western imperialist magnanimity. Instead it was argued that Czechoslovak independence should be seen as the revolutionary fight “which reached a mass scale in response to the revolutionary events in Russia.”¹⁵⁹ Independence was a direct result of the possibility provided by the revolution. But as can be gleaned from a later article, this independence was not true independence. “[People] who fought for the independent state and were ‘robbed’ of the results of their fight [and only] by taking into consideration the events after 1948 and saw it as a moment which opened the way to building socialism and permanent independence.”¹⁶⁰

It is fairly unsurprising that after the fall of communism 1989 that first Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic rapidly distanced itself from its communist past and instead chose to both purge and reproach its history from new angles. Lukas Vomela

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 773.

¹⁵⁸ Zander, Ulf, Historiekulturella manifestationer - historia i ord, bilder och musik, in Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (red.), *Historien är närvarande: historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, 1. uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2014, pp.172-173.

¹⁵⁹ Hálek, Jan, Štofáník, Jakub, *Interpreting the Creation of Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Shifts and Changes in the Politics of History and Memory*, pp. 781-782.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 783. Personal inclusion of brackets.

mentions how, up until only a few years ago, “the Czech Republic had represented an environment in which there was a lack of wider discussion about the specific place of communism in current Czech history and politics.”¹⁶¹ This is similar to when the communists seized power in 1948 as mentioned earlier as this too was a matter of power over the historical narrative. In its extension it can also be understood as a cultural selection of history being reproduced which, over time, gives certain historical events and narratives space front and centre. This all the while less exciting or otherwise less desired historical events are left in the dark.¹⁶²

Thus far, the overall narrative in Czech history when concerned with WWI and its legacy is one of a historical tug of war in regards to how to interpret its greater significance, impact, and purpose. Having passed through the lenses of both the left and right sides of the political spectrum this is not surprising, but what is surprising and thus interesting is how this has affected the state in which history has been written. As Vomela mentioned, the modern Czech state has up until fairly recently been in a limbo on the subject of communism and its implications. If discussed at any length, it was not raised as a positive at any rate. Stanislav Holubec held a similar discussion on the subject of the First Republic declared after WWI and how the communist regime had a similar relationship to its then non-communist past, and when it was discussed, it was its negative aspects raised to increase contemporary legitimacy.¹⁶³ The same was later applied in the end-phase and post-communist 1990’s where a new image of First Republic was adopted in “a highly positive image (...) This time it had been used as a legitimising tool for political and economic reforms.”¹⁶⁴

5.2 Memory and legacy of the armed forces

I would like to redirect attention to something mentioned above, namely the parts of history “left in the dark.” Neither communist or republican (for simplicity's sake) from what can be read in the historiography few if any like to mention how the very institution that characterised the struggle, the armed forces, was considered “the most hated institution in our

¹⁶¹ Vomela, Lukas, *The History Politics in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in Conflict - Competition - Cooperation in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries: The Intricacies of the Polish-Czech Relations*, pp, 33.

¹⁶² Zander, Ulf, *Historiekulturella manifestationer - historia i ord, bilder och musik*, in Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf (red.), *Historien är närvarande: historiedidaktik som teori och tillämpning*, pp. 151-153.

¹⁶³ Holubec, Stanislav, *Golden Twenty years or Bad Stepmother? The Czech communist and post-communist narratives on interwar Czechoslovakia*, pp. 23-28.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, pp 47.

young state” and “a symbol of old values to be forgotten”¹⁶⁵ Neither communist or republican discredited in entirety the people who fought and carried the torch that ultimately led to independence. It is true that the communists changed the narrative in terms of “why” it was fought and “who” did the fighting but discrediting it further would ultimately harm the legitimacy of any regime. Institutions are ultimately social objects, cultural devices, to which societies apply certain values which in turn affects how they are perceived, both contemporary and over time. The memory of an army as an institution, regardless of why and who fought, is a necessity in the story for the struggle for independence.¹⁶⁶ Despite this it is possible to adjust the story told. First Republic and post-communist writings lay greater importance on the actions of the volunteers and the Legion than the so-called “home army” of the Czech Crown Land as their narrative was ill-fitted. Jiří Hutečka writes:

This stemmed from the fact that any memory of the transition period itself did not go well with the official narrative that war and violence were a thing of the past, not of the Czechoslovak present, and if remembered at all, these were the sole preserve of the Czechoslovak Legion’s final contribution to the establishment of the new state. Consequently, these campaigns, as evidence of violence enacted by the supposedly progressive state, sometimes against its own citizens, were preferred to be “forgotten and ignored” under the overall culture of victory, as were the men who perpetrated them, particularly if they could not boast any other heroics in the name of the Republic.¹⁶⁷

Transition from the old empire into Czechoslovakia was not a path without its obstacles and certainly had its fair share of martyrs. Thus this is not one of the many stories that make up the dominating narrative on WWI in Czech history. That honour has fallen, as is somewhat usual in the field of at least military history, a certain canon of more dominating stories. Over the past two decades, many Czech historians have shown certain “dismay” at the state the field finds itself in.¹⁶⁸

Certain periods of history such as the Napoleonic era or the Second World War, or topics such as the Czechoslovak fortifications of the late 1930s, are dominated by this production and

¹⁶⁵ Hutečka, Jiří. “‘Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored’: Czechoslovak Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918-1919.” . pp. 637.

¹⁶⁶ Cubitt, Geoffrey, 141-142.

¹⁶⁷ Hutečka, Jiří. “Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored,” pp. 642.

¹⁶⁸ Hutečka, Jiří, *A Missed Opportunity? Czech Historiography of Modern War in the 21st Century*, pp. 271.

academic historiography must contend with the fact. This production defines what “military history” means in the eyes of both the general public and other scholars.¹⁶⁹

What the quote essentially means is that the field at large has been dominated by a certain type of stories, many of which fall into the category descriptive histories of military institutions alongside a mix of biographies. An example present in this thesis is *The Lost Legion*, which, while interesting in its own right, is rather uncomplicated as it does not necessarily raise any controversy for the First Republic unlike the preferably forgotten home army. Most of the preferred stories have the common denominator: “whose subtextual meaning supports the liberal-national point of view.”¹⁷⁰ This all loops back into the aforementioned tug of war of the narrative. Only the post-communist narrative has apparently stagnated as it here as well as in matters of politics, as mentioned by Vomela, does not wish to intermingle with communist interpreted history for any reason.

Hypothetically speaking, this could be indicative of an “age” in the sense Smith outlined previously. The Czech triumph over communism and the victory of liberal democracy is the underlying fundament on which the modern nation stands.¹⁷¹ This, let us call it “triumphal” age is mostly supported by these individual stories found in biographies as they highlight certain patriotic aspects usually defined by courage in face of adversity. The narratives influenced by communism post WWII contradicts the narrative proposed by the triumphal age when raised in any different light. Ulf Zander raises the idea that certain historical events that have received greater attention, such as Pearl Harbor and the felling of the atomic bombs, have been immortalised and encapsulated in the collective memory through either mottos, films, images, or stories.¹⁷² These events are direct products of the dominating interpretation of history, ie. *historiekultur*. A history where the Czechoslovak Legion did not fight the bolsheviks in the burgeoning USSR but instead were tools of the imperialist western powers ill fits the greater Czech history. This is especially the case if the communist period is to be considered a break in an otherwise liberal democratic period born as a direct result of WWI.

While not a direct “cause and effect,” if we redirect attention back to something mentioned in the early pages of this thesis, the Colonel Jaroslav Vodička, Chairman of the Czech Union of Freedom Fighters and his 2014 speech: “we lack a film in our cinema that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 291.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 292.

¹⁷¹ Smith, Anthony D, *Myths and memories of the nation*, 188-190.

¹⁷² Zander, Ulf, *Historiekulturella manifestationer - historia i ord, bilder och musik*, pp. 153-155.

would show the audience the heroic campaign of the Legionnaires and their fundamental influence on the recognition of Czechoslovakia.”¹⁷³ This is a wish to encapsulate in a similar way to what Zander raised and thus a path to extending the cultural imagination of the triumphal age brought about by the end of WWI. The break in-between but a side tangent in the otherwise free Czech state starting in 1918.

5.3 The impact of perceived national identity

While history on its own clearly has a major impact in shaping the narrative and vice versa, national identity is also a proponent that is relevant to bring to the table as it also affects the narrative. Jakub Havlíček writes that Czech national identity incorporates religious elements. He argues that a rather clear anti-catholic sentiment was present in the broader national identity on a societal level shown by a decrease in Catholics both pre and post-independence. While, at an individual level, Catholicism continues to dominate numerically among the Czechs, the openly declared church membership gradually decreased.¹⁷⁴ Havlíček’s paper on its own may seem irrelevant, but taking Petr Pabian’s argument into consideration as well we start to see a pattern that is part of the national consciousness. Just like Havlíček, Pabian shows how public Catholic sentiments declined and a rather large percentage left the church. Pabian elaborates further on this in terms of what he calls Hussite national identity where, also contrary to the smooth transition mentioned by Hutečka, Pabian identifies three contending versions of Czech national identity: Liberal, Protestant, and Catholic. This in relation to the establishment of a Czech national identity in the then newly established Czechoslovakia.¹⁷⁵ The term “Hussite Nation” is of interest here as it implies a certain uniqueness present in especially the Czech lands ever since roughly the early 1400s. While it is true that the modern Czech history is not as “venerative” towards the Hussite period as their 1900’s counterparts but its legacy leaves a mark on the national identity and historical consciousness.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Šmidrkal, Václav. “THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA.” pp. 69.

¹⁷⁴ Havlíček, Jakub, History, Memory, and Religion in the Czech Lands, *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities*, 2015, pp. 96-108.

https://www.academia.edu/24493052/History_Memory_and_Religion_in_the_Czech_Lands

¹⁷⁵ Pabian, Petr, Inventing the Hussite Nation: Liberals, Catholics, and Protestants in Conflict over Czech National Identity, pp. 275-282. 2007.

https://www.academia.edu/2506666/Inventing_the_Hussite_Nation_Liberals_Catholics_and_Protestants_in_Conflict_over_Czech_National_Identity

¹⁷⁶ LeCaine, Hugh, *The Czechs and the lands of the Bohemian crown*, pp. 39-40.

Pabian argues that according to contemporary Czech historiography “there was only one fairly homogenous Czech national movement” ever present from around the 1860’s when demands for increased autonomy started to rear its head. It can be identified by their “employed Hussite symbolism of place” i.e taking place in locations with a strong link to Jan Hus. This movement was also identified by them attempting a distinction from the Catholic past.¹⁷⁷ It was this Hussite identity that ultimately became the *de facto* interpretation in the later independent Czechoslovakia and has also carried over into the modern Czech state.¹⁷⁸ While it was not the only interpretation it became *the* Czech national identity at the expense of others.

It was mentioned that this, a seeming side tangent, was of relevance for the greater purpose of this thesis. This is especially the case if we turn our attention back to what Jiří Hutečka wrote in *Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored*. As mentioned therein previously, Hutečka argues from a similar standpoint that only certain narratives and interpretation of the past, in his case WWI, has been given adequate room to attach itself to society while those deemed ill-fitted were pushed aside. For example, Pabian writes that an opposing Catholic interpretation can be summarised in one sentence: “the Czech nation must be Roman Catholic” because “Czech Roman Catholics developed a distinct version of Czech national identity coupled with a distinct interpretation of Czech history.”¹⁷⁹ However, the very notion of this “must be Roman Catholic” can easily be interpreted as seditious when you take the Catholic Church and its closeness to the Austrian pre-war state into account. The victory of the Czechoslovak state would essentially be null and void to some if rapprochement to Austria through the faith was triumphant. The war was ultimately fought and won against Austria. This would signal a return to oppression to some in some capacity. Similar to the case brought up by Hutečka in regards to those who only served in Austrian uniform, it is relatively simple to connect the dots and see how this pulls Czech history and nationhood closer to Austria-Hungary who was predominantly Catholic. While Pabian makes it relatively clear that the Catholic version did not seek closer union with Austria, it can easily be boiled down to that singular idea from its opposition.

What this kind of dominating narrative essentially does in the long run is feeding into the to some extent already prevailing myth and living memory of the nation. Smith’s outline of nationalism comes to mind here, especially points three and four: loyalty to the nation

¹⁷⁷ Pabian, Petr, pp. 277-278.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 280.

¹⁷⁹ Pabian, Petr, pp. 279.

overrides all others and that true freedom can only be achieved through the nation.¹⁸⁰ Hussite thought was previously what brought the Czech lands further away from external influence in the past and did once again fill that purpose similar to Smith's argument regarding Indian independence movements.¹⁸¹ Catholic versions can thus be forgiven for being interpreted as an antithesis to this end, this did not however stop relatively contemporary Czech historiography to present the Hussite version of national identity as the only one existing in the late 1800s and early 1900's thus creating the ever since present *historiekultur* that can be seen in recent Czech history.¹⁸²

This was not only the case in academic history either. The previously cited Václav Šmidrkal wrote that this was in many ways mirrored in the interwar media and especially movies. The portrayal of WWI and its surrounding history can be seen as an extension of the Hussite national identity. The war was very much portrayed as an anti-Habsburg/anti-Austrian resistance with the end result being the declaration and creation of Czechoslovakia.¹⁸³ Šmidrkal writes further that:

The soldiers who defected from the Austrian-Hungarian military and voluntarily enlisted in the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, France, and Italy enjoyed a privileged status in interwar society, and their reputations were particularly exalted in their public representations. To a significant extent, it was the former Legionnaires themselves who promoted their own importance and historicized their experiences in literature, drama, and film. (...) the Czech lands had a fast-developing film industry that produced a large number of films.¹⁸⁴

It is also noted that at this point, film making at large was rather unregulated making the state relatively weak in influencing it. However, "film producers manifested their loyalty to the new state by their eagerness to shoot films on themes from national history"¹⁸⁵

While the state was initially a weak actor in regards to controlling what movies and films were produced and endorsed, it eventually gained some censorship control over the industry. Movies regarded as pro-Habsburg or anything similar was a taboo.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, Anthony D., *Myths and memories of the nation*, pp. 189.

¹⁸¹ Smith, Anthony, pp. 172.

¹⁸² Pabian, Petr, pp. 282.

Karlsson, Klas-Göran, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸³ Šmidrkal, Václav. "THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA." pp 72.

¹⁸⁴ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 72.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 73.

For example, there was no place in the Czechoslovak interwar cinema for a positive appraisal of the Habsburg monarchy or its legacy because that would contest the official mainstream narrative about an Austria-Hungary that oppressed the Czechs and Slovaks and was doomed to downfall.¹⁸⁶

Even movies that escaped the watchful eye of the censors could still retroactively fall under heavy criticism if they even slightly deviated from the supported narrative. Films showing signs of insubordination, even if it was directed against the demonised Austrians was considered an antithesis and that it was “insubordination that did not have a clear basis in the cause of an independent Czechoslovakia”¹⁸⁷

Beside the patriotic sentiments shown by some filmmakers, movies like these, knowingly or not, also served and reinforced the aforementioned living memory and myth of the nation that had started to take root in society following the end of the war. A vital part of any lasting culture, be it of history or otherwise, is its self replicating nature.¹⁸⁸ These sentiments were not directly and forcefully imposed but instead found actual appeal among the broader populace alongside its replication thus becoming the hegemonic view that still holds some sway, as will be shown in the part of this thesis detailing the video game *Last Train Home*.

5.4 Today’s living narrative: a memory of the past

This prevailing non-communist view of WWI has not only survived, as should have been illustrated by the discussion thus far, but also managed to thrive in the post communist Czechoslovakia and modern Czechia. The answer as for why this is the case, I believe, can in part be found in the words of Lynn Hunt: “Nations need a sense of the past but they also need the most accurate possible understandings of that past.”¹⁸⁹ The communist approach to the national history in general and the 1900’s and WWI in particular would in this case have been considered, no matter how, if at all truthful, *accurate* enough for the masses the sense they needed. British historian Herbert A. L. Fisher is said to have remarked that “Czechoslovakia is the child of propaganda.”¹⁹⁰ By framing the Czechoslovak nation and cause both pre and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 74.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 75.

¹⁸⁸ Karlsson, Klas-Göran, pp. 57-56. 65-67.

¹⁸⁹ Hunt, Lynn: Writing History Today: From Postmodern Challenge to Global History, in: Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities 2, Olomouc 2018, pp. 13.

¹⁹⁰ Orzoff, Andrea, *Battle for the castle [Elektronisk resurs] the myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, doi:

post independence as a victim and home of tragic heroes of sorts at the hand of the “terrible and oppressive Austrian-Hungarian state,”¹⁹¹ a story of an underdog, narratively speaking, has been born. An underdog makes, as can be seen in many stories, a compelling one. This can be reinforced somewhat further by the idea that humans are predisposed to the narrative mode of viewing the world, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter.¹⁹²

The plight and fight of the Czechs and Slovaks both politically but also as warfighters works best under these “righteous” and “noble” conditions that proved hard if not impossible to emulate in the communist setting. As Šmidrkál points out in his work, several feature films on WWI were produced during the communist period attempting to capture the lightning in a bottle that was the “good fight” of the brave men (and also women depending on setting.) The era of WWI in movies had however already passed in favour of WWII by the time of the communist regime:

The First World War was overwhelmed by the memory of the Second. The Second World War provided a legitimizing historical narrative for communist power as well as a bottomless well of inspiration for filmmakers, while cinematic depictions of the First World War were far less frequent after 1945.¹⁹³

The attempts that were made however tried to shift the purpose of Legions' fight in Russia to that of an attempt by the masses revolting against an existing system under the influence of the Bolsheviks rather than having them as a primary antagonist as had been before.¹⁹⁴ A key aspect of the fight as remembered by society at large was not simply fit for this kind of interpretation if placed in the same context. WWI became the backdrop for settings rather than front and centre as had been the case with previous movies before 1945.

At the end of and post WWI, the Czechoslovak national narrative that was exported to the Czechoslovak public and by extension the international stage by both movies, media, and otherwise propagandic apparatuses can be identified by two factors: political victimhood and

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195367812.003.0001> , pp 3-22.

Zeman, Zbyněk Anthony Bohuslav & Klimek, Antonín, *The life of Edvard Beneš. 1884-1948: Czechoslovakia in peace and war*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1997, 21–23.

¹⁹¹ Chargos, Maeva, A Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War, *Central European Papers*, 2020, 8(1):47-61, pp. 51.

¹⁹² Robertson, Alexa, pp. 222-223.

¹⁹³ Šmidrkál, Václav, pp. 81-81.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 81.

tragic heroism.¹⁹⁵ The tragic heroism as discussed here can primarily be seen in the multitude of movies on the plight of the armed forces of the Czechoslovak nation but in part as well found in the many biographies and diaries of the soldiers themselves. More than one of these movies were inspired directly by books.¹⁹⁶ Political victimhood was present in many of these movies as well but was primarily used as a political tool by first the provisional and later *de facto* governments of Masaryk and Beneš. The legitimacy of the First Republic relied heavily not only on their contribution in the war effort but also on the, as understood through the lens of Hussite nationalism, its historically continuous oppression by the Habsburg power. First through the execution of Jan Hus and the Hussite Wars carried through the generations all the way to the 1900's and the Bohemian Crownlands and its place in Austria-Hungary.¹⁹⁷ In the case of the "tragic heroes," this group was, especially during the postwar years, incorporated into the victimhood category as they could be described through their "sacrifice for the nation" thus becoming dutiful hero-sufferers."¹⁹⁸

A distinction appears to have been made during this depiction of the plight of the nation. While the fate of Jan Hus and the fates of so many during the Hussite Wars are described as martyrs, the contemporary struggle found greater use of tragic heroes than martyrs.¹⁹⁹ Going by Cubitt's argument on how history is a societal resource, a martyr carries with it an implication of someone who has to suffer or pay the ultimate price for their conviction. Other than having close ties to the Catholic jargon, it also implies that to some extent that their sacrifice was for something that was not realised until long after is similar to how some saints were canonised long after their deaths. A martyr's death was in this context considered a meaningless death while a hero's death served the given purpose better. Cubitt would argue that this memory serves as an active resource, being drawn upon to orientate the present and to make sense of it with the past as a foundation, albeit a somewhat customised resource due to the change from martyr to tragic victim.²⁰⁰ Adding Smith to this we recall the so-called gastronomical approach to history. As a reminder, its foundation is that history is

¹⁹⁵ Chargos, Maeva, Czech Victimhood Nationalism (1900-1920): Between Myth and Memory, *Council for European Studies - International Conference*, 2021-05-21, pp. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Šmidrkál, Václav, pp. 76.

Chargos, Maeva, A Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War, pp. 52.

¹⁹⁷ Chargos, Maeva, Czech Victimhood Nationalism (1900-1920): Between Myth and Memory, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁸ Chargos, Maeva, A Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War, pp. 52.

¹⁹⁹ Chargos, Maeva, A Victim Among Martyrs? pp. 52.

²⁰⁰ Cubitt, Geoffrey, pp. 27.

created by popular imagination and in part by the media, thus history is a creation of social engineering. It argues that a nation's history is a makeshift collection of historical resources that explains the modern nation and justifies its present.²⁰¹ The martyr narrative lacks the implication of sacrifice in the participation in the war against the Central Powers thus making it as ill-fitting as the later communist approach to history.

This can in part help explain the divide in narratives in Czechoslovakia during and post communism. The non-applicable nature of the history surrounding the First Republic led to a reliance on negative and heavily adjusted history to help legitimise the communist regime. Meanwhile the late and post communist state felt a heavy nostalgia towards the First Republic and its perceived glory days, i.e Smiths “golden age.”²⁰² Thus the relatively modern interpretation of history is still heavily influenced by this shift away from communism and thus fueling the perception and public imagination of the First Republic as the greatest hour of the nation in the collective memory.

If we loop back somewhat to the previous heading regarding the impact of national identity. A discussion was made about the very perception of what the national notion of being Czech (then Czechoslovak) was and what affected it. There an argument was raised that the Czechoslovak states early identity was a juggle between several proposed ideas. But as conveyed through Chargos, the Hussite identity was triumphant as it was carried by the idea of the hero-sufferer.²⁰³ It was this clear-cut connection to the struggle, far removed from any, even remotely close, connection to the old Austrian state that ultimately carried it to victory as *the* national identity. Any other, and especially the Catholic interpretation was deemed too close to Austria to easily be considered almost seditious. While it was technically true that most of the population up to this point was, at least nominally, Catholic it did not align with the chosen national symbol that was Jan Hus.²⁰⁴ A connection to the then contemporary greatest hour of the Czechs could easily be made with Jan Hus that simultaneously discredited the Catholic Church in the regard it was connected to the Austrian state.

²⁰¹ Smith, Anthony, pp. 163-164.

²⁰² Holubec, Stanislav, Golden Twenty years or Bad Stepmother? The Czech communist and post-communist narratives on interwar Czechoslovakia, pp. 46-48.
Smith, Anthony pp. 65-66.

²⁰³ Chargos, Maeva, A Victim Among Martyrs? Czech Victimhood Nationalism during the First World War, pp. 52.

²⁰⁴ Paces, Cynthia, The Czech nation must be Catholic!" an alternative version of Czech nationalism during the first republic, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1999, pp. 1-2.

5.5 The Proverbial Shadow of Communism and the Second World War

At face value, it would be easy to assume that both WWI and its outcome holds a central status in Czech history that would reflect outwards in the more international, English material published. While it holds true that ever since 2014 the amount of published material and public interest regarding WWI has increased rather dramatically this trend is rather recent and appears to come in some intervals with recent interest peaking in and around 2017-2018.²⁰⁵

As should be made clear at this point, the narrative of WWI is usually found as a thematic backdrop to more recent history, especially how it was handled and portrayed during the post-WWII communist regime. The more recent WWII also has a larger presence in the English published material than its predecessor. At first, this was seen as a bothersome inconvenience. However, through some much needed advice, this shadow cast by WWII and more recent history presented an additional interesting entry into the discussion.

Šmidrkal provides an interesting opening to this approach. He argues that the post-communist society that arose in the aftermath of 1989 produced a wide reaction against the then decades long highly controlled media market. Society at large but specifically so in the film industry turned towards an anti-communist and anti-totalitarian stance. WWI, while still relevant, was considered a “healed wound” that did not need to be revisited or poked in further at the time. Meanwhile, the horrors and trauma presented by WWII and the communist period was still very fresh in memory.²⁰⁶

The fact that the heroes and victims of the totalitarian regimes were still alive and waiting for an homage played a role as well, while the last Legionnaires had died before the turn of the twenty-first century.²⁰⁷

While it is undeniable that a new story of Legionaries fighting the bolsheviks in Russia would serve an anti-communist purpose in society, this is as stated but a recent impulse despite the renewed interest and sympathies for the story of the creation of the First Republic and its heroes.²⁰⁸ The lack of media coverage of WWI in Czech media in a post-1989 world can in part be explained by growing private enterprises in the media sector and a pressure to cover something new.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Look again to Image 4, Appendix.

²⁰⁶ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 89.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 89.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, pp. 91.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 92.

This pivot towards WWII as a topic deserving coverage over WWI may have been unknowingly started by the media but this eventually bled over into academia as a result of the burgeoning *historiekultur* being born as a result. The story of WWII and the subsequent communism had such stopping power and momentum it pushed the earlier story to the sideline. In the new anti-communist Czechoslovak state this kind of history found footing and was subsequently reproduced, creating a collective societal image of how history unfolded.²¹⁰ This is not to say that the academic products of history were in any way inaccurate or overly influenced by bias, merely that it overshadowed the older history in favour of a new history. This history instead focuses on the fight for the survival of the nation and later the oppression by the communist regime, more often than not letting the analysis suffer at the expense of “minute details.”²¹¹

5.6 A reapproach to the past

The rope has once again been pulled in the tug-of-war in Czech history, this time in favour of the First Republic history, in a way spearheaded by Colonel Jaroslav Vodička’s speech calling for a new Legionnaire film back in 2014. Interest for the period is once again at an alltime high. Biographies are being revisited and finding such as old diaries are uncovered by relatives of involved individuals.²¹² First in a long time, an upcoming movie *Legionáři - sibiřská anabáze* (*Legionaries - A Siberian Anabasis*, originally expected to release in 2018) is in production.²¹³ It would be safe to assume that this popular revival is soon to be followed more closely by academia in a similar fashion to how anti-communist sentiments did.

It was mentioned at the beginning of this in brief that a common theme seen throughout the material has been reconciliatory in nature. However, it first appeared that this was in the sense of trying to rectify some “errors” or something similar with the older material. But upon closer inspection it would appear that the terms *slow rapprochement* or *uncertain understanding* would serve better to describe the nature of the material. The initial thought going into the material was that a certain animosity against Soviet communism would be present, as is somewhat the case with *Last Train Home* and that it would rather

²¹⁰ Zander, Ulf, *Historiekulturella manifestationer - historia i ord, bilder och musik*, pp. 151-153.

²¹¹ Hutečka, Jiří, *A Missed Opportunity? Czech Historiography of Modern War in the 21st Century*, pp. 284.

²¹² Kroupa, Mikulas, McEncroe, Thomas, Czechoslovak Legionary’s diary depicts First World War through unique illustrations, *Radio Prague International*, 2020-08-25, <https://english.radio.cz/czechoslovak-Legionarys-diary-depicts-first-world-war-through-unique-8690200>.

²¹³ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp.92.

obviously affect the narrative of the collective material. Up until a few years ago this might have been the case, as stated by Lukas Vomela previously.²¹⁴ But as stated, the terms *rapprochement* and/or understanding proved to be better in regards to analysing the greater narrative in play in the material. Instead of concealed disapproval and criticism of the communist system as was initially thought, attempts were these last few years, as in the case with Hálek and Štofanič to understand how the watershed moment that was Czechoslovak independence was utilised as a legitimising tool for not just the First Republic but also the later communist state.²¹⁵ While it is true that there were elements of trying to ignore the less favourable parts of history, both pre, contemporary, and post communism, the does not derive from the fact that the founding could not be ignored. Due to its significance in national history it carries a certain amount of power in society, translated into political power.²¹⁶ In Cubitts terms, it was simply an historical resource too important and impossible to ignore.

As the founding of Czechoslovakia was so tightly bound to WWI, it is no surprise that its historical importance was best utilised, and for the sake of this thesis, best illustrated in media such as movies as discussed by Šmidrkal.²¹⁷ Both the First Republic and the communist regime utilised movies to this end with varying success due to the medium's usefulness in sharing messages to swathes of the population. What the change in what narrative was depicted in these movies gives us is a good showcase example of not just controlling the narrative in any direction, but also how the common history of both sides was valued, albeit differently. Šmidrkal's observations regarding these movies shows an increased interest in not just the movies made during the First Republic but during communism as well.

Czech historiography is in a manner of speaking leaving the limbo-like state in regards to communism it had found itself in since 1991, not just proven by the likes of Šmidrkal's text but also when we look at critical discussions regarding the use of victimisation during both the First Republic and communism. There we can see more clearly why the different regimes, be it First Republic or communist, chose to include or exclude certain topics or items. Not necessarily because of some abstract notion of ideology or inherent dislike, but sometimes simply because it did not fit or was applicable enough to the new narrative.

So if the general narrative of modern Czech historiography is more in line with terms such as slow *rapprochement* or uncertain understanding, where does that lead us in terms of a

²¹⁴ Vomela, Lukas, pp. 33.

²¹⁵ Hálek, Jan, Štofanič, Jakub, pp. 783.

²¹⁶ Zander, Ulf, *Historiekulturella manifestationer - historia i ord, bilder och musik*, pp. 151-153.

²¹⁷ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 72.

more definitive answer? Well, it is relatively evident that modern historiography has moved in the direction out of the limbo of post-communism in part because it only provided so much for historical analysis but also because the general attitude towards the past has shifted somewhat. Post-1991 it would simply not be doable in any rewarding sense to “defend” or positively approach the communist period. But as time passed, and the memory was left to mature, the history left in the dark came back into the light. It became not just possible to discuss but a fruitful endeavour to discuss the Czech society during communism and its relationship with the First Republic.

6. Railroaded Narrative aboard the *Last Train Home*

The video game *Last Train Home* is divided into nine chapters represented by a stretch of rail across 20th century Russia.²¹⁸ Only Chapter I will be discussed at a more extensive level that goes beyond the narrative analysis as it introduces certain elements and mechanics crucial to the rest of the game. The remaining eight chapters will be discussed through the structure of several themes present in the story

The historical narrative told throughout *Last Train Home* is the in the words of developer Ashborne Games marketing manager, Dominik Jícha:

In our game, we tell a story as old as the history of warfare. The tale of coming home is something everyone can relate to, whether it's the journey home to family. The return home from war is known all too intimately in the histories of most countries. Returning from a hostile territory plagued by civil war is something that, for example, America has experienced several times in the last century. Or we can recall, for instance, the famous Homer's Odyssey.²¹⁹

This is in rather stark contrast to the relatively modern historiography of the modern Czech state. The impression given by the studied material thus far which for the most part handled how and why history has been interpreted the way it has and also how, Jícha instead lays out a foundation more grounded and a personal tale not all too dissimilar to that of Bečvář.

²¹⁸ Last Train Home, Map of rail lines.

See image 1, Appendix.

²¹⁹ This is an excerpt from an answer to an email I sent late 2023 where I asked questions in regards to what the driving narrative that they wanted to tell throughout the game, and whether they felt that was accomplished.

The first impression when opening the game for the first time is that of a monologue given by what is later shown to be *the* narrating character of the entire game.²²⁰ We are, rather somberly, told that the Great War (at least for Russia) is over and that a new republic has been born in the heart of Europe: The Czechoslovak Republic. All this to a backdrop first empty trenches transitioning to that of hope- and colourful image of a parade in what probably is Prague. But the image of Prague is soon replaced by that of images of fierce combat between the Red and White forces ravaging Russia, the obstacle in the way towards the ship waiting in Vladivostok, ready to take them home. “It might be our Last Train Home.”²²¹

The purpose of the transitioning of images from the horrors of war to that of what can only be described as an happy image of a celebrated parade only to go back to the previous horror is deliberate in two ways. The first of which serves as a narrative function to set the stage for the greater story at hand. It introduces to the audience in very broad terms that the First World War has ended and that the men of the Czechslovak Legion are to return home while at the same time introducing the two primary obstacles in the way. While not portraying either side as an enemy outright at this point, it is implied they will in one way or another hamper progress, especially as the player is told to remain neutral in their conflict. The second function is somewhat more hypothetical, but an argument can be made that it is to plant the idea that a far from smooth journey awaits considering not only passing through disputed territory, but also that the journey takes them through Siberia.

6.1 The introduction to the story through Chapter I

Before the game truly starts, the player is given several choices in terms of difficulty. Examples of these are the matter of food and coal consumption during the journey, frequency of meta-narrative “morale events” affecting the mood of individual soldiers and otherwise tweaks to make the game significantly easier or harder depending on preference.²²² Settings like these are commonplace in games regardless of genre as they provide accessibility. But in this case and in cases like this it provides an interesting perspective. While historical games offer an agency to not only see and read history but to also *do* or *play* history, changes like these sometimes present problems in terms of representation of history. Chapman makes the

²²⁰ Last Train Home, Artbook.

See image 2, Appendix

²²¹ Last Train Home, Introductory cinematic 1

Author’s note: There are two introductory cinematics, one when the game is first launched, the second when the player first presses “New game” in the main menu.

²²² Last Train Home, Settings menu.

See image 3, Appendix

point that this primarily stems from them being a product meant for entertainment first and foremost.²²³ This however plays into the agency given to the player in the narrative and the emerging ludonarrative. If the player understands the history, in which the narrative takes place, in a similar fashion to how the co-founder of Ashborne Games Petr Kolar expresses it:

“The Legion were like gentlemen fighting,” said Kolar, who co-founded Ashborne Games after that visit. “They always made sure that they were well cleaned, well equipped. That’s one of the reasons 70,000 men could control the whole Trans-Siberian Railway.”²²⁴

If the above quote coincides with the player's understanding then they might adjust the settings to emulate this disciplined army, making it either easier to reflect how hardship is overcome by the soldiers themselves, or make it harder to instead reflect the army leadership, that is the player, and its excellence in face of adversity.

Finalising the settings the game truly begins and the player is greeted by another cinematic who, similar to the previous one, gives a brief summary of the history of why you as the player are where you are and for what purpose, essentially a historical background. Unlike the previous cinematic however we are given further information regarding the tale we are about to take part in, it is: “a work of fiction inspired by the writings of a brilliant member of the Czechoslovak Legion and a veritable instrument of history.”²²⁵ No further information is given in regards to who this “brilliant member” is in the game itself, but by looking at the mini documentary *Last Train Home | Making of: Episode 2 - Narrative* we learn that a clear inspiration is taken from the writings of a František Langer who I shall return to later in this thesis²²⁶ However, considering its importance as a source, it would not come as a huge surprise to me if *The Lost Legion* was part of the greater material used in the games production.

As the cinematic fades the generated game environment takes its place on the screen panning over an armoured train sitting idly on the tracks roughly. Along its length soldiers can be seen stretching their limbs and taking this opportunity to get some fresh air before the journey continues. You are addressed directly by the commanding officer, a Major Gazdík,

²²³ Chapman, pp. 47.

²²⁴ Horti, Samuel, A Video Game That Doubles as a World War I History Lesson, *New York Times*, 2023-11-29. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/29/arts/last-train-home-ashborne.html>. (Read 2023-12-14)

²²⁵ *Last Train Home*, Introductory cinematic 2.

²²⁶ *Last Train Home | Making of: Episode 2 - Narrative*, THQ Nordic Inside, 2023-09-05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bY0ZfRSj5ec>, (accessed 2024-04-12)

you are to trade for supplies with the locals with a small contingent of the larger force. The objective given in the top left corner is “We come in peace” reinforcing the *neutral* character the framing narrative has placed upon the player.²²⁷ While this section ultimately serves to teach the player basic mechanics such as movement of soldiers and their different attributes it also introduces the main antagonist of the story: The Red Army. The locals, more specifically the miller, the player was meant to trade with was found to have been murdered along with most of his family and the property set ablaze. The surviving family member wants nothing to do with the approaching Legionaries claiming “soldiers are all the same... killing is all you know.”²²⁸ Later Red forces can from an overlook be seen carrying their ill-gotten gains. Several of those present wish to pursue, but are talked down by the major. The soon-to-be Czechoslovakia shall not be embroiled in another country’s affairs.

This part of the chapter aims to establish the hardships of the narrative further as well as establishing the Red forces as the main antagonist while at the same time reinforcing the ideal of the gentleman soldier mentioned by Kolar. Similarities from Šmidrkal's arguments can be sensed within. While interest for WWI Czechoslovak history resurfaced post-1989 and anti-communist sentiments were high, more recent post-WWII memories and “the fact that the heroes and victims of the totalitarian regimes were still alive and waiting for an homage played a role as well, while the last Legionnaires had died before the turn of the twenty-first century.” There was also the matter of funding a movie to scale, thought to have cost, at the time, roughly four million euros.²²⁹ It is not unlikely that along with the anniversary of both the start and end of WWI that this interest has awoken and come to be expressed in the analysed media.²³⁰

Thus far I have remained very close to the happenings on the ground as they have a very large impact on the games narrative and story as a whole, considering this is Chapter I it is necessary. Without it, later events, turns and twists would not make sense. With that said this will not always be the case going forward as not everything has a significant impact and/or is a recurring event. Things like that will be discussed but not repeatedly.

The remainder of the chapter primarily introduces the player to the mechanics of managing the armoured train and its crew and carts. These range from the locomotive,

²²⁷ Chapman, Adam, *Digital games as history*, pp. 119-121.

Last Train Home, Chapter I, “We come in peace.”

²²⁸ Last Train Home, Chapter I, “We come in peace.”

²²⁹ Šmidrkal, Václav, *Habsburg's Last War: The Filmic Memory (1918 to the Present)*, pp. 89-90. 91.

²³⁰ While on its own not definitive, the trend for the “Czechoslovak Legion” has increased over the years according to Google Ngram Viewer. See image 4, Appendix.

storage carts, food and medical carts, living quarters, and even an artillery cart. They all serve a purpose and require dedicated staff to function. Wounded soldiers receive no aid if left unattended, the artillery cart is essentially dead weight if unmanned during missions, and soldiers running on no sleep and empty stomachs are practically dead as if assigned to a combat role without a weapon. This acts both as an introductory experience telling the player their resources are finite but also that the soldiers at hand are not pawns. They all have a name, backstory, personal beliefs, and opinions on matters that can occur during missions thus affecting their morale and potential actions.

It is not long before coming back to the train and having got moving again, the next major obstacle and the personification of the Red Army presents itself. At the town of Sukhinichi the train is stopped by the Red general Adam Morozov²³¹, a partly fictional character inspired by both myth and real soldiers from the civil war. Similar to the events that in real life took place at Penza, Morozov demands disarmament to be allowed any further along the track in return for safe passage.²³² Unlike Penza however this demand was refused outright, claiming the Legionaries would most likely face the same outcome as the miller and his family once disarmed.

In this scenario, the player has no input or choice in the course of action as command of the unit has not yet passed to them. The real life disarmament was technically an agreement between the Czechoslovak Provisional Governments representatives and the Soviet government outlined as:

- a) That the evacuation should begin at once;
- (b) That the non-Communist Russian officers who still occupied the highest command positions in the Corps (referred to in the telegram as the "counter-revolutionary commanders") be immediately removed; and
- (c) That the members of the Corps should proceed not as fighting units but as a group of free citizens, taking with them a certain quantity of arms for self-defense against the attack of counter-revolutionists.²³³

²³¹ Last Train Home, Chapter I.

See image 5, Appendix.

²³² Baerlein, Henry, *The march of the seventy thousand*, L. Parsons, London, 1926, pp. 117-120. Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 78.

²³³ Kennan, George F. "The Czechoslovak Legion." *The Russian Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1957, pp. 3–16. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/125745>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2024. Pp. 5-6.

Benes, Eduard, *My War Memoirs*, London, 1928, p. 355.

<https://archive.org/details/mywarmemoirstran00edua/page/n3/mode/2up>

Each train cart could keep around 168 rifles each, which divided among 70000 men was practically nothing.²³⁴

What narratively has been done with the history of the events is a clever use of storytelling. By using a point of congestion and what to many must have felt like a slap in the face and instead only raising the pure defiance, the developers have more clearly created a pure enemy, not one that seems willing to compromise and has reasonable motives. It uses both the function of “good versus evil” as well as building upon the national myth of origin and struggle. Borrowing from Cubitt, one can rather easily see how this interpretation of the Penza agreement can be seen as a resource used by a society or at least parts of it.²³⁵ The agreement was never a fair deal and was in the end not honoured by either side considering the hostilities to come, but by side-stepping the entire ordeal and only showing defiance, another more heroic image is given. It should be noted that Morozov claims that the player's train is “not the first (...) to pass through here. Your countrymen handed over their weapons without incident. For your soldiers' sake, do as I ask or you will regret it.” But this is merely stated and not shown giving it less credibility at that moment.

As mentioned, this is a point of congestion that is mentioned more than once, not just by the game but also by Baerlein and Bečvář. Interestingly enough, it is not outwardly mentioned in the Czech sources if we choose not to count Bečvář. While it is mentioned by the likes of Victor Fic in passing, it is not really touched upon by any of the Czech material as it is more focused on a bigger picture and not as detail oriented as say, Fic or Bečvář. What is interesting however is that previously cited George Kennan, former US ambassador to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, outright mentions this while he himself draws this from Eduard Benes.²³⁶ Is not impossible that this surprising silence on the matter, especially if we consider what Jiří Hutečka wrote in *Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored* on how seemingly only the ill-fitted narrative details of the war was removed.²³⁷

From this point onwards it is clear that neutrality is no longer an option as it is hinted during the previous encounter that Morozov was glad you chose to resist, despite leaving without further direct hostilities. From this point forward, any Red forces are your enemies. Your first direct combat encounter with them is however a breeze regardless of difficulty as their forces at this point consists of little more than peasants who have never fired, let alone

²³⁴ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 78.

²³⁵ Cubitt, Geoffrey, *History and memory*, pp. 39-40.

²³⁶ See note 228.

²³⁷ Hutečka, Jiří. “‘Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored’: Czechoslovak Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918-1919.” *Nationalities Papers* 49, pp. 629-631.

held a rifle before. This is not to say the player can not make a mistake. When personally going through the game for the first time, I was under the assumption the soldiers in my care were invincible as this is still technically the tutorial where, in most games, the game is more forgiving. But through personal incompetence I created a ludonarrative where a grenadier by the name of Josef Mejzlík was ruthlessly gunned down. As a direct consequence of his death, in the later wake being held in this memory, another soldier drank enough liquor to be forever branded an alcoholic. Later down the line, this would result in yet another death involving a shovel and the locomotive's firebox.

Chapter I reaches its final stages upon reaching Moscow where my previous casualty was only the beginning. Once again encountering Morozov who orders another train to ram headfirst into the one the player controls. This resulted in the death of Major Gazdík and most of the crew except for a few survivors. The player is now tasked with finding Captain Langer, the aforementioned narrator, who up until this point had been a key negotiator for the Provisional Government.²³⁸

There are similarities between Langer and several of the actual negotiators who were present in Moscow at the time. He is most likely a characterisation of several representatives negotiating on the behalf of Czechoslovakia. Unlike Morozov, Langer is directly based upon a real person by the same name.²³⁹ Due to his diplomatic as well as military experience, he is made out to be new commander to-be once located. In the process of locating the captain, a new train needs to be acquired in order to proceed East. While the player is tasked with securing this new locomotive, Langer rounds up any and all Legionaries still present in Moscow. While having Langer as primary negotiator for the Czechoslovak cause as represented in the game is a logical choice considering his actual service, it is also interesting as to why there is no mention of more prominent representatives sent to Moscow such as the later politician Professor Prokop Maxa who in Bečvář's account is given a central position in this matter.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ See image 6, Appendix

²³⁹ Langer is a historical character. He was born in 1888 in Prague to a Czech speaking Jewish family. He studied medicine at Charles University. He served in Czechoslovak Legions in Russia during World War I as a physician.

Nationalencyklopedin, František Langer.

<http://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/frantisek-langer> (2024-04-15)

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "František Langer". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frantisek-Langer>. Accessed 15 April 2024.

²⁴⁰ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 76-77.

6.2 Narrative on the First World War

Throughout Chapter I the broad outlines of the narrative have emerged. The player is to manage a trainload of soldiers in terms of food, coal, and ammunition all the while crossing a Russia embroiled in a civil war while maintaining neutrality. The latter proved impossible.

Upon leaving Moscow the player is informed of the following beneath the heading Bittersweet Farewell:

The regrettable events in Moscow claimed the lives of Major Gazdik and many brave Legionaries. Morozov's savage attack will not be forgiven. However, the arrival of Captain Langer and his unit has helped with morale. All is not lost. The journey continues. Upon learning of Major Gazdik's demise, the Czechoslovak Provisional Government sent orders with your promotion from Captain to Major. This is not how you imagined to move up the ranks but here you are. The responsibility of leading soldiers to Vladivostok suddenly rests heavily on your shoulders. The soldiers took the new leadership well, but Captain Langer seemed taken aback. Nevertheless, Major Gazdik trusted Langer to serve as a valuable advisor, and so will you.²⁴¹

This information is most likely delivered via telegram, only available to be received and sent through telegraphes located among the line stations. The Legion is thus depicted as fairly isolated and self reliant as orders from above will be few and far in between. Any decision for better or worse will be made in the moment. This is, at least in part, why the Legion in the real world held what can be described as a congress in Chelyabinsk with the purpose of establishing the future organisation of their armed forces going eastward and to address mounting concerns in regards to their ever more strained relationship with the bolsheviks.²⁴²

This concept of self reliance and general distance from actual authority detaches the narrative of the game away from the greater war raging in Europe. The original idea was for the Legion in Russia to make the journey and rendezvous with the allies in France to aid on that front. This did not come to pass however which only adds to the isolation and that the fight is about something else other than just winning the war. Getting home to the deservedly free homeland or securing enough food and coal for the journey is placed higher upon the priority list in this case. The war is more of a backdrop in this regard and seen as a means to

²⁴¹ Last Train Home, Chapter II; "Bittersweet Farewell."

See image 7, Appendix.

²⁴² Kennan, George. "The Czechoslovak Legion: II." *The Russian Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1958, pp. 11–28. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/125722>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2024. Pp. 13.

an end that has been achieved. Seen from this angle there is a case to be made for how the narrative is anti-war given its bleak and gritty depiction. The war did however present itself as an answer to the question of if there was to be a nation for the Czechs and Slovaks.

The theme of self-reliance is further expanded upon as the story moves forward as the player has no way to recessive direct support from the Provisional Government. Thus foraging, trade, and maintaining cordial relations with passing villages are required. It is in the player's interaction with these villages that the ludonarrative can be expanded further. An example of this is introduced early during Chapter II as part of increasing the tensions between the player and the Red forces even further. A village the player passes through has been drained of its manpower due to recruitment at the hands of the Red Army from a nearby camp. The player is faced with a choice: help the village with rather menial tasks as well as dealing with a pack of wolves threatening their livestock or simply decide that the reward, if there even is one, is simply not worth the effort. Any stop that makes use of the limited forces available to the player is accompanied with an inherent risk in terms of both ammunition and the lives of said soldiers. For the sake of this argument, let us say that the player accepts these tasks. In this scenario, what was meant to be a group of menial tasks did towards the end turn into a skirmish with the aforementioned Red forces returning to the village for more recruits and supplies. The player did not per se receive any reward for their actions. However, the opportunity did arise to essentially steal supplies from the village store room during the mission. If the player chooses to do so, it makes the conversation between the soldiers regarding the Red forces returning to the village make less sense. One soldier remarks how he does not understand why the Reds would attack and steal from their own. Were the Reds not supposed to help the villagers as heard previously? Another answer by claiming this is what happens when you choose the wrong side in the civil war. This exchange puts the players' potential actions in a bad light depending on how dire their situation was at that moment.

Regardless of the player's actions, they learn of the nearby Red Army camp close-by further along the tracks. Unlike the previous engagement, this mission is not optional. The main goal of it is intelligence and, if possible, destroying any leftover supplies your forces do not need. After a prolonged engagement with the entrenched forces present in the camp, one of the soldiers finds the intelligence papers. The player advisor, Captain Langer notes how the indicate some form of special operation to be carried out by the encamped Red forces. His tone goes dark when he concludes that these reports “indicate nothing short of genocide.” What that ultimately entails is not disclosed or elaborated upon. What it does mean for the narrative is to make any and all Red forces the ultimate enemy. No matter what the player has

done so far or will potentially do can not truly measure to the crime that (will later down the line) is genocide.

Allowing room for analysis we should divert our attention to what was written in regards to how the narrative had been previously handled during the communist era. Unlike the narrative unfolding here, where the forces spawned by the October Revolution, its leadership is actively trying to ignore this particular part of the war and revolution as it directly contradicts the communist leadership and its legitimacy in Czechoslovakia. To claim that Czechoslovak independence was a direct result of the revolution is in this case a cover story aiming to outshine the rest of the war. The game is in this aspect so far a polar opposite in narrative, the developers narrative is making the revolution and its forces out to be direct obstacles to getting home besides being cartoonishly evil at times, which is not too dissimilar to the experiences and thoughts expressed in *The Lost Legion*. Even in the aftermath of the raid on the camp, the wives of the men who willingly signed up with the Bolsheviks claim they practically signed their own death warrant, thus not directly blaming the player for taking an active part in their demise. It does however raise some questions in regards to how “noble” the Legion actually was and plays into the soviet image that the Legion was essentially a band of robbers illegally occupying the Trans-Siberian Railway on behalf of the western powers and Japanese imperialists in the east.²⁴³

6.3 Escalation of Hostilities

Despite that hostilities has directly broken out between the player and the Red forces, when the player eventually reaches the previously mentioned city of Penza where the first disarmament agreement was reached in the real world, negotiations seems to have completely broken down and what was otherwise a rather peaceful affair in the grand scope of things was a drawn out firefight. Taking the city comes with a major choice for the player in terms of narrative. As it turns out, many trains belonging to the Legion have passed through the city previously, many of which took a southern route. This route also reportedly has a greater presence of Red forces. The northern route, the less popular for previous trains, is allegedly under the control of the White forces. For the purpose of wanting to be exposed to the White forces in the civil war, I personally chose the northern route. Regardless of route chosen, a subordinate of the player hands them a telegram found in Penza. The telegram itself is interesting in and of itself as it is directly based upon a telegram that was intercepted but also

²⁴³ Gordon, Andrew, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (4th Ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 180-185.

that it is directly mentioned in *The Lost Legion*. It is titled Order 377 and signed by none other than Lev Trotsky. It reads as follows:

To all Soviet workers, peasants, and soldiers from Penza to Vladivostok. Every soldier of the Czechoslovak Legion seen with a weapon is to be shot on the spot. Czechoslovaks are part of the international imperialist conspiracy and support the counter-revolutionary powers in their effort to divide Siberia. Every Legion train with even one weapon on board is to be seized and all Legionaries are to be arrested. A reliable force is being sent to crush and punish the insurgents, but Czechoslovak Legionaries that give up their weapons will be treated as brothers. Not a single railroad car with Czechoslovak Legionaries may go any further east! Anyone who assists the Legionaries or lets them through will be considered a traitor and will be severely punished.

People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs, Trotsky.²⁴⁴

At a first glance this can easily be seen as a particular and specific narrative touch by the developers to, if that has not been made fully clear, that the Red forces are an unavoidable enemy doing everything in its power to stop the journey. This is however not the case as this is a slightly differently worded to the real telegram intercepted on the 28th of May 1918:

All Soviets are hereby ordered to disarm the Czechoslovaks immediately. Every armed Czechoslovak found on the railway is to be shot on the spot; every troop train in which even one armed man is found shall be unloaded, and its soldiers shall be interned in a war prisoners' camp. Local war commissars must proceed at once to carry out this order; every delay will be considered treason and will bring the offender severe punishment (...) If your forces are not adequate to disarm them, do everything possible to stop the echelons: side-track them, take their locomotives, in urgent cases tear up the railway tracks.²⁴⁵

Of note here other than the similarities between the two is what information is being left out. Namely, the Cheyabiansk incident as it has come to be known, which precedes the telegram and might be a catalyst for a breakdown of amicable relations as a last straw. In short, when passing a train of returning Hungarian prisoners returning from Siberia, an object of iron was thrown out of it, hitting and killing a Czech soldier. The entire ordeal was supposed to be

²⁴⁴ Last Train Home, Chapter II, "Order 377."

See image 8, Appendix.

²⁴⁵ Kennan, George. "The Czechoslovak Legion: II. pp. 14.

handled by local soviet authorities but the Hungarian in question was lynched.²⁴⁶ This is mentioned because it may be deliberate to ignore this controversy as this incident can be argued to have been the proverbial back of soviet patience breaking, or a welcome excuse.

6.4 Honourable Heroes or Hopeless Pawns of War?

Despite any effort made by the player in the narrative thus far, it is made increasingly clear by the recurring monologues by Langer in between chapters that the situation is growing worse by the day. Morale is low and hope is a scarce commodity. Here is also expressed the irritation by the common soldier how they are repeatedly asked to remain neutral while at the same time receiving orders from the government to practically aid the White forces in military matters. This desperation is mirrored by the saving grace of camaraderie between those in the player's command. A recurring theme is "no man left behind" because "we are all going home." Despite this, not every surviving Legionnaire found along the track can be saved, either due to a lack of food or simply that there is no room for them. As mentioned, every individual soldier has a unique backstory and characteristics. Narratively speaking the developers want the player to have to make a tough decision. "Should I leave behind this crippled soldier who will never recover in favour of an experienced engineer?" In line with the framing narrative and metagaming (the use of information from the real world to influence gameplay), it is technically rewarded to choose the experienced engineer over the cripple as the reward outweighs the loss. But if the player is truly immersed in the story, an emerging ludo narrative would have the player choosing the less directly rewarding path, choosing to keep the cripple. It can be argued that the narrative mind the player is in is at least somewhat dependent on the *historiekultur* in which they find themselves. If they truly see this odyssey-esque march east and its soldiers "like gentlemen fighting" as cited by Petr Kolar earlier, it would feel non-historical to take the immoral path. While purely speculative, it could be argued from the point of Cubitt that no one wants to remember their own history as being the "villains." If the history of Czechoslovak independence was built upon barbaric actions and villainy, it would be a more difficult path to rally behind and would clash with the understanding as Kolar, and by some extension Ashborne as a whole, has about this particular part of history.

Moral choices like these occur outside of the greater story as well. In a certain event called "Destinies Left Alone" that can occur from Chapter II and onwards, your forces sent

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 12.

out to forage can stumble upon a struggling farmstead occupied by an old man and his two young daughters. The farm has apparently been repeatedly sacked by Red as well as White forces several times over leaving little to the family who owns it. As mentioned earlier, all soldiers have a unique personality defined by traits. Some are for example kind but also royalist in their belief while others can be stubborn but have communist leanings. In this situation should the player choose to help the family, besides giving them some food and help with some tasks around the farm, soldiers with kind and religious traits insist on staying behind to help further all while promising they will rendezvous with the rest in Vladivostok.²⁴⁷ Similar to the situation of leaving some and taking on others, this clash between framing narrative, ludo narrative, and pure meta continues to put strain on both supplies and morale.

Another example of an event that can occur along the track centres on the question of faith and neutrality. Passing by a church granted the player brought a religious character along, this question will be discussed among the soldiers. One soldier expresses admiration for the architecture of the Orthodox church while also wishing they (the Russians in general) respect the commandment “thou shalt not kill.” Another chime in that the average person does whilst the religious character brought along raises the issue on when killing is allowed and not depending on religion and context. Should the player visit the church, a priest greets the soldiers. Upon learning they are Legionaries he expresses respect for their cause and attempt at neutrality. Similarly to my personal experience with this event, a soldier is confused, is not the church aligned with the Tsar and the White Army? The Tsar was, after all, supposedly divinely ordained and had rested on this authority since at least Ivan the Terrible.²⁴⁸ The priest argues that this is bolshevik propaganda and that the church strives for reform.²⁴⁹

The strange part about this encounter is not the fact that a man of the cloth is not outwardly a staunch monarchist insisting on the issue that God’s appointed shall rule Russia. What is strange is that a local priest in what is essentially in the middle of nowhere, hours away from any city, knows about both the aims and actions of the Legion. This encounter can be interpreted in two ways. One is to create some neutrality in who really is the enemy. The

²⁴⁷ *Last Train Home*, Chapter II, “Destinies Left Alone.”

See image 9, Appendix

²⁴⁸ Bogatyrev, Sergei. “Reinventing the Russian Monarchy in the 1550s: Ivan the Terrible, the Dynasty, and the Church.” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 2 (2007): pp. 271–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4214436>. pp. 292.

²⁴⁹ *Last Train Home*, Chapter III, “Can Faith be Neutral?”
See image 10, Appendix.

priest did not seem ecstatic on the ideology espoused by either the Reds or Whites. Another way to interpret this is to distance the conflict from the common person. While the church as an institution was aligned with the Tsar, there is room for discrepancy in attitude between the grassroots and the church leadership. Local priests would arguably have more in common and greater concern for their local parish and community than a distant power struggle. The common people are not the ultimate foe in this conflict, some simply wish to live their lives undisturbed by the conflict that ravages around them (think the miller's surviving family member or the village that was aided) not liking either side. The priest is no exception here other than being slightly friendlier in his demeanour, understanding that the forces that the player control actually try to be neutral to the extent it is possible.

While the concept of neutrality is thrown around a lot, the framing narrative gives few to no possibilities aside from scripted encounters such as the first meeting with Morozov to actually be somewhat cordial with the Reds. On the contrary, the framing narrative actually pushes the player towards the White side in the conflict which ultimately culminates in joint operations alongside their forces. These are however met with displeasure from the likes of Langer as it is continuously pointed out this is not their fight. However this cooperation is depicted as a necessary evil as it is both easier to get along with the Whites and their favour is needed for safe passage so as to not have to fight both sides.

6.5 The Russian Civil War: Reds or Whites as the Enemy

Roughly along the halfway point through the story, the player will encounter the White forces directly, and due to the ultimately failed endeavour to remain neutral it becomes increasingly clear that currying favour with the Whites is now a viable option in order to ensure passage and survival. This is the beginning of what is called "The White Horizon" both alluding to a greater White presence while also indicating that the Siberian winter is fast approaching. The first encounter with a representative of the White Army, an unnamed officer whose horse has died, thus stranding him, is if possible worse than the first encounter with the Red forces. An outright rude and preposterous demand for food and a weapon is made in exchange for a future reward. Technically being allied, this request *should* be granted, both from a narrative and meta perspective. I personally attempted both outcomes. Granting the request was greeted by nothing and refusing it resulted in a loss of morale. Allies indeed.

Despite this interaction, not long after the player comes across a village adjacent to a rail station where they are greeted by the message "Red and Green should Never be Seen." A

peasant militia is present at the station claiming to be the “true army of the people” as opposed to the Red forces who claim the same moniker. They armed themselves in response to the Red forces claiming their coal mine and taking several of the village's families as hostages. This is not the only example of the “Red Terror” provided as at least two villages can be found in ruins along the track. One of these is accompanied by the title “Red Terror” even though it is not fully clear whether or not the Reds were to blame.

All this takes place in Chapter III and onwards and truly opens to the fact that the Red forces are the true enemy in the player's way. However this does not mean that the White Army is portrayed as the “good” allies. The White officer from earlier gave off the impression that the Legion were tools rather than allies in the civil war, something that can be gleaned from Bečvář's writings. This uncertainty is reinforced further when a village is approached that is utterly burned to the ground, leaving only a handful of survivors among the ruins making the soldiers wonder whether this was the doing of the Reds or the Whites as neither side seemed willing to compromise with suspected sympathisers of the other side.²⁵⁰ Despite this, examples of a White Terror as opposed to the Red Terror is few and far inbetween and more often than not displayed with a certain uncertainty. During the epilogue for Chapter IV, Langer explains how news of atrocities reach them every day, some committed by the Reds, some by Whites, and other allegedly by the Legion, but it does not delve deeper than that in this regard.

Going by Chapman's definition of framing narrative, the developers push harder on the Red Terror rather than the White as there is an overlap in interests between the parties. But by doing so it also charges the narrative input the player has through *lexia* in the ludo narrative as it incentivises actions against them.²⁵¹ The Whites can come across as bothersome and arrogant, but the Reds as evil. There is for example a line of dialogue given by a farmer further down the “Red and Green” event chain where he claims that “violence is all they know.” This mirrors some of the first words given by the first non-soldier character the player interacts with in Chapter I, but I digress. Fighting the Reds never seems odd due to this depiction. Borrowing from Smith and Cubitt in this matter, this depiction is most likely non-deliberate. A story with a clear antagonist is narratively sound and lends credence to people as narrative beings. But what Smith brings to the discussion is the matter of social engineering of history. It fits the character of the Czech (by extension Czechoslovakia) as resilient in face of a larger foe. In WWII it was the nazis, here it is the bolsheviks. Thus when

²⁵⁰ Bushkovitch, Paul., *A Concise History of Russia*, pp. 308.

²⁵¹ Chapman, Adam, *Digital games as history*, pp. 119-121.

drawing inspiration from the past and depicting it, it falls rather neatly into place as a story as it has influenced the understanding of the depicted struggle.²⁵² Taking Cubitt into account it becomes more apparent why the Reds become the greater enemy. Looking both to the past and at the time of writing, soviet communism has left a considerable mark on Czech society making it more apparent to have its representatives, that is soldiers, as a hindrance. This combined with an increasingly hostile Russia at the time of writing these two factors make sense of one another and confirm each other.²⁵³

This becomes even more relevant and interesting when we bring Apostolos Spanos into the discussion. Spanos argues for example how games (as artefacts) can be a source of social and by extension cultural history, meaning that the game itself says something about the society in which it was produced. This was mentioned when introducing Spanos earlier in the text but needs some additional context for the argument that is about to be made. Spanos mentions a board game from the late 1800's called *Monopolist* advertised as the struggle between Capital and Labour.²⁵⁴ Spanos argued that this in some way acts as contemporary social/political communication from how society and by extension history up until that point was understood. The same logic can be applied here as *Last Train Home* is a product of its time depicting a view of history as it is understood by its contemporaries. Klas-Göran Karlssons concept of *historiekultur* captures this contemporary view quite clearly.²⁵⁵ Russia and by extension communism is not looked upon favourably as a result of the society in which the game has been produced.

Despite this, this “russophobia” for a lack of a better word, is extended further to the Whites as well. It has been mentioned that the Legion is used as a tool in the fight against the Reds. The in-game battle of Irkutsk is the best example of this. Here, the player is tasked with securing a bridge between the two halves of the city, one controlled by the Reds, the other by Whites. The player is further directed to look for surviving White soldiers on the Red held side. Despite being successful in this as well as defending a key position, the White Officer in charge decides to cut their losses and blows up the remaining bridge, deserting not just the player but also the surviving White forces. This betrayal is felt not only by the players' soldiers but also the Whites. While the player manages to find a ferry back across, the White soldiers give their lives to cover that retreat as they “owe it to you.” The blame for this betrayal is not put upon the soldiers of the White side. It is directed towards the institution,

²⁵² Smith, Anthony D., *Myths and memories of the nation*, pp. 170-175.

²⁵³ Cubitt, Geoffrey, *History and memory*, pp. 39-42.

²⁵⁴ Apostolos Spanos, *Games of History: Games and Gaming As Historical Sources*, pp. 68-69.

²⁵⁵ Karlsson, Klas-Göran & Zander, Ulf, pp. 57-70.

the White Army as an entity. The men in its ranks are as expendable as the player's troops if it means achieving victory. While outright denying it was White artillery that destroyed the bridge, the White commander says the following:

Our generals believe there is only one Russia. They leave no room for compromise. For them, the enemy is anyone who is not part of Russia. You - Legionaries are not part of Russia. You want your new republic (...) No. I am not against you. You have helped us. And many are grateful. As a proof of that, I will share some of our own supplies. As a compensation for the lost train. However, Some say you are self-serving. That you only care about returning home. A few even believe you are an enemy, not only to the Reds but to ourselves as well..²⁵⁶

Nominally allies, but even the closest thing to a friendly force is subtly hostile to the player's cause. Despite the commander's words, there is a grain of truth in it. The Legion had no real interest to get embroiled in the civil war and only really wanted to go home. As for how this puts the Legion at odds with the White forces is not really elaborated upon. It could be chalked down to the aforementioned russophobia but that is probably too easy of an answer. If one would hazard a guess it is probably a mix of shaking up the story as well as depicting the actual strife between the White Army and the Legion that occurred in some capacity. This friction with the White Army occurs regardless of how much aid the player has pledged in the past. Some missions are as mentioned optional. So this can be seen two ways, either that the White Army is using the player and their resources or that the White Army is losing its patience with their so-called ally who continually refuses to help.

In a similar fashion to how blame was placed upon the White Army as an institution, shortly after the encounter at Irkutsk, the player once again encounter the Red general Morozov. He has sabotaged the track ahead of the player and is preparing an all out assault on the player position. His forces are ill equipped and lacking both ammunition and food. One of his soldiers pleads with the general to reconsider the attack as the player's forces command a strategic position with a machine gun. These pleas are ignored, this fight is described as greater than them all. This is for Russia, the motherland. Just like the White officer before, victory is to be achieved whatever the cost. Waves of troops are sent to their death all while Captain Langer tries to reason with Morozov to reconsider this. "Think of your soldiers," he says. This can be seen as complete madness as Morozov does not relent much to the dismay

²⁵⁶ Last Train Home, Chapter VII, "Supplies form the Whites"
See image 11, Appendix

of one of the player's soldiers asking why he keeps sending men into the “meat grinder.” Langer does provide some insight into this worth mentioning: “He is not mad. He has no choice. He has a duty to his country. As we have to our new republic.” Just like the player, Morozov has a mission that demands success at any cost. There is no compromise. While this might clash with a previous impression given that the Legion as opposed to the Reds were willing to compromise, one has to remember that Morozov went out of his way to hamper the player's progress. The player is actively trying to leave Russia. Many missions along the way are optional. There is rarely a direct need to fight the Reds other than for resources.

The player is now given an opportunity and choice to prematurely end the slaughter before any more lives are lost. Morozov needs to die and his men will flee. This again reinforces that the true enemy is not the men whom the player is fighting, but rather the Red Army and by extension its ideology. This is further reinforced by the post-mission text: “We had to find out what happened to the White supply lines, as several supply trains had never made it to us. We tried and succeeded. We finally got revenge for Major Gazdik. Morozov and many of his men lie dead. But was the loss of so many lives, even enemy lives, worth it?” followed by, prefaced by “A soldier is a human. Nothing less, nothing more”:

It is an exhausting journey back to the train. Your soldiers give an account of the mission and are forced to repeat it, again and again, as your advisor presses them for details. They'd returned from a confrontation that had no winners or losers. Some were stunned, some lost in thought, some in shock. Even those with personal grudges against all of Russia were feeling uneasy. Perhaps even ashamed. Because... the dead could not be counted.²⁵⁷

The player achieved another victory towards the goal, however this is not cause for celebration. This is accompanied by a song, an elegy by Langer which is described as a hymn to Slavic brotherhood everywhere. “A fallen Slav is always honored, whether friend or foe.” And if we recall the mention of a casualty suffered early on, during which a wake was held for the fallen, similar wakes are held for *every single soldier* who falls in the player's care.

To bring Spanos back into the discussion, he borrows from Astrid Erll, who in his definition of what he called cultural memory writes that it is “the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts.”²⁵⁸ Spanos argues that games are transmitters of cultural memory, similarly to the aforementioned Sami game Dablot Prejjesne. This stance towards panslavism

²⁵⁷ Last Train Home, Chapter VII, “A soldier is a human. Nothing less, nothing more.” See image 12, Appendix.

²⁵⁸ Apostolos Spanos, *Games of History*, pp. 52-53.

depicted is an important theme placed front and centre in this situation. PanSlavic sentiments were key to the Czechoslovak project. Without it, a common Czech and Slovak state would not have been feasible.

6.6 The Nation of the Czechs (and Slovaks) in *Last Train Home*

In the background of the narrative there is the always out of reach end goal: home. The promised homeland of Czechoslovakia. Towards the end of the journey the player receives word via telegram that the republic has been declared and once Vladivostok has been reached, there is an actual country to return to. However, this is met not by joy as one would expect but rather somberly. Langer narrates how he is “feeling like a puppet; a marionette, dangling from an unseen hand.”²⁵⁹ This last half of the journey had been accompanied by an increased cooperation with White forces that, while rewarding, put the journey and the soldiers at risk. A noteworthy task of this kind was “Mysterious Family” during which the player is to escort a number of notables, a family, to Nizhneudinsk. Their identity was at the beginning unknown but as it later is alluded to it was surviving members of the Tsars family. Their exact relation is unknown but this makes them a high value target. The simple fact that the task is to guarantee their safety is not the issue at hand, the issue was that the information regarding their true identity was hidden by the government the soldiers of the train had fought to make sovereign in Czechoslovakia. This task had put the entire purpose of the journey at risk by making the train a greater target than it realistically needed to be. The purpose had shifted from fighting for *the* cause. Now it was simply *a* cause, and not one that should concern the Legion. The idea expressed is that their fight ended with the declaration and in a way way back when Russia withdrew from the war. Similar expressions can be found in Bečvář’s writings, where many of his comrades expressed feelings of abandonment and that their cause was lost.²⁶⁰

While the cause was independence and the name Czechoslovakia gets thrown around many times throughout the story, it rarely goes deeper in that regard. The nation of the Czechs and Slovaks is in many ways presented as natural. Rarely if ever are the individual ethnicities separated or discussed as different. They are Czechoslovaks through and through. Despite this there are mentions in individual soldier's character cards (bio) of their ethnicities, but this is not elaborated upon. For example, the previously mentioned Major Gazdík was

²⁵⁹ Last Train Home, End of Chapter VI, Cinematic
See image 13, Appendix.

²⁶⁰ Bečvář, Gustav, pp. 197.

Slovak. There are other characters similar to him that have not been mentioned due to lack of relevance that hold some form of leadership role that are also Slovaks. Depending on localisation settings, the game can be played in “Immersive audio” which mixes the audio between Czech, Slovak, and Russian on the field of battle depending on the actor. Despite this, and to my knowledge, the characters such as Gazdik are all voiced by Czech actors despite sometimes being ethnically Slovak.²⁶¹ The Czechoslovak nation as depicted in the game is thus predominantly Czech in presentation, besides this it is also depicted as a nation born from “so much death” as it was put by Langer.²⁶² It was cause for celebration for the common soldier on the train, but Langer seems to be the only one who appreciates how steep its price was, and the price was among the countless dead to become a veteran in another's war.

Langer later explains how, with the *de facto* declaration of the republic, the Legion had become an “unacceptable threat” to not just the Reds but also the Whites. One can only assume that the words of the previously mentioned White commander have come back to haunt the journey. “Some say you are self-serving. That you only care about returning home.” One can further assume that the Whites have drawn the conclusion that the Legion and their uses have reached their end as their motivating factor now has been achieved. While this is not how the partnership between the two officially ended in actual history, Admiral Kolchak was as mentioned surrendered shortly before the last troops left Russia, it is a decent enough mechanism to move the story towards its end. The Legion is now truly alone and only has one goal: going home.

6.7 End of the Line

Upon reaching Vladivostok, as opposed to how it was with Bečvář, the city is surprisingly under Red control. This is most likely just a story beat to give the impression of a final last stand against overwhelming odds, as the Red forces give their all to stop the Legion from leaving Russia.²⁶³ While this is pure fiction considering the Japanese presence in the east alongside being the stronghold of White forces.²⁶⁴ To compare Bečvář leaving Russia with the

²⁶¹ Such as Gazdik, being described as a Slovak.

Last Train Home Wiki, Otakar Gazdik, https://last-train-home.fandom.com/wiki/Otakar_Gazdik. (Accessed 2024-07-12)

²⁶² Last Train Home, Chapter VII, “The Day the Republic was Formed.” See image 14, Appendix.

²⁶³ Last Train Home, Chapter IX, “Becoming Legends.” See image 15, Appendix.

²⁶⁴ Kennan, George F. “The Czechoslovak Legion.” pp. 7-8.

chaotic final stand in the game makes it seem anticlimactic in comparison. However, as Chapman puts it: “Of course historical games do sometimes present problematic representations, no doubt in part because they are entertainment products. These range from simple inaccuracies to widespread exclusionary historical representations.”²⁶⁵ While this primarily refers to representation in games in matters of gender and ethnicity a case for it can be made here as well. Regardless of how historically accurate this final counter is in reality, it stems from what Chapman argues is most rewarding. Games and their developers are no strangers to reward “players for actions that they consider to be historically factual and/or punish actions that conflict with this.”²⁶⁶ If this encounter had been true or factual, it would come to the surprise of no one that the Legion would fight for the chance to finally leave Russia, especially so if we are to believe Bečvář and his desire to go home. The reward here is to finish the game and to feel accomplished. However, this setting comes with the caveat of placing the Red Army as a final obstacle in their way. Despite their differences, even the government in Moscow wanted the Czechoslovak Legion out of Russia, and to stop that when they finally reached Vladivostok would be a missed opportunity to accomplish that. The animosity between the two parties had at the end of the day broken out due to mistrust and suspicion more than anything else. But as Spanos would argue, as we consider *Last Train Home* a source in this case, it is not so much about what the game covers about the past but rather what it shows of the current culture. Games are essentially mediums that keep the cultural memory and identity as understood of the time they are made alive.²⁶⁷

7. Summary, a discussion on results, and conclusions

During the course of this thesis the material examined has been focused on the question of narrative present in Czech historiographic material alongside an autobiography and a video game. All of these have had in common a focus on the First World War, the early Czechoslovakia, and how it has been remembered. This has been done with the aim of answering a set of research questions asked in the very beginning, which are the following:

- What is the overarching narrative on the First World War with emphasis on the Czechoslovak Legion and the creation of Czechoslovakia as depicted in Czech historiography?

²⁶⁵ Chapman, Adam, pp. 47.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 47.

²⁶⁷ Spanos, Apostolos, pp. 3. 53.

- How does it compare to the narrative told in popular media such as the video game *Last Train Home*?
- How does it compare from the account provided by *The Lost Legion; a Czechoslovakian Epic*?
- Is there, and if so, what is the historical narrative throughout Czech historiography?
 - To what extent does this retelling of history affect the reader's understanding of the origin and creation of Czechoslovakia?
 - What narrative holds the greatest influence on *Last Train Home* and does it align with any established narrative?

7.1 Summary

The overarching narrative that can be identified within the historiographical material is one which can most easily be described as a back and forth tug of war between primarily two stances. The discussions on the foundation of Czechoslovakia all centre around the watershed moment that is the First World War as it is an unavoidable subject to not include. The earliest discussion on the subject arose in the aftermath of WWI and the country's independence. This period could be called First Republic history and was heavily reliant on propagandic material regarding the suffering, plight, and struggle the to-be Czechoslovak nation endured both under Austrian rule but also during the war. This was however accompanied with a sense of pride in the participation and achievements of the “hero-sufferers” in this case found in the east where much praise was directed. Those who managed to leave Austrian service and fight for the nation became the primary object for this praise. To the public this was most exemplified in cinema.

The narrative however changed quite dramatically with the establishment of a communist regime in Czechoslovakia following the Second World War. As the forces of the Czechoslovak Legion had been at odds with the forces of the revolution in Russia presenting them and their actions as heroic proved to be problematic. While it was outright impossible to ignore, attempts were instead made to redefine the nature of the Legion and its actions. At first the Legion was presented as a tool of western imperialism but in the post-Stalin period turned into a revolutionary force in their own right. But this attempt was met with its fair share of difficulty as the impact the Legion had made in society had proven to have become part of the national identity and myth of the nation thus creating this clash in narrative.

Interest in WWI waned somewhat as a result of WWII as new stories wanted to be told and WWI was now more or less considered to be a healed wound. But as communism was ousted from power in the country, a return period emerged, at first to influence reform but also to distance the state from the communist period. This created a feedback loop in which the country found itself to be in a limbo-like greyzone in regards to communism. It is not until relatively recently that communism as a subject has been revisited in a greater scope.

This can primarily be seen by looking at the increased interest in both search terms but also the re-rise of so-called “Legionnaire films” of which one massive movie is currently in production. Today’s media has also given rise to the presence of history in video games as a main subject. Czech studio Ashborne Games released in late 2023 the title *Last Train Home* which covers a theoretical last train leaving Russia, with the player given command of this odyssey. The game is a clear example of the return of nostalgic feelings of the First Republic before the communist regime and is thus narratively similar to the older films being produced in the interwar period.

7.2 Discussion and conclusions

The first question asked in this thesis was what the narrative was in Czech historiography and how it compared to those present in the video game *Last Train Home* and the autobiography *The Lost Legion*. This was both the easiest and simultaneously the most difficult question to answer. While it might not come as a huge revelation on its own, there is not one homogenous grand narrative that encompasses the history of Czechoslovakia and modern Czechia, but several. These have, while not outright “competed” for dominance, waxed and waned alongside whoever governed the country ever since its birth in the 20th century. These narratives even began before the country was declared independent during the prelude to and during WWI. The previously mentioned historian Herbert A. L. Fisher remarked that “Czechoslovakia is the child of propaganda.”²⁶⁸ And here is where the first narrative can be identified: the oppressed peoples of the Czech and Slovak nation. By directly framing the Czechs and Slovaks as being brutally oppressed by their Austrian overlord despite having no real power to fight back creates an image of a victim and a bully. While on its own this garners sympathy from international onlookers, what truly impresses in this regard is the

²⁶⁸ Orzoff, Andrea, *Battle for the castle [Elektronisk resurs] the myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914-1948*, pp 3-22.

Zeman, Zbyněk Anthony Bohuslav & Klimek, Antonín, *The life of Edvard Beneš. 1884-1948: Czechoslovakia in peace and war*, pp. 21–23.

willpower to fight back when the opportunity that was WWI arose. Their fight became that of a narrative underdog which made their cause noble. This cemented the fight of the Czechoslovak Legion in the country's imagination and became a crucial if not integral part of the country's national identity and *historiekultur*. It can be summarised as: "We fought for our own independence against the odds. This was the reigning narrative that dominated the First Republic up until the establishment of the communist regime.

A very similar view of history can be found in *Last Train Home* as it is heavily influenced by this narrative of Czech history. While the game is primarily described as a homecoming story similar to that of the *Odyssey*, clear inspiration from pre-communist depictions are taken. Itself being a product of a post-communist Czech Republic is also making itself known as it harbours not only anti-communist sentiments, besides them being the main antagonist. The very representation of the Red Army, Adam Morozov is presented as ruthless, cold blooded, and to an extent downright evil going to considerable lengths to crush the Legion's progress towards Vladivostok. The difference in narrative from historiography is not only on account of its medium but also in its inherent purpose: entertainment. *Last Train Home* is very much first and foremost a product meant to be consumed as a source for entertainment. This entertainment is however built upon an historical premise. While historiographic material more often than not talks about WWI and its implications for Czechoslovakia in a broader sense such as how the memory is handled, the game itself is a *direct* example of how the history is handled. As an entertainment product depicting a war, an antagonist is needed, and the fight against said antagonist needs to feel motivated. Other games in the genre of "war" such as those depicting the fight against Nazi Germany do not have to as explicitly detail how evil or horrible the Nazis were. What the game essentially does is attempting to bring its source material to life in the form of a story, something which neither is the purpose is possible in the same way with historiography.

Bečvář's *The Lost Legion* is by default more similar in nature to *Last Train Home* as it in comparison to the historiographical material differs in a similar manner. Bečvář essentially tells the narrative story of the little man and the common soldier, as his tale is similar to many of those found around him. While Bečvář covers many central events important as to why the events surrounding the Czechoslovak Legion unfolded as they did, he does this from an on the ground point of view, albeit with some hindsight considering the book was written in post. A good example is the Penza agreement which is considered a turning point in relations between the Legion and the bolsheviks. Despite also having a clear antagonist, like *Last Train Home*, Bečvář does not seem all that concerned with the ideology of the enemy soldiers

beyond that they are bolsheviks. He is more critical of their lack of discipline than their ideological convictions. This is unlike *Last Train Home* where the bolsheviks are accused of genocide early on in the game clearly putting them on similar moral ground as Nazis in other war games.

A possible explanation as to why Bečvář differs in this regard can boil down to the time in which it was written. Despite the conflict that had raged in Russia, Bečvář's great enemy has been Austria-Hungary, the great oppressor of his people. This seemingly aligns with Šmidrkal's point that movies released on the subject of WWI that showed examples of, say insubordination (even against Austrians), that was deemed to not "have a clear basis in the cause of an independent Czechoslovakia" were thrown to the side. Disobeying orders for the sake of it was looked down upon unless it furthered the cause.²⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Bečvář wrote before the communist regime and lacked the subsequent relationship with the ideology and regime his later countrymen had.

So, what is the narrative in Czech historiography and how does it compare to those present in *Last Train Home* and *The Lost Legion*? The narrative can in short be summarised as First Republic history, communist revisionism, and contemporary uncertainty. All have claimed the same history for their respective cause and legitimacy and they primarily differ in how they chose to represent it. The First Republic wore it with pride, the communist reapplied it to fit a revolutionary tale of anti-imperialism, and contemporary history has only just recently opened up to approaching communism again. *Last Train Home* is a combination of First Republic history as it prides itself on the history, and the contemporary uncertainty, as it is an early example of approaching pre-communist WWI. *The Lost Legion* is found as a middle ground between the two, clearly telling a narrative fitting of the First Republic while avoiding the pitfalls of being politically charged towards the bolsheviks.

The second question and sub questions for this thesis was reliant upon the answer to the first question: is there a historical narrative throughout Czech history? If that is the case, to what extent does this retelling of history affect the reader's understanding of the origin and creation of Czechoslovakia? And further, what narrative holds the greatest influence on *Last Train Home* and does it align with any established narrative? As stated, this question is heavily reliant upon the answer to the first question. For the first question it was established that there is not one singular narrative but several identified as First Republic history, communist revisionism, and contemporary uncertainty. With this in mind we can go on to

²⁶⁹ Šmidrkal, Václav, pp. 72.

answer its sub questions. Depending on which narrative a person is brought up with and / or believes, it drastically affects their perception of how and why Czechoslovakia was created. If we consider Bečvář and similar accounts to be the primary representatives of the narrative present in First Republic history it is quite easy to understand why a reader would come to the conclusion that these are wholly accurate accounts “whose subtextual meaning supports the liberal-national point of view.”²⁷⁰ The dominating perception would be that the birth of Czechoslovakia is the fruit of the labour of its champions. While there is some general truth in this being that Czechoslovakia was a project being unimaginable without its supporting figures it still paints a very one sided image, almost ignoring the wider war and the possibility of the Allies losing, thus leaving the project dead in the water.

The communist equivalent of this would instead give the impression that the early lobbying for an independent Czechoslovakia was but a useful tool in the hands of western imperialist powers with their own objectives. With later revisions made however, what was first considered an enemy, the Czechoslovak Legion was refashioned into a revolutionary force “which reached a mass scale in response to the revolutionary events in Russia.”²⁷¹ Independence was to be a direct result of the possibility provided by the revolution. Being generous, one can see the argument being made that the events in Russia and the Legions’ actions in holding the railway certainly aided the Allied cause. This is most likely not the angle intended here however.

As for the so-called contemporary uncertainty and how its narrative would affect the reader's understanding it is almost present in the name it has been given. Contemporary uncertainty. The aforementioned limbo of the place of communism in Czech politics and history has drastically changed its perception. It was something which was to be avoided after the Velvet Revolution while still being somewhat of an elephant in the room. It leaves room for the nostalgia of the past understood to be untainted by communism thus creating some animosity towards it. It is in this setting that *Last Train Home* was dreamed up and subsequently created. As a quote “The Legion were like gentlemen fighting” is born out of this nostalgia for the past.²⁷² But as a result of being created in a post-communist Czech Republic, the previous, almost lack of, animosity towards communism is not present. A case could be made that, as has been made clear by some reviews of the game, that it is in some regard, anti-Russian more so than anti-communism.²⁷³ While the players input and *lexia* on

²⁷⁰ Hutečka, Jiří, A Missed Opportunity? Pp. 292.

²⁷¹ Hálek, Jan, Štofánik, Jakub, pp. 781-782.

²⁷² Horti, Samuel, A Video Game That Doubles as a World War I History Lesson.

²⁷³ See image 16, Appendix.

the matter in-game is rather limited, they are continuously prompted or otherwise pushed in a, to the developers, favourable direction where increasingly hostile actions are taken against the bolshevik forces to ensure the players troops continued survival.

While such claims goes beyond the scope of what this thesis has covered, it raises an interesting question to add to the overall discussion: has the modern geopolitical landscape affected the depiction of the bolshevik forces in the game? It is certainly a possibility but not something that can be answered definitively without writing another thesis on the subject.

8. Future research

It would certainly be interesting to delve further into the usage and presence of historical narratives in a wider selection of video games as the medium itself has only fairly recently gained traction as a source of historical knowledge and contemporary perception of the past as seen given the existence of both Chapman and Spanos respective works but also the presence of essays and chapters such as *Video Games as Sources, Tools... History?* by John Harney (2016) and *Video Games as Participatory Public History* by Jerimiah McCall (2018) Their presence in modern society should thus not be underestimated as they have proven to be a viable source of analysis in tandem with more traditional sources and academic texts.

To see more studies conducted on how video games affect the public perception of the past would not only be interesting from a personal point of view but would also help to open the field further than just analysis on narrative. Studies on the implication of video games present as educational tools, not just in history, but other fields in a greater quantity would certainly be interesting but would also require a dedicated thesis on its own to properly cover it.

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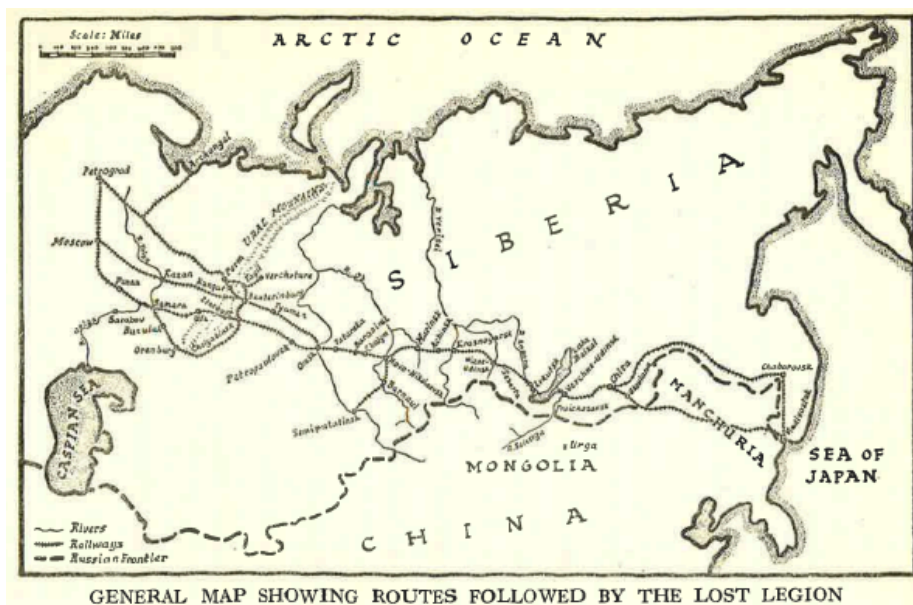
Appendixes

1



An overview of the track stretching from Moscow to Vladivostok. In red is the track that has been travelled. This is the way progress is tracked and contains relevant information on what has happened so far in the journey.

Source: *Last Train Home*.



In contrast, here is a map provided in *The Lost Legion*.

The text reads: General map showing routes followed by the Lost Legion.

Source: *The Lost Legion*.

2



Captain Langer, the in-game narrator and advisor to the player once they assume direct command. Langer plays a central role in the story and is key for explaining what is happening during the story as he relays outside information to the player.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

3

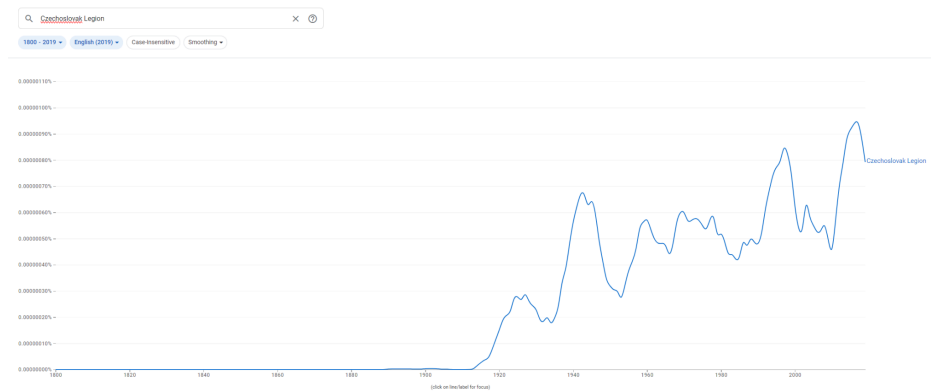


A section of sliders in the pre-game menu where the player can adjust difficulty in many

areas of the game to their liking.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

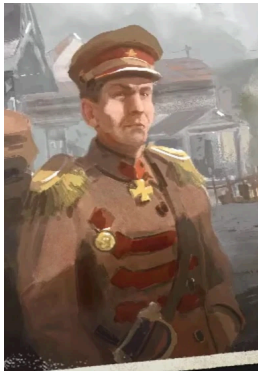
4



Graph detailing increase and decline of interest

Source: Google Ngram Viewer

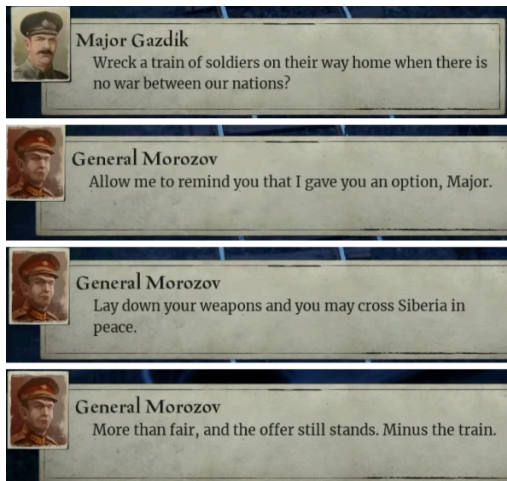
5



Adam Morozov, the main antagonist and in-game leader of the Red forces the player encounters.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

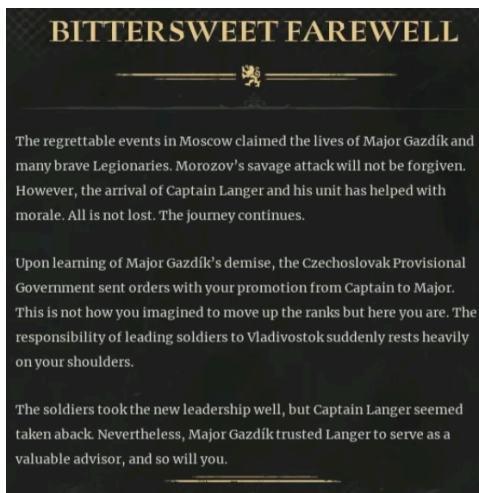
6



The final conversation between the major and the general. A deciding factor for conflict as depicted in-game.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

7



Source: *Last Train Home*.

8

Order 377

To all Soviet workers, peasants, and soldiers from Penza to Vladivostok. Every soldier of the Czechoslovak Legion seen with a weapon is to be shot on the spot. Czechoslovaks are part of the international imperialist conspiracy and support the counter-revolutionary powers in their effort to divide Siberia. Every Legion train with even one weapon on board is to be seized and all Legionaries are to be arrested. A reliable force is being sent to crush and punish the insurgents, but Czechoslovak Legionaries that give up their weapons will be treated as brothers. Not a single railroad car with Czechoslovak Legionaries may go any further east! Anyone who assists the Legionaries or lets them through will be considered a traitor and will be severely punished.

People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs, Trotsky.

Trotsky's orders as shown in-game. As stated in the greater text, this order is similar to the one issued by Trotsky in the real world.

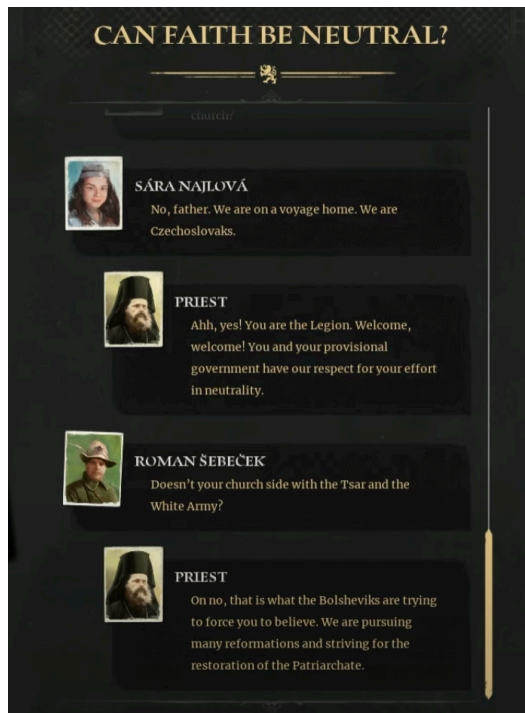
Source: *Last Train Home*.

9



Here is shown a good example of how morale and choice has an in-game effect on how the ludo narrative plays out.

Source: *Last Train Home*.



Source: *Last Train Home*.

SUPPLIES FROM THE WHITES



ALEKS KOROLEV

Our generals believe there is only one Russia. They leave no room for compromise. For them, the enemy is anyone who is not part of Russia. You—Legionaries—are not part of Russia. You want your new republic.

Korolev pauses, before continuing slowly, in a somber tone.



ALEKS KOROLEV

That makes us enemies.

☞ Are you against us, Captain Korolev?

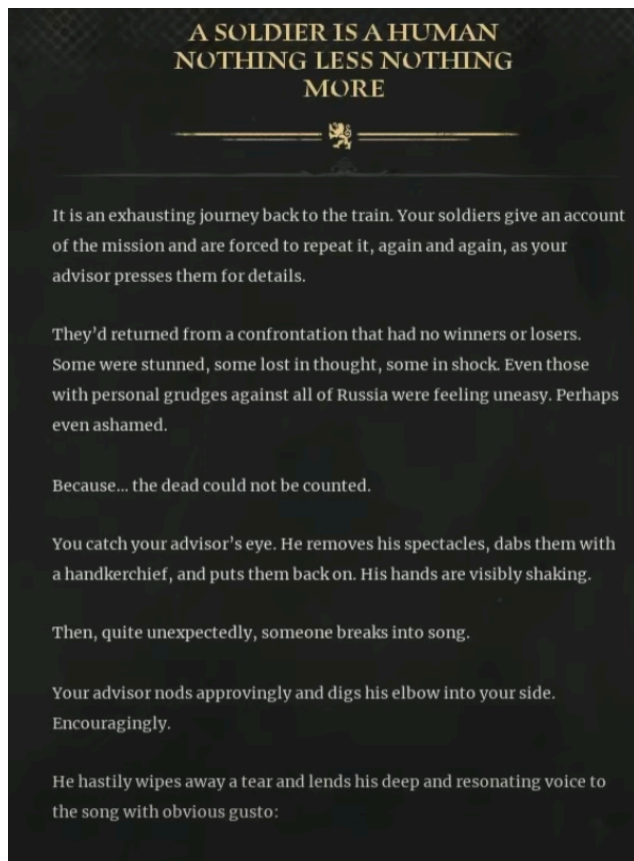
Korolev smiles but doesn't respond. He orders his men to bring forth supplies for your journey. Dozen of soldiers drop their rifles and start moving packages of food, fuel and clothing. He then takes you and your advisor aside, so the other soldiers cannot hear...



ALEKS KOROLEV

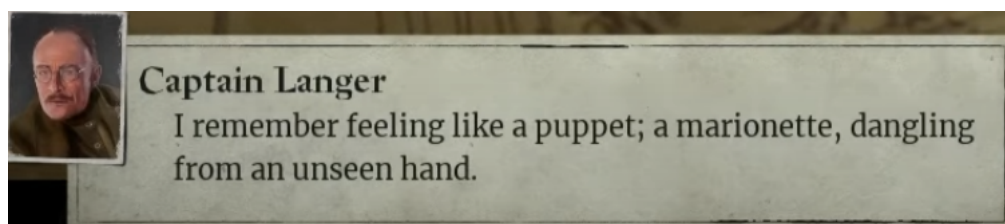
No. I am not against you. You have helped us. And many are grateful. As a proof of that, I will share some of our own supplies. As a compensation for the lost train.

Source: *Last Train Home*.



Source: *Last Train Home*.

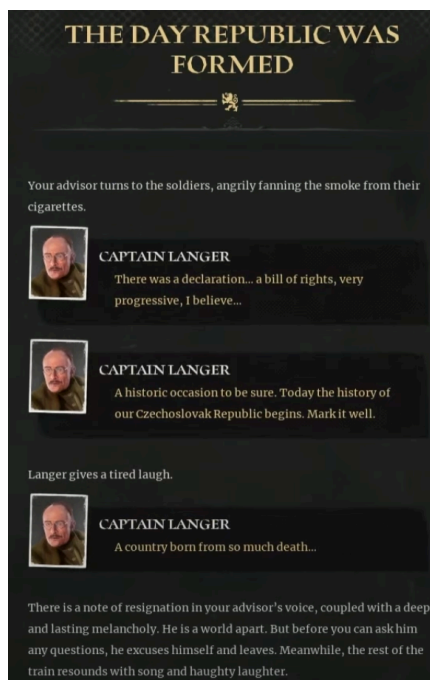
13



Langer expressed feeling like a puppet during one of his monologues.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

14



Source: *Last Train Home*.

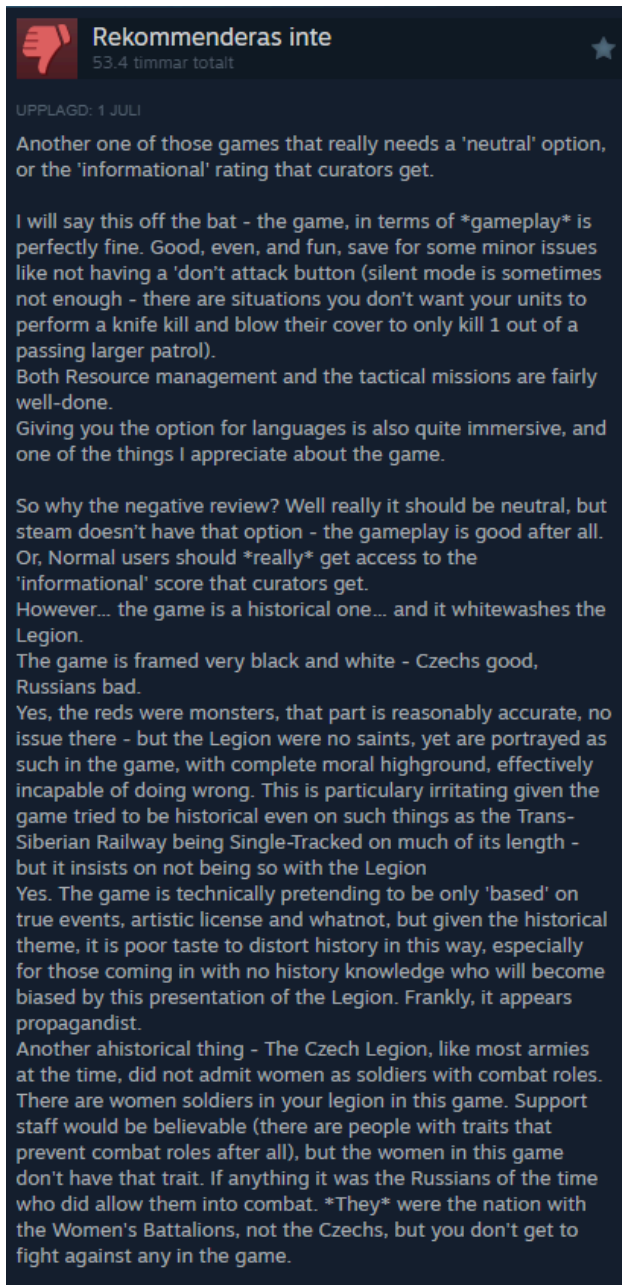
15



The player-controlled forces holding their ground against wave upon wave of Red Army troops.

Source: *Last Train Home*.

16



The reviewer in question is censored due to privacy. An argument made is that the game is very “black and white - Czechs good, Russians bad.”

Source: Steam.com