ORIENTALIA PRAGENSIA

CZECH INDOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF ORIENTALISM

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The concept of Orientalism has received much acclaim as well as critical reviews ever since it was coined by Edward Said in the late nineteen seventies. The discussions that followed were mostly focused on the Anglo-Saxon and francophone production of knowledge about the Orient. The German case became a subject of study much later. In this paper I examine the relevance of Said's concept of Orientalism in relation to Czech intellectual encounters with India. In the following pages I want to argue that in the Czech case India was constructed not on the premises of otherness and inferiority but, on the contrary, the premises of identity and equality, because such a construction was more consistent with the goals of the Czech national revival.

The end of the Cold War and subsequent economic and political transformation have shifted markedly the position of the Czech Republic as well as the whole Central and Eastern Europe in relation to India. While in our part of the world the change was radical in all aspects of life, India has been a fellow runner in that she has embarked upon a similar path of liberalising her economy, reducing state regulatory mechanisms, and unleashing the force of private capital. Twenty years on from that time, Indian students and professionals in multinational companies as well as Indian businesses, Indian cuisine and films have become part of Czech life as much as travel memories of the many thousands of Czechs who have had a chance to visit India. In terms of international politics, we have replaced our role of emissaries of Soviet block interests in the so called Third World with a less pronounced one within the EU and NATO framework. At the same time, India has developed into an aspiring global power.

Those new conditions also bring about questions of past legacy, current importance, and possible future developments of Indology, or Indian studies, within our national traditions of scholarship. The questions range from the general claim for reflexivity to striking the right balance between the ancient and the modern in teaching about India, to curricular transformations, to concern for the careers of our graduates. In this paper I shall focus on the first-mentioned issue, namely the element of reflexivity in teaching and writing about India in the Czech Republic.

Since the beginnings of Indology at both German and Czech universities in Prague in the second half of the 19th century, research has focused on the fields of linguistics, literary studies and history, initially with emphasis on the distant past. Although modern Indian languages and current developments became a subject of more interest with the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, it was the beginning of the Cold War that gave impetus to the introduction of full-fledged degree courses in modern Indian languages

and further enhanced the interest in current social and political processes in South Asia.[1] Modern Indian studies were, however, stifled by state-imposed restrictions on travel on the one hand and a tight ideological framework on the other, which further reinforced the dominance of linguistics, literary studies and history over social sciences and fieldwork based research. Over the same period, in Western countries, approaches to the study of India, informed and inspired by anthropology and sociology, gained prominence over traditional Indology. While social sciences in Western academia have undergone a process often called the "reflexive turn", our academia was largely insulated from those influences and continued within a more traditional, modernist paradigm.

The reflexive turn in social sciences was closely related to the end of European colonial empires. In the process of intellectual decolonisation, earlier accounts of other cultures were criticised for their objectivist approach. The authority of the voice of ethnographers and orientalists was questioned, the link between knowledge and power emphasised (Said 1978; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fisher and Marcus 1986). The rhetorical strategies that authors use to produce knowledge about the Other came under scrutiny. As a result of this critical movement, approaches methodologically inspired by hermeneutics, which rethink the subjectivity of the researcher and writer, gained in popularity (e.g., Geertz 1973 for anthropology; Halbfass 1988 for Indology).

There are three major reasons why the claim for reflexivity had a late and cumbersome arrival onto the Czech academic scene. First, Czechoslovakia has never been part of any colonial enterprise. The Austro-Hungarian Empire never had any overseas colonies worth mentioning either. Therefore, there was no hangover after the loss of an Empire and no feeling of guilt for keeping other populations in colonial subjugation.[2] Czechoslovakia did not experience an influx of immigrants from former overseas territories and examples of Czech minority literature dealing with minority identities from an emic point of view are still few and far between. There is no Czech counterpart to, say, Maghrebian literature in French. The very political conditions that triggered the critique of objectivism and of 'otherising' discourses in the West thus did not apply to Czechoslovakia and most of Eastern Europe.

The second reason for our relative lack of interest in engaging with critical reflexivity lies in the fact that our social sciences were the one branch of knowledge hit hardest by constrains of that particular version of Marxism, or rather Marxism-Leninism, which our political system officially subscribed to. The tenets of that doctrine were mandatory and had to be imbibed by each and every university graduate in order to set the framework for his or her thoughts. Sociology was largely limited to quantitative statistical research and anthropology was dismissed altogether and virtually banned as a "bourgeois science". With few exceptions, our counterpart to anthropology generally followed an earlier German distinction of *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*,[3] and focused largely on

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[1] For a recent overview of Czech Indology see, e.g., Vavroušková 2010, or the paper by J. Vacek in this volume.

[2] The Czech Other has always been internal: the Sudeten Germans in between the two World Wars, the Roma to this day and the strong Vietnamese minority, perhaps, in the near future.

[3] The term *Volkskunde* is often translated as Folklore studies although it implies specifically the study of one's own people's culture. The Czech equivalent "národopis" (literally, "nationology") reveals still more its

material culture and folklore. Ironically, the prohibition of "bourgeois science" suppressed also the fundamental critique which this science, at a later stage, produced of itself. The postmodern discourse as a whole was, indeed, considered to be an unwelcome left-posing example of deviation within bourgeois thought by the keepers of our official doctrine, since that doctrine itself was rooted in the same set of modernist philosophical presumptions as the positivist science in the West. In spite of a broadening exposure since the end of the communist rule, the intellectual heritage of 19th century modernity has to date had a comparatively stronger influence over Czech social sciences and humanities than is the case in Western Europe.

The third reason, and here I am moving onto shakier ground, is, in my opinion, the nature of Czech political discourse after the breakdown of communist rule. Our new regime is based not so much on identity with the democracies of Western Europe, with their systems of checks and balances, welfare states, and general loyalty to rules and laws, but rather on opposition to the preceding communist regime and anything that could be identified with that regime. Since we have successfully travelled the path of transformation right into the EU, it might seem that there is no contradiction between identity with the West and the ideology of anti-communism but, at a deeper level, there actually is. The more intensely the imaginary Other of the past regime is invoked and enlivened as a threat to our presence, the more comfortably we can live in denial of structural and discursive continuities with that regime as well as discontinuities across our Western border. Yet again, a reflexive turn in the form of a critical discourse, be it post-colonial or feminist for that matter, is hard to reconcile with the present imagination of our historically situated collective self.

While social sciences were the most obvious victim of the ideological twists which Czechoslovakia witnessed in terms of a nearly perfect periodicity of twenty-year long cycles over the 20th century, our Oriental studies were partly salvaged thanks to the focus on the study of languages and production of literary translations. Hence the emphasis on philology as the inherited positive background of our contemporary Indology and a deep scepticism about politically motivated changes of labels of the Indology-versus-Indian-studies kind.

In order to understand the poetics and politics of Czech intellectual engagement with things Indian, one has to go beyond the labels and simplistic analogies. Indeed, one may ask a number of questions: If there is a tradition of Oriental studies in Prague, does that imply that Czech authors have subscribed to the same kind of Orientalism as the one exposed by Edward Said? Or was there any local brand of Orientalism? What purpose could it serve without the framework of an Empire? Since Said has limited himself to English and French sources, these questions have to be raised with every national tradition of Oriental scholarship individually and the answers can only be drawn from scholarly and artistic texts on the Orient in all the respective languages

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nationalistic roots. *Völkerkunde* in turn refers to the study of other peoples' culture. Interestingly, while tracing the differences in folk costumes or traditional village architecture in, say, Bavaria, Bohemia, and Polish Silesia would be an enterprise in comparative *Volkskunde*, *Völkerkunde* was reserved for the study of more distant Others.

that served as vehicles of those traditions. The answers, of course, do not necessarily have to be all the same, as a large area of Eastern Europe was itself part of the Orient. To suggest that the very existence of scholarship in Oriental studies or Indology implies a colonialist discourse would amount to committing the same fallacy Said criticises, namely an entrenchment of the East/West divide and a denial of diversity within.

In fact as far as the term Indology is concerned, Said himself uses it freely, mostly as an area specialisation along with Sinology or Japanology, unlike Orientalism which refers more specifically to the nexus of power over and knowledge about the Orient. In his Afterword to the 1995 printing of *Orientalism* (Said 2001, p. 352) he even credits Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies school with "the most brilliant revisionist work […] in the field of Indology". It is, perhaps, needless to recall a long list of Indian scholars who considered themselves Indologists and made great contributions to the field.

But let us move beyond the name of the discipline. In developing a Foucaultian analysis of the relation between the knowledge and power in the field of Oriental studies, Said famously defines Orientalism as such a Western construction of the East whereby the East is imagined as both *other* and *inferior* to the West.[4] Then he goes on showing how this construction pervaded virtually all spheres of Western representation of the Orient from poetry to painting, to various areas of scholarship. Czech scholarship on India, crucially, does not fit into that scheme at all. Our construction of India was not, indeed, detached from power relations and her representations did gain importance with the Czech public by the virtue of their ability to inspire collective imagination and serve a political purpose. So far, so Said. But the political context of the Czech national awakening and Czech-German relations, within which those representations were produced, differed dramatically from that of expanding colonial powers. In the Czech case India was construed not on the premises of otherness and inferiority but, on the contrary, the premises of identity and equality. This was not so because of our moral superiority to colonial nations but because doing so served better the Czech cause. India was construed as a site for projection of our collective self down imaginary history and as a possible source of legitimacy for our own claims to independent national statehood.

The crucial relation for Czechs as an ethnic group, as well as for Czech statehood, has always been the relation to the German population in the West, North, and South and to the state formations there. The population of the Czech kingdom was mixed Czech and German from the 13th century up to the end of the Second World War. Within these historical boundaries the Czechs were the dominant element but every time the boundaries or political allegiances shifted, ethnic tensions resurfaced in one form or another.

In 1526 the Czech kingdom fell under the rule of the Austrian Habsburg monarchy and by 1620 the Czech nobility fighting the monarchy was finally subdued. The victory of the Habsburgs was accompanied by forced re-Catholicisation of dominantly

[4] "Both the traditional Orientalist, as we shall see, and Kissinger conceive of the difference between cultures, first, as creating a battlefront that separates them, and second, as inviting the West to control, contain, and otherwise govern (through superior knowledge and accommodating power) the Other" (Said 1978, pp. 47–48).

Protestant Bohemia and by Germanisation of all areas of public life. When the concept of nation and nationalism came of age in the wake of the French Revolution, and was enhanced by the development of printing-press capitalism (cf. Anderson 1991), identities construed in terms of language and ethnicity gained prominence. At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries the Czech national awakening started. That is around the time when we can locate the beginnings of the Bengali Renaissance, an interesting fact that bears some relevance for our discussion on the following pages. The national awakening culminated after the First World War in 1918, when the Czechoslovak republic was formed out of the Slav-dominated northern territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

India, as we will see, had a role to play in Czech-German relations too. The representations of India in Czech discourse clearly did not derive from the British or French sources but reflected and countered the constructions of German India scholars. German representations of the Orient also fell outside of Said's analysis and came under scrutiny only much later. In one of the latest works on the subject, Cowan (2010, p. 2) argues that

> late eighteenth and nineteenth-century German proponents of Indian wisdom […] brought to the study of Sanskrit texts their own search to establish a set of German national origins that were independent of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. They also strove to postulate how modern Germany might regenerate an enervated Europe and bring about what they felt to be its enlightened (Christian) destiny.

Cowan also substantially alters the received notion of Orientalism when he states (ibid.) that

> in the German case, orientalism can *only* be understood as a set of *personal* attempts to appropriate foreign concepts, motifs, and stories in an effort to tell Germany's own unique story.

Such a concept of Orientalism, unlike that of Said, can also be applied to the Czech case. Throughout his well researched book Cowan shows how German thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries construed an imaginary affinity of Germans with old India in order to craft a splendid noble role for resurgent Germany in European history. It is important to note in this context that Germany, unlike Britain and France, only formed its nation state in the 19th century by the amalgamation of numerous independent principalities.

The German representations of India were thus based on an imagined identity instead of otherness but, at the same time, on the notion of superiority. This applies in particular to Herder and his followers (ibid., 56): "… while Indians retained something inexplicable that still made them Indians, their civilisation had already peaked and was in decline, while German civilisation was nearing its zenith." Ancient India was considered to be the beginning of human civilisation and Germany's future role its final fulfilment.

Czech discourse largely derived from the German one. Imagination of, and knowledge about, India had a role to play in the very first phase of the Czech national

awakening.[5] Since the dominant Austrian discourse held minority languages and populations to be culturally and socially inferior, the first task of our revivalists was to establish the Czech language as equal if not superior to German. One of their major arguments was the newly discovered similarity of Slav languages to Sanskrit. The revivalist argument was that Czech with its complex system of inflection is, indeed, a language with very antique roots that surpass those of German. This argument later developed into a specific sort of India-as-a-cradle-of-civilisation theory, which explored and construed close links between Slav and Indian cultures in the field of language, mythology, and religion. This revivalist construction even stimulated such curious experiments as Czech poetry in old Indian metres and such overstatements as an assertion that one Czech traveller had no trouble getting himself understood anywhere in India (see Strnad 2007). As in the German case, India's past glory was thus connected with the ideal of a bright future for the Czech nation.

The logic of our nationalist imagination, however, brought another interesting twist to the Czech construction of India. While the British and the French produced a hegemonic discourse about the other and inferior Orientals they actually dominated over, the Germans, whose national resurgence started in the wake of the Napoleonic wars and in direct opposition to the French, combined the notion of affinity with that of superiority over India. The Czechs who, in turn, built their national consciousness on opposition to German superiority, not only fought to prove that the Slavs' affinity with India is much closer than that of Germans, but also established a sense of equality among Slavs and Indians. Our revivalists were from an early stage aware of the Bengali Renaissance and the reformist effort of the Brahmasamaj and related it directly to the struggle of Czech revivalists against German cultural dominance (ibid.). This notion of affinity on the basis of parallel and, more importantly, *coeval* struggles of two peoples against foreign oppression was the basis of equality and a sense of common destiny.[6] Unlike in the German case, the importance of India as a topos in our national thought lay not only in her ancient glory displaced into a deep past on the timeline, but also in her presence and her future.

A positive image of India and her movement for self-determination in Czech discourse remained largely intact throughout the 19th century, despite the fact that it was based often on misguided presumptions. That does not mean to say, however, that there were no exceptions. One which may speak for all is the figure of Ottokar Feistmantel, a Czech geologist who worked for the Geological Survey of India from 1875 to 1883. He generally looked at India with a British eye and spoke highly of the colonial administration he was himself part of. In his travelogue (1884) Feistmantel supports the authority and authenticity of his writing by a long quotation from an official document which bears testimony to his career progress in the service. With his bent for

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[5] Strnad's (2007) article 'India, as Reflected in Czech Consciousness in the Era of the National Revivalist Movement of the Nineteenth Century' is, to my knowledge, the only published reflexive account on the history of Czech intellectual encounters with India. It gives numerous examples which could be quoted to support the "identity and equality" thesis.

[6] The temporal displacement and denial of a coeval status as a rhetorical strategy of producing the Other is extensively elaborated upon by Fabian (1983).

the classification of minerals he talks about people of India as part of the environment, either useful servants or obstacles in his work. The fact that his take on India was an exception and not a rule may be also deduced from the fact that he dedicated the last chapter of his account to a criticism of negative views of British colonial rule in India which were then, according to his opinion, prevailing in the Czech press. In spite of such exceptions which could be readily accused of Orientalism in Said's sense, the "identity and equality" construction, I will argue, remained the dominant pattern of representation.

One of the effects of German dominance that most of our revivalists could not foresee was the broadness of cultural horizon that the German language opened up to Czechs and which later decreased with the decline of German influence. Thanks to that influence regular courses in Sanskrit started at Prague German University as early as 1850 and by the end of the century a fully-fledged classical Indology was already firmly established at both Czech and German Universities in Prague. Around the time of the creation of Czechoslovakia, research into modern Indian languages and literatures broadened the scope of Prague Indology. This trend was further enhanced by the establishment of the Oriental Institute in 1922 with the help of the first Czechoslovak President, T. G. Masaryk.[7]

The founder of modern Indology at the Czech University in Prague, Prof. Vincenc Lesný (1882–1953), originally studied languages of ancient India, namely Sanskrit and Pali, but later he became interested also in Hindi, Marathi and Bengali. He studied Bengali by himself and became acquainted with Tagore's works before the First World War. There is evidence that they exchanged correspondence as early as 1913, the year Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize. Lesný has to his credit that he was the first European translator of Tagore from Bengali originals. He translated and published examples of Tagore's poetry and prose as early as 1914. The two men met in October 1920 in London and Lesný invited Tagore to Prague. Tagore visited Prague twice (1921 and 1926) and bequeathed a lasting impression on the Czech cultural and intellectual milieu. His works were already well known to Czech readers in 1921. Lesný, in turn, accepted Tagore's invitation to be a visiting professor to Shantiniketan. After his visits to India he also wrote about social and political affairs in India in the two decades before her independence, namely about her struggle against the Empire.[8]

Lesný's texts clearly do not show any signs of Orientalism in Said's sense but bear out the "identity and equality" construction which had developed in Czech discourse at an earlier stage. In the preface to his 1924 travelogue entitled *India Today,* Lesný wrote in an essentially anti-Otherising fashion (Lesný 1924, p. 3; translation mine):

> I lived a simple life and did not take part in any great adventure. Fairy-tale palaces of Maharajas, tiger hunts, elephant rides, and self-immolation of fakirs, so often and so colourfully

[7] Interestingly, Masaryk had his own connection with India. He was a retired Professor of sociology when he became the President and his writings inspired one of the founders of Indian sociology, Benay Kumar Sarkar. Sarkar also visited Prague in between the World Wars and was one of the voices that expressed solidarity with the people of Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation.

[8] For an overview of Prof. Lesný's work see Filipský (1982).

described, are indeed part of India too. But there is also the beat of simple human heart which, in India as in our country, chimes in tune with the sound of nature. To this simple life and breath-taking beauty of nature brought to perfection by human hands I dedicate these impressions of my journey.

Yet again, identity and not a difference is a leitmotif of his account of India.

Lesný's relation to Tagore was cordial and full of admiration, albeit romanticising at times, but he always staunchly criticised the one-sidedness of Tagore's reception in the West (ibid., p. 91, translation mine):

> Rabindranath Tagore is not a mystic locked up in the ivory tower of his thoughts. He is rather like a prince of Bengali fairy tales: all which rests in slumber is suddenly awoken to the beauty of life by the touch of his hand.

Tagore reciprocated and valued Lesný's scholarly contributions. In a letter to the Czechoslovak Minister of Education dated 4th August, 1935, Tagore refers to Lesný as a scholar

> who by his Indological researches has truly interpreted our culture to the West and brought closer the two hemispheres of thought. [9]

The context of Czech-German relations appears on several occasions in connection with Tagore. His universal humanism was sometimes difficult to reconcile with the constructions of India which both Czechs and Germans created in the process of their nation building. In the 1921 Czech translation of Tagore's lectures on nationalism, the translator, V. K. Škrach, felt compelled to comment upon Tagore's notion of nationalism in his afterword. Let me quote at some length (Škrach 1921, pp. 105–108, translation mine):

> Rabindranath Tagore uses the terms nation and nationalism in a different sense than we usually do. Tagore understands nation to be chiefly an instrument of political, economic and technological civilisation. […] For us, on the other hand, a nation is a natural collective individuality whose members feel the bond of blood, love for the soil and understand fully their cultural community expressing itself in a common language, a common tradition, and in an urgent desire to extend the national character and programme into all spheres of human activity. Nationality is an instinctual as well as emotional ideal as well as moral communion; nationality is an instrument of humanity – nation as a natural instrument of mankind. […] As we can see, Tagore's opposition to Western nationalism is, in fact, very close to our humanistic nationalism. […]
> For obvious reasons Tagore speaks mostly of a particular Western civilisation – the very West within the West – the state organisation of British world-rule. What he actually means by nationalism is Western etatism and imperialism, which privileges political and economic interest, […] plain struggle for power, cult of the machine and materialism… […] However, he fails to see some important differences. It seems that Tagore has not been well informed about our struggle for political and national freedom and its ethical principles; there is no mention in his essays of small nations of Central Europe suffering under the rule of a particular German nationalism and he was probably equally unaware of the fact that it was the Western nations who fought against that Pan-Germanism and its military, political, and economic despotism.

[9] Rabindranath Tagore correspondence archive, Rabindra Bhavan, Vishvabharati University, Shantiniketan, File 208, No. 13.

> The fight of those nations was not only a power struggle but also a moral and ideal struggle for the sake of democracy and freedom of small nations. Had he known, he could have raised many of his arguments with still more justification precisely against Pan-Germanic nationalism.

In this curious passage we see the same pattern of identity and equality at work in spite of the strain it is under. The author values Czech nationalism and struggles to identify it with Tagore's humanism in order to establish a common front against British and German imperialisms. Finally, Pan-Germanism is painted as the worst of all and Tagore is somewhat chided for he did not know the Czech case and could not espouse it as explicitly as, the author surely believes, he would have done had he been acquainted with it.

While Tagore was probably unaware of the complex tapestry of Central European ethnic loyalties at the time he wrote the lectures on nationalism, he could not escape them during his visits to Prague. In a letter to one Mr. Scott dated 12th October, 1926, Prague (Dutta and Robinson 1997, p. 339), Rabindranath Tagore is complaining of "cyclonic fury of engagements which still shows no signs of abatement." This is further explained by his secretary Prashanta Mahalanobis in his letter written the same day to E. J. Thompson (ibid.):

> We have been going from place to place like gypsies. Poet had a nervous breakdown in Prague… there are two different sets in Prague, Czechs and Germans, and everything had to be repeated twice.

The ethnic and political tensions in Central Europe escalated further after Hitler's ascent to power in 1933. Czechoslovakia accepted streams of refugees fleeing from the Nazi Germany but with tensions running high the Czech public was suspicious of the immigrant wave. The Committee for Assistance to Immigrants from Germany decided to address eminent personalities who, in their view, had moral influence over the Czech public and asked them to support the cause of German refugees. Tagore was one of them.[10] His moral authority as a humanist and his perceived affinity with the Czech public was this time invoked to bridge the divide between the Czech public and German refugees. But this act was only a small move on the chessboard of Central European history, where the real divide was between Nazi dictatorship in Germany and Czechoslovak democracy. The Germans and German Jews fleeing the Nazis were on the side of democracy and ethnicisation of this divide by both sides finally proved fatal when the original Czechoslovak Germans pledged their allegiance to Hitler, a move which paved the way for Nazi occupation.

It was in 1937 on the last Christmas Eve before Czechoslovakia was dismembered by the Munich agreement of 1938, when an unusual radio message was broadcast from Prague.[11] It was an appeal for moral support and peace in the face of nearing occupation. Although the message was a call for help to all friends and well-wishers of the country, it was specifically addressed to Albert Einstein, representing the West,

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[10] Rabindranath Tagore correspondence archive, Rabindra Bhavan, Vishvabharati University, Shantiniketan, File 74, No. 11–13, 63.

[11] For a detailed account of this episode with transcriptions of this message and replies see Vavroušková 2009.

and Rabindranath Tagore, the voice of the East. Karel Čapek, our most recognised and pacifist writer of that time, read out the message in Czech and Prof. Lesný in English with a few Bengali words at the end. Although Tagore was unable to reply instantly on the airwaves of Czechoslovak Radio from Shantiniketan, which was the original plan and was stalled for technical reasons and lapses in organisation,[12] he wrote back a telegram of goodwill and later received a recording of the message. Although this episode was played out on the broader canvas of East/West relations, closer to Tagore's own views, the choice of addressing Tagore was by no means a matter of chance and falls well into line with the identity and equality pattern, which remained in place after the Second World War too. The original early revivalist feeling of closeness between Czechs and Indians as opposed to that of Czechs and Germans reappears as late as 1948 in an inaugural speech by Prof. Lesný at the opening of an exhibition on India (quoted in Vavroušková 2009):

> I have often asked myself what, indeed, attracts us to India so much. Above all, there is Ancient Indian culture. Possibly some people are enchanted by that opaque veil of mystery and wonder, in which Europe long ago, but especially during the Age of Romanticism, shrouded India. But for us, Czechs, this ancient cultural country has yet another lure and attraction. It seems to me that a third link is constituted by the affinity between the soul of our people and that of a people who are linguistically and ethnically nearer to us, Slavs, than, say, to the Romance or Anglo-Saxon races, and whose thought is closer to ours, too. From this affinity has grown our interest in India, her culture and literature, religions, morals and customs, economic and political life, city and village life, and, last but not least, her fight for freedom.

All the examples cited above, of necessity few and scattered over a large period of time, were presented here to support the main thesis of this paper, namely, that Czech constructions of India were framed by a political discourse substantially different from that of big European colonial nations and hence the tradition of Czech Indology does not imply an Orientalist perspective in Said's sense. Fortunately, the exchanges of ideas between India and Europe as well as the trajectories of mutual understanding and misunderstanding have always been much more variegated than a single colonialist discourse. Although our investigation follows the Foucaultian notion of knowledge as power, it questions the universal applicability of Said's notion of Orientalism. Indeed, earlier studies on German Indology had already disconnected Orientalism from Empire. Pollock (1993) argued that Orientalism as a discourse of power may not have a distant Other as its target but may be directed inwards to the society that produces such a discourse. Cowan's (2010) contribution to the German case goes one step further in declaring that in the German case Orientalism can only be understood as being directed inwards.

The same is, indeed, true of Czech perceptions of India with two ideological twists to the German model. Czech revivalists struggled firstly, to prove that the Indo-Czech (Indo-Slav) affinity is much closer than the Indo-German affinity, and secondly, to establish that the Indian movement for self-determination and later for independent

[12] Rabindranath Tagore correspondence archive in Shantiniketan has a whole File 75 with 29 items dedicated to this episode and to the intensive exchange of cables between Tagore and Czechoslovak Radio.

statehood is essentially a coeval and parallel cause to the Czech case of an oppressed people fighting an external domination. The nature of domestic discourses and political goals they embodied had it so that the British discourse constructed India as both other and inferior, the German discourse as showing affinity yet inferior by virtue of displacement on the timeline, and the Czech one as showing affinity and coeval, hence equal. Those departures, in my view, put into question the usefulness of the very concept of Orientalism and its applicability. The more diverse the structure of individual national discourses on the Orient reveals itself to be, the more the term Orientralism runs the risk of becoming a sort of a schlagwort, a popular catchphrase that can be easily pulled out of a hat whenever the West/East dichotomy comes into question. In the process, Orientalism as an analytical tool loses its edge.

We may either dilute the original notion of Orientalism to such an extent that it comprises every possible nexus between knowledge about the East and political power, whether directed outwards or inwards, or explore different notions that strive to understand the cultural and political connections between peoples of Europe and Asia from a broader perspective, such as cross-cultural hermeneutics (e.g., Halbfass 1988, Preisendanz 1997) or global sociology (Turner 1994). It would also be interesting to compare the self-referential aspects of Oriental studies within individual nationalist discourses. While Anderson's distinction of three modular forms of nationalism (Anderson 1991) could explain why some constructions of the Orient are directed outwards and some inwards, Partha Chatterjee's critique (1993) of Anderson's Eurocentrism provides an interesting starting point for comparison between the Bengali Renaissance and the Czech national revival which both show striking similarities, e.g. focus on language codification and on production of texts in high literary genres prior to political claims. Recent comparative studies of post-colonialism with post-socialism (e.g. Chari and Verdery 2009) might thus be anchored with more historical depth. Ultimately, such an enterprise serves better the cause of deconstructing the East-West divide than a mindless repetition of the Saidian paradigm in different settings.

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