

# 90 ANOS DE MIROSLAV HROCH

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“Meu próprio trabalho não procurou propor uma teoria da construção das nações, mas desenvolver métodos efetivos para classificar e avaliar as experiências de construção nacional como um processo inserido numa história social e cultural mais ampla.” (Miroslav Hroch)

Este ano comemoramos os 90 anos de vida de Miroslav Hroch. Historiador, o Professor Hroch nasceu dia 14 de junho de 1932 em Praga - República Checa, no Leste europeu. Tornou-se uma das principais referências nos estudos sobre os processos de formação das nacionalidades e, atualmente, compõe o Conselho Executivo da Tensões Mundiais, Revista do Observatório das Nacionalidades.

Além do desenvolvimento de pesquisas sobre “problemas nacionais”, Hroch vivenciou alguns momentos históricos de intenso sentimento patriótico em experiências classificadas como “nacionalismo stricto sensu”, seja quando seu país foi invadido pela Alemanha durante a Segunda Guerra, como também quando a República Tcheca compôs a União Soviética durante a Guerra Fria.

Hroch reconhece seu interesse pelos processos de formação da nação em sua primeira experiência de pesquisa. Sua monografia tratou da “estrutura social da filiação em uma comunidade patriótica tcheca”.

Em seus estudos, Hroch deixa explícito que não busca construir um modelo de processo de formação nacional, mas desenvolver metodologias que possibilitem a identificação e avaliação das diferentes experiências de construção nacional de acordo com seus aspectos históricos e culturais.

Essa característica das contribuições de Miroslav Hroch possibilita um diálogo com experiências de formação nacional também na América Latina, África e Ásia e com autores(as) desses territórios que também se dedicam aos estudos sobre a questão nacional.

Celebrar a vida de Miroslav Hroch, e suas marcas no mundo, é também reconhecer a possibilidade de fazer ciência respeitando a soberania dos povos e seu protagonismo em suas experiências de libertação.



# 90 years of Miroslav Hroch

BEATRIZ PEROTE

“My own work has not sought to advance a theory of nation-building, but rather to develop effective methods for the classification and assessment of experiences of nation-building as a process set within a wider social and cultural history.” (Miroslav Hroch)

This year we celebrate 90 years of the life of Miroslav Hroch. A historian, Professor Hroch was born on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1932 in Prague, Czech Republic, in Eastern Europe. He became a foremost reference on the studies on the processes of the formation of nationalities and, currently, is part of the Executive Council of World Tensions, the Observatory of Nationalities’ academic publication.

Beyond developing research into “national issues”, Hroch experienced historical moments of intense patriotic sentiment in experiences classified as “*stricto sensu* nationalism”, both when his country was invaded by Germany during World War II, as well as when the Czech Republic was part of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Hroch has acknowledged his interest in the processes of national formation in his first research experience. His monograph dealt with “the social structure of affiliation in a patriotic Czech community”.

In his studies, Hroch makes it clear that he is not looking to build a model of national formation, but to develop methodologies that allow for the identification and evaluation of different experiences of national building in regards to their historical and cultural aspects.

This aspect of Miroslav Hroch’s contributions allows for a dialogue with experiences in national formation to also take place in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, with authors from these territories that also dedicate themselves to studies on the issue of nation.

To celebrate the life of Miroslav Hroch, and the marks he has left on the world, is to recognise the possibility of pursuing scientific endeavours while still respecting the people’s sovereignty and their experiences of liberation.

### **Interview Miroslav Hroch**

Among the authors of the middle XX century usually mentioned as being relevant to the study on the processes of nationalities construction two Czechs are highlighted: Ernest Gellner, who worked mostly in London, and Miroslav Hroch, established at the old University Charles of Prague. Gellner was committed to elaborate a grand sociological theory according to which nations emerged as a result of the transition from agrarian societies to an industrial world; his works are well-known in Brazil. Hroch, focusing on the history of some small countries of Central Europe, attempted to detach nations from capitalist development. The main works of Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge, 1985) and *Das Europa der Nationen* (Göttingen 2005) have not yet been translated to Portuguese.

While attending the 2007 ASEN Conference, at the London School of Economics, we met the young Spanish professor Daniel Esparza, today teaching at the Palacky University of Olomouc, in the Czech Republic, and asked him to intermediate an interview with Miroslav Hroch to "World Tensions". Supportive, Daniel promptly accepted our demand and we sketched out some questions. At a restaurant, in Prague on June 25, 2007, Daniel began the conversation with Hroch. Then, by the internet, we continued interviewing the veteran Czech historian. We now present the result of this enterprise, aware that the Brazilian lecturers have much to profit from Miroslav Hroch academic experience and innovative formulations.

**World Tensions** - Is Prague your birth place? Were your parents Czech? Was your family catholic? Did you receive a religious formation?

**Miroslav Hroch** – I am born in Prague, but my parents came from the province in 1920s. They were Czech, my father catholic, while my mother opted out from the Church in her young years, since her father was a anti-clerical socialist with a strong national feeling. Religion was never discussed in the family and consequently, my religious formation was limited to the not very attractive hours of religious education at the elementary school.

**W.T.** - During your first years at school, was patriotism cultivated as part of the Czech educational system?

**M.H.** – During the time, when I visited elementary school, my country was occupied by Germans and the only (unsuccessfully) cultivated patriotism was the German one. After the liberation in 1945, all the social atmosphere, including educational system, became very patriotic. After 1948, patriotism was never banned from schools, but it received a political modification, corresponding to the Cold War period: the Czech patriotism had to be compatible with love to Soviet Union and other socialist countries, but concerning Western countries it had to be distinguished between “the people” as an object of positive feeling, and “bourgeoisie”, which was an enemy. This educational concept was, nevertheless, not very effective and rather soon turned to a farce.

**W.T.** - Besides Germany and Denmark, did you live and work in other countries?

**M.H.** – As a young boy, I had the privilege to participate after World War II twice in a Red Cross action bringing undernourished Czech children for summer vacancies to Norway. So, I learned basic Norwegian and opened the door to Scandinavian languages. For a long time, I could not work in Western countries (except 1960s) until the end of 1980s. Nevertheless, there were no difficulties (except financial) for a stay in “socialist countries”, above all, I worked in archives and libraries in Poland and GDR. After 1990, I was 2 years visiting professor in Germany, for one year in Italy (EUI in Florence) and one term in USA (UCLA), some weeks teaching also in Finland and Lithuania.

**W.T.** - Why, how, and when did you get involved with nationalism studies?

**M.H.** - I would like to say that I strongly dislike the term nationalism, and I have never been involved in nationalism studies. If you mean the beginning of my interest in national problems, this was about nation

forming processes, i.e. how begun the national movements. This was rather early, my first essay in the second year of my studies at the University in History, was about the social structure of the membership in one Czech patriotic community. The result of this first research was that the supporters of the Czech national movement were members of neither bourgeoisie, as it was the official Stalinist concept, nor peasants, as it was the traditional Czech patriotic myth, but it was a small bourgeoisie (craftsmen, shopkeepers) and intelligentsia. This starting point is in the beginning of the Fifties and it was joined somehow indirectly and not verbalised with the fact that we were part of the Soviet *imperium* and at that times, nation formation and national movements were criticized as nationalist (in the pejorative sense of the word) and also as an instrument of the bourgeoisie. The political background of this official version was that, at least, it was a reactionary movement which started or tried to achieve a national identity.

With respect to the 1848 revolutions, there are several articles from Marx and Engels criticizing Slavic national movements and specially the Czechs as being counter revolutionary, and some Soviet and also Czech historians denounced in the Fifties this national movement as “reactionary” and I regarded it as the first step to Russification. This was the political background, but later on, in 1960s, my central motivation was not political, but academic: this fascinating phenomenon that we had in Europe in different times, in different territories, but the same reaction, the same ideas, the same way of thinking. And you can’t explain it only by migration of “nationalism”, because otherwise you couldn’t understand why Catalans started their movement one hundred years after the French Revolution (being in the French border) and with respect to the Czechs only ten years after the Revolution (being more faraway from France). It’s impossible to explain it in this way. Then, my first central topic was to question if this nation formation was an abstract process, or whether it was a concrete sum of actions of really existing persons? Who were these people? Which factors in their life influenced their activity, or motivated them to be patriots? This was my basic motivation to study “social preconditions of national revival”.

**W.T.** - Which authors would you say that influenced your ideas and writings?

**M.H.** - I would say the first author who influenced me in the negative sense of the word was Stalin, with this thesis that nations were formed through struggles of bourgeoisie for markets. This is what we learnt from the *Gymnazium* (=high school). But in a positive sense of the word, the first important for me was the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer, criticised by Stalin who was struggling against the Austro-Marxists. Otto Bauer published in 1907 a very important book on nation formation (*Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question*). The theoretical background of this book was the idea that nations were formed in different stages since Middle Ages. This is a very interesting book, but was very difficult to get it in the 50's, because it was forbidden – as “revisionist” - in Czechoslovakia. In 1953, Karl W. Deutsch published the book *Nationalism and Social Communication*. I got it through inter-university service in Prague, at the beginning of the 60's. For me, “communication” as the factor of the nation formation was a very important explanatory factor at that time. Another inspiring author for me was indirectly Hobsbawm, who in 1962 published his book *the Age of Revolution*, where he had a short chapter on nations and another on romanticism. I still support the idea that nations and national movements are a product of what we today call “crisis of identities”, although he uses other terms. He describes a situation on the threshold of modernity. And I think this was a very important hypothesis. Well, these three authors became very important for me at that time. Naturally, I had access to many other authors, but none of them was convincing enough in my eyes.

**W.T.** - What about Josef Polisenský?

**M.H.** - He was my teacher, and it was him, who recommended me, being a student in his pro-seminar, to study the social structure of Czech patriotism. But personally, he was not interested in national movements, but in 17<sup>th</sup> century political history, cultural and modern history. He never published something about nations. He supported me in other topics but not in this one. So far, I was somehow a “self-made-man” in this field.

**W.T.** - In addition to your teacher advice, which reasons motivated you to research a small Czech patriotic community? Considering the political background of the 50s, what seduced a young scholar to study national formations?

**M.H.** - As I already said, it was, especially during 1960s, when I wrote my book on “social preconditions” above all the academic interest in comparative research and in this fascinating all countries embarrassing process of nation-formation in Europe. May be, it was also some kind of satisfaction to find out that Czechs were by far not the only ones, who struggled for their “revival”. And so, it was also some kind of nostalgic search for affinity for our destiny. If there was any “political” background for my research, then it was the intention to introduce some kind of revisionism in this field. Therefore, I tried to use statistical data, which could not be (in my opinion of that time) put in question, in order to demonstrate that - using Marxist methodology (or historical materialism) - it is possible to explain the nation formation in a more sophisticated and convincing way than it was the case in the official Soviet Marxism-Leninism. On the other side of Iron Courtain, this question was not regarded as up-to date in Western Europe during the 1960s. I still remember that being in Western Germany and in Denmark in that time, some young historians could not understand that I am interested in such an “reactionary” phenomenon, like nation and nationalism. In this point, their opinion did not differ from that of liberals, who supposed that “nationalism” was an outdated heritage from the 19th century.

**W.T.** - Hobsbawm considered that your first book, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, published in 1985, opened a “new era in the analysis of the composition of national liberation movements”. How did you react to his attitude?

**M.H.** - He knew already my first book, the original 1968 German version, published in Prague. It was him who recommended the English translation. And also much later, in the 80's, somewhere in Germany, I found out that Hobsbawm wrote an article in 1973 or so, where he positively spoke about me and my book. His high appreciation is very understandable, he recognized that my non-dogmatic concept of Marxism (Gellner called me “semi-Marxist”) is very near to his methodological approach. Hobsbawm was in Prague in 1964, this was the first time I met him. He came for a conference and was not only interested in history but in jazz too. I had a very good impression of him. It was fine to read this appreciation of my book,



which was included in his book *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. The first time I was told about this book was in 1991, in a conference in Santander (Spain) with professors Andres de Blas, Gellner and others. But it was an other participant, a Norwegian political scientist, Marianne Heiberg, who told me about Hobsbawm's comments.

**W.T** - How do you position your first book on national movements among the literature of that time?

**M.H.** – It depends, what you mean by “that time”. The basic concept is formulated and text is written in 1960s and the English version is only an enlarged version of the book from 1968. The English translation was finished already in the end of 1970s, the Publisher hesitated long time with the print without giving me the opportunity to make any changes or additions. Consequently, the text which was printed 1985 has no reference to those famous works of E. Gellner and B.Anderson (and also A.Smith) which have been published some years before. And I could explain this circumstance only in the Preface to the 2nd edition of my book in 2000 (Columbia UP). – But back to “positioning”. In 1960s, there were only very few books on this topic – important above all the already mentioned Karl W.Deutsch, who inspired me in a positive way, and the German historian Eugen Lemberg whose book (*Nationalismus 1.,2., Hamburg 1964*), confirmed me in my decision to use comparative method and provoked my criticism towards the broad and non-differentiated use of the term “nationalism”. So far, I was the first one, who consequently used comparative method as a tool of analysis of this category of historical processes. If you, however, mean the context of the books from 1980s, some basic differences between them and me have to be stressed: firstly, I never pretended to develop an all explaining “theory of nationalism”, because I preferred to study the nation as a large social group, secondly, my approach was comparative and historical (today, I would say, influenced by historical sociology), thirdly, my research was focused on non-dominant “small” nations, on their national movements, which were almost ignored in the literature of 1980s (John Breuilly is an exception in this point). And finally, I regarded (and I am still regarding) the nation formation as a specifically European process, i.e. I did not care about non-Europe.

**W.T.** - Your chapter on *Mapping the Nation*, published in 1996, doesn't present an optimistic framework concerning the studies on the construction of nationalities...

**M.H.** - This chapter in the reader *Mapping the nation* is an article which was originally published in the *New Left Review* in 1993. I don't know if I was optimistic or not. To write it, I was encouraged by Perry Anderson, Benedict Anderson's brother, and one of the founders of the *New Left Review*. I met him in Los Angeles when I was teaching there for a term. Anderson asked me to write an article – as a resumé of my lectures in California. So I wrote that article and he edited it in such very elegant English (laughs). This article is partially a revision of my 1985 book (i.e. from 1968), because I try to explain my position about the nation formation as a complex phenomenon, not only concerning the social preconditions, but in general. Also, I tried to weaken the impression that my concept is an “essentialist” one.

**W.T.** - The studies on personal and collective identity and identities are very fashionable nowadays. For example, in the field of nationalism, there are an increasing number of studies on national identity. Is this “obsession” on identity a global symptom of “crisis of identity” a term that you mentioned before and came from Erik Erickson.

**M.H.** - I don't think I am qualified to answer this question. For Eric Erickson the crisis of identity is a reaction to social and cultural changes. If you interpret the “computerization” or the “digitalization” of society as a social change, we really have some kind of crisis of identity. Something that can be connected with your question is the example, at least as far as I know, of the Czech Republic, where we are now observing a very serious crisis of historicism. Some weeks ago, I gave in Bohemia an opening conference called “the end of historicism”. I understand this phenomenon as a loss of perspective. Our young generation and we in general have no alternative for the system, no alternative for the future. The future does not need our visions any more, it seems do develop automatically as a result of globalized processes. And if you lose the imagination of the future, you lose the interest on history. Nowadays, there is a great disorientation in this subject, yet an important challenge for professional historians.

**W.T.** - To what extent the European Union (as a significant "Other"), has transformed Czech national identity?

**M.H.** - I know this is sometimes discussed or mentioned, but it depends on how we define the nation again. If we define nation in the Anglo-Saxon semiotic sense, this means, nation as a State, which means also a power or the division of power, then the European Union could be considered as a negative "Other", because the EU endangers this monopole of power in the nation-state. So far, I interpret the euro-scepticism of some politicians (not only Václav Klaus), in an instrumentalist sense, I mean, they use it because they are simply afraid of losing or diminishing their powers.

Nevertheless, if you understand a nation as a community with a common culture, a common memory and past, with the same common, let's say, cultural background, then, I don't think that the European Union is something endangering the national cultures, because culture is about prestige, not about power. On the contrary, Europe in this sense is the only force or the only instrument (maybe there are other instruments) against Americanization. One of the main aims of the EU policies is to support national cultures, national identities. In this way, for the Czech nation and national identity, I consider the EU more as a positive than a negative significant Other. There is no danger in entering Europe; there is no possibility to dissolve our identity in Europe as some politicians like the Czech president Klaus uses to say. The danger is much more that we can be dissolved in the American (anti)culture as its subculture.

**W.T.** - By saying that there is an Anglo-Saxon perception of the nation, don't you generalize a little too much? We think it is the case to ask for more explanations.

**M.H.** - This differentiation is by far not my invention. You can look into encyclopedias and dictionaries already from the 18th century to find out this difference between "political" concept of the nation in English language and "cultural" concept in German (or Czech). French understanding is somewhere in between, both state and linguistic unification are the basis for a nation. Reading

Anglo-Saxon authors on 19th century national movements, you find explicitly or implicitly the opinion that these movements were focused on statehood, that they above all struggled for their own state. This is nevertheless an error based on the fiction that a nation at least cannot exist without state. In Czech or German linguistic tradition, we speak about nations regardless on the political form they are organized in. This concerns not only the past: I have no difficulties to speak about Flemish or Catalan nation, because these are large social group with a full social structure, developed culture and a strong national identity, which is not the case of “ethnic communities”, like Galicians, Sorbs, Byelorussians or Brittons.

**W.T.** – The rivalries with the “foreign” always nourished national feelings. How to explain that the construction of the European unity encourage the affirmation of national identities?

**M.H.** – I am not qualified to answer this question, since I do not know the data of Eurobarometer, where results of sociological research on these topics are regularly published. If “the foreign” will be understood as “non-European”, then it could strengthen the European identity. Unfortunately, we observe during the last years also another tend, supported by USA: to nourish national feelings in some new members of EU against the “old” EU. Significant example: the US intervention in Iraque.

**W.T.** – And regarding the influence of the past: the Czech “trauma of the betrayal”? Václav Klaus perceives the European Union as an “oppressor entity”, comparing Brussels (EU) with Moscow (USSR) and sometimes with Vienna (Habsburg Empire). However, he admits the non-existence of any better alternative to the EU. In a long-term historical perspective, do you see any relationship between his attitude toward the EU and the past relationship with its historical “Others” (Germans, Russians and Slovaks)?

**M.H.** - The first part of this question, I think, I have already answered it, as I said before, it is about political power. Some politicians are afraid that their power could be somehow limited. What do you mean with long-term, decades or centuries?

**W.T** - I mean centuries. I understand the Long-term or *Longue durée* like a bridge between Fernand Braudel (*École des Annales*), and Anthony D. Smith (ethno-symbolist).

**M.H.** - Well, concerning the Czech Republic, intellectuals are divided, some are very, very, careful to keep the uniqueness of Czech nation and defend somehow the Czech history against any generalization or description in general terms. In a European context, the Czech history is always central for them. For them the European Union could be regarded as some kind of danger. In Spring 2007, we could read in Czech newspapers that German Prime Minister, Angela Merkel, proposed the need of a text book in European history. The reaction of the majority of the Czech historians was very negative, in the sense that they were afraid that “they” (the Europeans) “would write our history”. At once, it is as if Czech history would be the most important thing in Europe. This reaction in the best case is a misunderstanding. In the worst case this is a clear demonstration of “provincialism”. Especially, during the last fifteen or ten years, the Czech historical researchers, despite having freedom to travel, with possibilities to get scholarships and grants everywhere, are much more “provincial” in the choice of their research topics than before. This young people (the majority) prefer to study Czech history and they are not trying to choose European topics. It’s really shocking. The limitation of the majority of the Czech historians concentrated only in their own history is also the reason why they refused this European textbook. The misunderstanding and my critic comes from the false perception that the aim would be to write the European textbooks neglecting all national histories. Of course, every nation can write textbooks on its own history, but the European history is something different than a mere sample, a collection of many national histories.

With respect to Václav Klaus, I don’t think he knows what kind of betrayal he is imagining, but he is always using or misusing this speech without trusting the EU. This is some kind of Czech historical stereotype, to remind the danger from outside, betrayal, etc. There is always the same paradigm; I would call it the Czech Hussite stigma (from the Hussite revolution in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as

the first stage of European Reformation): the idea that we are very exceptional and we are very progressive. The first time that you can observe it in the Czech Lands was during the First Republic (1918-1938), when the Czechs saw themselves as the only democracy in Central Europe. 1948, the takeover of the communists, is another example. Many communists, at that time, had the idea that they would produce an alternative type of Socialism, a specific Czech socialism, different from the Soviet Union, although this idea was very quickly out, and in the 50's many of them were persecuted and executed. 1968, the Prague Spring, it is also this illusion that we were preparing something special, a specific combination of democracy and socialism. This historical stereotype portrayed by Klaus, for example, is including in modified form also an other, may be less common, Czech complex of struggling "against all" (from the Czech *proti všem*, which came from the very popular novel of Alois Jirasek (1890). He takes this historical stereotype from the Hussite times, and it still survives- naturally only in a verbalized form - in the Czech family traditions, although this is difficult to prove. - On the other side, it is necessary to remind the less informed public that the Czech nation formation represents indeed some unique features in European comparison.

**W.T.** – The repression of the socialist regime contributed, at last, to diminish or to increase in some way Czech patriotism?

**M.H.** – This is a very complicated problem, which has to be analyzed empirically. There is no doubt that such events like the Soviet occupation in August 1968 strengthened nationalist feelings, above all against Russians, although it was declared to be an "internationalist" action. At the other side, the more contacts with the West - already since 1960s, the more servility and inferiority feelings in attitude to Western nations (and above all USA) spread among a part of population. Even though it is difficult to generalize, I have the impression that instead of "strengthening", we observe a confusion in this field. The result of it is that the explicitly nationalist programs have only a very weak (compared f.eks. with Poland, Hungary, France or Germany) support of the population, but that there exist remarkable signs of strong xenophobia.

**W.T.** - The studies on nationalism use to be classified under four approaches or paradigms: primordialist, perennialist, modernist and ethno-symbolist. As far as I know some scholars have given you the label of primordialist and others consider you a modernist. What do you think about these labels?

**M.H.** - I don't like these labels, but I recognise that you need some kind of typology to name things. But what does primordialism mean? What does modernism mean? It depends. If you define primordialism in the sense of believing in eternal nations, I couldn't be put under this label. But if it is understood, like Anthony D. Smith makes, that nations have some ethnic pre-history, then I am primordialist. The same with modernism, if modernism means that the nation is a social group, product or part of the process of modernization, yes, I am modernist. But if you understand modernism or constructivism as a concept where nations are mere timeless cultural constructs, invented from nothing by intellectuals, then I am neither modernist, nor constructivist. Here again: how important is to define our terms.

**W.T.** - Gellner and you grew up both in Prague. You remained here in Prague, and he emigrated. How was your professional relationship before the 90's? And during the 90's when he was back in Prague?

**M.H.** - Gellner was born in Paris, but he grew up in Prague until 1939 when his family emigrated. He participated in the Czechoslovak army during the Second World War. But after it, he didn't return to Prague and remained in Britain. In this way he was British by education. He spoke excellent Czech, without accent. Only he had some difficulties in finding some scientific terms in Czech. By the way, in Prague was also born Hans Kohn, a Jewish-German speaking Zionist, who immigrated to Palestine and later to America. Another nationalism specialist from Bohemia too, was Karl W. Deutsch. He emigrated in 1939, together with his mother, who was one of the German social-democrat members of the Czechoslovak parliament and organized help for émigrés from Nazi Germany. I have never

met him, but I know he spoke little Czech. When he died, he gave his library to the city of Prague. Back to Gellner, the first time I heard his name was in Prague in the middle of the 80's, when a lady came to me and spoke in the name of professor Gellner. She told me that Gellner knew my works, and he wanted to know if I had written something new on this topic of national movement. And I said yes, but in Czech language. She answered never mind, because Gellner knows Czech too. I was surprised and I gave her some things for him. Later on I received an invitation for a conference in Tallin, in 1988, organized by him and Soviets anthropologists. But I couldn't participate because I had no money to go. The first time I met him in person was not in Bohemia, but in Santander (Spain) in 1991, in a international conference, as I mentioned before. After that, I met Gellner several times, but not very often. In 1995, some months before he died, he included me into the Scientific Council of his institute in Nationalism studies, which was a part of Central European University., at that time we started to be frequently in contact. I invited him to speak in my seminar, not on nationalism but on his book *Plough, Sword and Book*, which was an attempt to write a new "periodization" of the human History.

**W.T.** – Gellner came to Brazil occasionally to make conferences and some of ours students have being studying his thoughts. On his works, he tried to pass for being exempt of patriotic feelings. Benedict Anderson makes jokes saying that he liked to hear Irish songs when needing particular comfort. In your opinion, was Gellner a Czech patriot?

**M.H.** – It depends, how you define the term. He enjoyed to stay in Prague, he was interested in Czech culture, but this does not mean that he adopted Czech national identity. Concerning his youth, he kept, as I said, nostalgic feelings to pre-war Czechoslovakia.

**W.T** – How do you explain the strong Czech presence among the few authors that brought important contributions to the study on the construction of the nations?



**M.H.** - Do not forget that Kohn and Deutsch – and also Otto Bauer – were German Jewish and not Czech by origin. My explanation is that Austrian Empire and above all Czech lands were some kind “laboratory” or training field of national conflicts, where arguments were formulated and methods of national movement were developed, which could be used as model – right or wrong – in analysis of various other national movements, so far they belonged to this type of “stateless” ones. Let me remind you that, chronologically, Czech national movement belongs to those earliest starting already in the beginning of the 19th century – similarly like Magyar and German. Other national movements in Europe started two, three decades and more later. This does not mean that I propose a model of cultural transfer from Bohemia to other national movements!

**W.T.** - Your book, *Social Preconditions of the National Revival in Europe*, was published in English almost 20 years after its 1968 German publication. You were living in Czechoslovakia, “beyond” the Iron Curtain, which made more difficult to be recognized in the West and also more dangerous to write on nationalism in a “communist World”. What did you do during those years?

**M.H.** - The year of 1985, as the publication date of *Social Preconditions of the National Revival in Europe*, was a coincidence, because this book had a complicated story. Originally, I received in 1974 a letter from the New Left publishers, proposing me to translate and publish it there. Yet I discovered that New Left published authors forbidden by our regime, Trotsky for example, and it could have been dangerous for me, because the regime could associate me with the ideas of those publishers. I don't remember how, but I discovered that Hobsbawm was behind this, and I wrote a letter to him, explaining the reasons why it would be difficult for me, and he understood it very well. So they proposed this book to Cambridge. In 1979, they also asked if I would add some informations on singular national movements, and I said yes, so I wrote these narratives. Then, they answered me that it was too long, and I had to shorten it, yet that shortened version got

lost in 1982, so I had to reconstruct it. And, finally, in 1985 the book was published. That's why I said that the context of 1985 doesn't mean anything, because everything was prepared since the 70's. In the Czechoslovakia 70's, it was not recommendable to continue my research and concepts on "nationalism". My earlier written Ph.D. thesis was on Baltic trade during the Thirty years' war, so I could return to this topic during that time, and I wrote in the end of 70s a comparative book about trade and politics in the Baltic Sea during the Thirty years' war (East and West). Later on I wrote in Czech another book on revolutions in a comparative perspective. Moreover, I published a book, with another colleague, on the 17<sup>th</sup> Century crisis, it was an international discussion on that topic, and this work was also published and translated in German. By the way, Hobsbawm was one of the first who started this discussion in the 50's. At the end of the 80's (after the publication of *Social Preconditions*), I wrote a book in Czech on the French Revolution in Europe. With another colleague we edited a book on Counter-reformation and the Inquisition. This was before the opening of the Spanish archives, which were closed during Franco regime and even some years after his death. This book was published in English and also in German and French. So this is an overview, what I did in this period of 1970s and 1980s.

**W.T.** - Who were your contacts in the West?

**M.H.** - There were several contacts in various countries. Hobsbawm was one of them. After so many years I saw him again in London in 1984. Besides, we wanted to invite him to Prague, at that time, but he was regarded by the Czechoslovak socialist regime as a "revisionist" and this was worse than to be non-Marxist. So he decided not to come because he didn't want to compromise colleagues, not only me, but many others he knew here. He came to Prague in 1990's, two or three times. Moreover, I had a lot of contacts in West Germany. In the 60's, I spent two semesters in West Germany with a post-doc scholarship and participated in some seminars. In the 70's, it was practically impossible to travel to Western Germany, because they were regarded as a counter-

revolutionary country by the socialist regime. However, I kept contacts in different hidden ways and I could research several months on Thirty Years War in Denmark during the 70's and on Counter-Reformation in Italy during the 80s. Beside of this, I got very good contacts in Finland, Norway and Sweden, which could be continued in 1990s.

**W.T.** - Are you still working on the same subject? Today, would you make any important revision on your original works?

**M.H.** - The first revision is presented in the article in *New Left Review*, I mentioned above, then, some more aspects are included in the introduction of the second edition of *Social Preconditions of the National Revival* (2000). In one way, there is a misunderstanding. This book is not a theory of the national movement neither a theory on nationalism, it is simply an empirically research on social preconditions – with some generalizing conclusions –, although of course, you can find some theoretical elements, above all comparative method. More than a revision I would make some enlargements of the main questions from the 90's till today, not concerning social preconditions but general factors of national movement. All the social preconditions which I analyzed in my book are about the transition from agitation to mass movement, this means, from phase B to phase C. The most important gap in my 1968 book, is about the relevant question, why did they start phase B? What is behind this decision? Why this first step from A to B, from a static, neutral position (concentrated on research of culture, ethnicity and so on) to a dynamic one? How to explain the beginning of national agitation? Finally, I would like to say that some of these gaps are filled in my 2005 German book, which I find to be the best I ever have written on this topic. This book tries to give a general interpretation of the nation formation as a social and cultural phenomenon. It became some kind of concluding volume of a “trilogy”, whose first volume was “Social Preconditions” (asking: who were the activists?), and second “In the National Interest” published 2000 in Prague (asking: what did they want?).

**W.T.** – Since the XX century, nationalism has been used to legitimate modern military apparatus. Nevertheless, your studies do not highlight the role of militaries and the wars in the construction of national communities...

**M.H.** – This has more irrational than scientific reasons. Somehow, I am an anti-militarist and – after having written my MA thesis on Wallerstein in Northern Germany – I avoid studying wars. This is, may be, the reason, why I paid so little attention to the role of wars in national movements. Nevertheless, we must not generalize the Balkan and Irish experience: most national movements achieved successfully their Phase C without being involved into wars (Czechs, Magyars, Slovenes, Slovaks, Finns etc.). The fact that many European nations achieved their statehood as a result of World War I. is more an accident that resulted partially from decisions and interests of Great Powers and partially from the fact that national communities were already constructed.

**W.T.** – Could you comment the idea that Latin American nationalist discourse preceded the nationalist discourse in Europe?

**M.H.** – As I already mentioned, I am trying to avoid speaking about non-European developments. As far as I know, the Latin American “nationalis discourse” influenced – i.e. preceded the “national awakening” in Spain, but chronologically, as I already mentioned, the German, Magyar, Czech and Norwegian “nationalist discourse” started earlier than Latin American revolutions. But may be, you interpret the Tupac Amaru upheaval as “nationalist” ?

**W.T.** - Professor Hroch, as we know, the social preconditions of national revival are related to the end of the Feudalism, the arrival of the Capitalism and the beginning of the expansion of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. Don't you find somewhat similar those times and today? Instead of an Industrial Revolution we are in the beginning of a “Digital Revolution” that has profoundly affected the relationship between Man and the concept of Time and Space, as it also happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Industrial Revolution. A symptom of this new relationship can be observed in the arrival of

a “virtual nationalism” through Internet (Tamil for example). In this sense, can we speak about new “social preconditions” of a new type of nationalism? Do you see new forms of nationalism in the future?

**M.H.** - This is a sample of questions for one long lecture. These parallels between past and present could be divided into two sections. One parallel is what you have mentioned here about digital revolution, but before starting to speak about this, there is another parallel on which I have already published something. It's a parallel between the so called new nationalism (not as Mary Kaldor refers) in post-communist Europe after 1989 and national movements we know from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have all these movements or these nationalisms in Estonia, former Yugoslavia and so on. Here, we can really observe a parallel between this new nationalism in post-communist Europe and the classical national movements. Because there are many similar or analogical situations or features between this movement and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, like loss or destruction of the Old Regime, or insecurity of what comes next. Of course you can also find a lot of differences, but we would need more time to explain this.

With respect to “digital revolution”, we have to include more factors. We have not only a “digital revolution”, as you have called it provisionally, we have not only this new concept of time and space, but we have also a new concept or “old new” concept, which means growing individualism, as a part of the concept of liberalism or neo-liberalism. I don't know how exactly to call it, but these principles are opposed to the basic ideas which were behind the classical national movement, which means solidarity which means responsibility of a man for his people, working for your nation in the name of humanity. These attitudes do not exist today as they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. So I don't think we could have a second or third wave of national revival in Europe. We can have as you said, a “virtual” feeling, artificially produced by media. This would be possible, but I can't imagine a re- production, in this digital sense, of one of the basic preconditions of this strong national identity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the idea of personalised and immortal nation. I mean, this is the idea that your

personal life is limited, however, thanks to the nation and working for the nation, even if you die, you will be able to survive forever with your nation. And I repeat that this feeling cannot be produced by digital ways. This digitalization is strange for me. The isolation of the individuals (of course you can say that there are chats and so on) is a sign of identity crisis, producing this feeling of being isolated, of being alone. Hence, this phenomenon is contradictory with the possibility of constructing a new nation and a new national feeling. But, all that I said, it is only valid where there is peace and some kind of economic prosperity. With economic decline, with international conflicts, the conditions may change and then, may be, it could occur again, a phenomenon that I called a “repeated performance”, a expression that I used to explain, for example, the Croatian or Slovak nationalism in the 1990’s. I mean, the Croats and Slovaks repeated or imitated the same models of behaviour as in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Who knows what will happen in the future.

**W.T.** – Today, which steps would you suggest to a young student interested in conceptualize the nation?

**M.H.** – Naturally, it depends on his specialization. To a student of history or historical sociology I would recommend:

1. not to be emotionally involved in the topic – neither against or in favour of “nationalism”,
2. to use comparative approach as much as possible,
3. to distinguish between terms, like “nation” and the differentiated reality
4. do not forget that national discourse usually concerns not only ideas, but above all real interests both in material sphere, and in the struggle for power.
5. to pay attention to the social structure and socials origins of national activists, i.e. of those, who are formulating “national interests” and programs.

**W.T.** - Professor Hroch, thank you very much for your time and kindness.

**M.H.** - Thanks to you. It was a pleasure.