



Central European Dissidents in the 1980s:

Negotiating the Meaning of Human Rights and Peace on the East-West Frontiers

My dissertation project constitutes an attempt to look at the opposition movements of Eastern (or rather Central) Europe from a different perspective, introducing the idea of a “figure” of the “Dissident”. I trace the changing representations of the “dissident” from the 1970s to 1989, theorizing the performative function and the impact this concept had on those who were labeled with it.

The second part of the project deals with “dissident” actions and discursive practices in relation to such ideas as human rights, pacifism and environmentalism.

The part of my research most relevant in the context of the “Nuclear Crisis” Project touches the Czechoslovak and Polish younger opposition movements such as the “Movement for Civic Freedom” (*Hnutí za Občanskou Svobodu* - HOS) and “Freedom and Peace” (*Wolność i Pokój* - WiP). Using such concepts as “localization”, “framing” and “re-contextualization” I argue that the seemingly universal idea of “peace” needed to be reformulated to fit the domestic ideational context and political discourse. I also look at the attempted re-negotiation of the localized concept of “peace” that took place throughout the 1980s on the occasions of trans-national and trans-bloc encounters of Eastern and Western pacifist activists. Basing my claims on a hermeneutical analysis of archival sources (samizdat, manifestos), interviews, as well as biographies and memoirs, I argue that there was a very wide cleavage between the divergent understandings of “peace” and “disarmament” among the two sides who in fact shared very little in terms of values and goals. In brief, while the Eastern dissenters wanted to define “peace” in the language of human rights and argued that only democratization, education and civil freedom can effectively create long-term peace, the Westerners emphasized disarmament (especially nuclear), denied the role of liberal democracy (pointing to “peaceful coexistence”), and had trouble grasping the Eastern perspective. Disarmament, on the other hand, was only picked up by the Eastern opposition in passing and was quite low on their priority list. This divergence was very hard to transcend and, in my opinion, accounted for the long-term failure of pacifism as a “universal” ideology, as well as the current difference in perspectives on security within the enlarged EU.