

Molly Pucci: *Security Empire*. The Secret Police in Communist Eastern Europe. Yale University Press. New Haven – London 2020. 378 S. ISBN 978-0-300-24257-7. (\$ 65,-)

Even though secret police institutions are often viewed as impersonal and monolithic, Molly Pucci's *Security Empire* shows that these interpretations are far from correct. She analyzes the secret police agencies of three Eastern European countries—Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany—in the years 1945–1954. In these turbulent years, all three states were forcibly adopting a new ideology, creating new institutions and persuading millions of people that this kind of state was where they belonged.

P. tells the history of the secret police apparatus through the lens of individuals as well as institutions. Her findings are based on thorough research in archives as well as study of secondary literature, autobiographies, and memoirs of people who were active in the apparatus in this period. The transnational and comparative approach shows that the path leading to the adoption of the Soviet model was not straightforward, but characterized by a search for local variants. Even though the results were ultimately similar, each country built its secret police apparatus in a different way, responding not only to previous developments, but also the country's geopolitical position and its specific features. The relationship with the Soviet administration and historical ties with Russia and later the Soviet Union also played a major role. While in Czechoslovakia Soviet advisers only started influencing the organization of local security forces after the February coup of 1948, the situation in the two other countries was different. In the GDR, Soviet activists had a privileged position: they handled and later also supervised individual cases, played a key role in the filling of various positions in the security forces and generally had a huge impact on everyday life. The relationship between the Poles and the Soviets, on the other hand, was characterized by conflict and repression, and so the role of Soviet advisers was rather ambivalent. Although they had a major influence on Polish secret security forces and urged them to implement Soviet investigation and interrogation methods, the Poles were much more hesitant to adopt Soviet practices than the Czechoslovaks.

The short introduction, in which P. explains her methods, goals and questions, is followed by two main parts. Part I deals with the Communist creation of state security forces in the “national path to socialism” era 1945–1948. Over three chapters, P. analyzes the different economic and political conditions in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In Poland, the state security apparatus was established under the conditions of civil conflict, accompanied by violence and terror. The conflict escalated due to the large number of weapons available in the population and the frequent consumption of alcohol on both sides of the conflict. When recruiting police officers, the Communist Party mainly relied on people with military experience, such as ex-guerrillas and former soldiers, who then backed its gradual consolidation of power. In Czechoslovakia, state security forces played only a secondary role in the assumption of power. Czechoslovak state security focused primarily on gathering information on its political opponents. The removal of non-Communist elites from factories, schools, offices, ministries and even the parliament was overseen by Action Committees, which were groups of political activists, most of them members of the Communist Party. In East Germany, the state security apparatus was created under the conditions of occupation by the Soviet Union, in which the Germans were in an unequal position. Here, repressions and arrests were carried out by Soviet security forces, not the Germans themselves. The Soviets retained great influence over the East German secret police even into the 1950s. As a result, it was in East Germany that the domestic state security forces were paradoxically the least developed during this period.

The “national path to socialism” era lasted only for a few years. After the many political and economic problems of the early Communist era became apparent, the key question was who would become the scapegoat. After the rift between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had developed, the national path to socialism approach was abandoned and replaced by the doctrine of class struggle. The system of repression changed soon afterwards. What followed was a period of arrests, the institutionalization of the use of violence in interroga-

tions, and mass purges in communist parties. This is the period covered in Part II, focusing on the years 1948–1954. In three chapters, this part discusses each country in turn and describes the gradual centralization of the state security forces; the author explores changes in security methods, the building of information networks and the encouragement to use violence and torture. P. examines how the security forces professionalized after the initial chaotic period, gradually became more disciplined, introduced political and professional training and started using not only new terminology, but also violence—both against those arrested and within the security forces themselves. P. analyzes how the members of the security forces gradually developed strong bonds with each other and even with each other's families, as they were encouraged to socialize not only at political meetings, but also in their leisure time.

Even during this period, each of the countries had its particular issues. In Poland, state security forces dealt mainly with problems of discipline, alcoholism and abuse of power; Czechoslovakia lacked the capacity to carry out its surveillance plans, and in East Germany, no decisions could be made without consultation with the Soviets. In each country, repressions and arrests took place in a different manner. In Czechoslovakia, General Secretary of the Communist Party Rudolf Slánský was arrested together with ten other leaders of the communist and state security apparatus and was later executed. In Poland, Władysław Gomułka was imprisoned for many years and released only in 1954. In East Germany, similar trials were fully directed by Soviet Military Tribunals.

Yet the book not only deals with the history of state security forces. P.'s ambition is to paint a more accurate picture of the reasons why communist power stabilized in each country. *Security Empire* deals with people, groups and organizations that helped communist parties replace the existing elites in their country and gain and consolidate power. It shows the gradual transformation of the communist parties, from an era in which new members were accepted *en masse* to a gradual bureaucratization of the party associated with greater member discipline, an emphasis on member selection, training and scrutiny, the promotion of new methods such as criticism and self-criticism, and targeted use of exclusion. P.'s aim is to illustrate the changing relationship between communist parties and security forces and their mutual competition for dominance and decision-making powers. She argues that the security forces were not as powerful as some publications claim, arising as they did from disorganization and chaos accompanied with corruption, property theft and other negative phenomena. The state security apparatus was never a homogeneous, static institution, but rather one that experienced internal revolutions in terms of its organization, staff and policing methods and underwent personnel changes through arrests, expulsions and public trials. In *Security Empire*, P. offers an impressive comparison of not only the development of secret security agencies in Eastern Europe, but also the consolidation of communist power.

Praha

Klára Pinerová

Corinna Kühn: Medialisierte Körper. Performances und Aktionen der Neoavantgarden Ostmitteleuropas in den 1970er Jahren. (Das östliche Europa: Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, Bd. 11.) Böhlau. Wien u. a. 2020. 324 S., III. ISBN 978-3-412-51422-8. (€ 45,-.)

Corinna Kühn untersucht in ihrer an der Universität Köln entstandenen Dissertation Performances und Aktionen der Neoavantgarden Ostmitteleuropas der 1960er und 1970er Jahre und ihre Medialisierungen. Dabei richtet sie ihren Blick auf das subversive und widerständige Potenzial künstlerischer Praktiken. Denn auch wenn die Performances und Aktionen überwiegend in privaten oder halböffentlichen Räumen stattfanden, wurden sie mittels Film und Fotografie archiviert, distribuiert und rezipiert und auf diese Weise sichtbar gemacht. Die Medialisierung der Körper spiele, so K., hinsichtlich der Subversivität der Performance- und Aktionskunst der Neoavantgarden eine zentrale Rolle, denn sie lege „ideologische Konstruktionen offizieller Körper- und Menschenbilder in den sozialisti-