The great murder of the Second World War began on September 1, 1939, at most fifteen kilometers away near Oderberg and near Teschen. And in those same hours my father, who had decided after March 15, 1939 to bind his fate to that of the Third Reich, forcefully dragged me through all of Schlesisch Ostrau to the German elementary school . . . For the first time in my childhood, I rebelled against my father’s authority and shrieked to the open windows of the Czech town hall in Schlesisch Ostrau: “I don’t want to go to a German school! Let me go to my Czech school!” The teacher František Valouch, whom I worshipped although he wore a raven black wig on his bald head, leaned out from the window on the first floor of the town hall and yelled to my father in Czech: “Let go of the boy, you Ersatz Teuton!”

—Ota Filip, in his autobiographical novel, Der siebente Lebenslauf.

In September of 1899 the Czech National Social Party issued a stern warning to parents in Prague as the school enrollment season approached: “Czech parents! Remember that your children are not only your own property, but also the property of the nation. They are the property of all of society and that society has the right to control your conduct!” Czech and German nationalists in the Bohemian lands were hardly alone in claiming that children comprised a precious form of “national property” (nationaler Besitz, národní

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Note on names and places: The term Bohemian lands refers to the Austrian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. For places with no common English language name, I have used both the Czech and German language names. In cases of individuals whose identity was contested, wherever possible, I reproduce the names as those individuals themselves reported them.

2. České dítě patří do české školy! (Brno, 1899), 6.
majetek) at the turn of the century. In an age of mass politics and nationalist demography, nationalists across Europe obsessed about the quantity and quality of the nation’s children. They were, however, unique in their ability to transform this polemical claim into a legal reality. Between 1900–1945, German and Czech nationalist social workers and educational activists in the Bohemian lands attempted to create a political culture in which children belonged to national communities, and in which the nation’s rights to educate children often trumped parental rights. In 1905, nationalists gained the legal right to “reclaim” children from the schools of the national enemy in Moravia, a right which they retained until 1938. By the time Ota Filip’s father dragged him to the German school in Slezská Ostrava/Schlesisch Ostrau, children had become one of the most precious stakes in the nationalist battle, and a parent’s choice of a German or Czech school had become a matter of unprecedented personal, political, moral, and national significance.

As nationalists sought to assert their claims on children, they provoked bitter conflicts with individual parents over the identities of thousands of primary school children. The nation’s right to reclaim children became central to interwar conceptions of democracy and minority rights at the same time that these collective rights encouraged disciplinary practices of denunciation and national ascription. In the name of national self-determination, nationalists and the state were increasingly empowered to assign individual children and parents a national identity against their will. Parents who were once nationally ambivalent themselves gradually learned to assert some agency against the demands of nationalists by articulating their own identities in nationalist terms. After the Nazis dismembered the Czechoslovak state in 1938–1939, the battle for children only intensified, as the dynamics of the Nazi occupation were powerfully shaped by the local history of nationalist conflict and mobilization around children. Traditional practices of national ascription now served new policies of Nazification and racial selection in the occupied Bohemian lands. Czech nationalists on the Right and the Left mobilized to protect children from the overriding threat of Germanization, deploying discourses that equated the defense of ethnic Czechness with the protection of democracy. This strategy in turn shaped the policies developed by Nazi officials to negotiate consent in the last years of the war. Ultimately, the Nazi regime abandoned its goals of Germanizing racially “valuable” Czech children and focused instead on securing their loyalty to the Third Reich as Czechs, through a doctrine which became known as “Reich-loyal Czech Nationalism.”

Czech Children Belong in Czech Schools!

At the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class German and Czech nationalists in imperial Austria sought to build mass political movements around the national idea. These activists faced a daunting challenge: how to convince working-class and rural Bohemians and Moravians, many of whom lived in bilingual communities and families, that they were actually Czechs or Germans? Since the supranational Habsburg state attempted to remain above national conflict, nationalists did not have the power of a nationalizing state on their side, as in Germany and France. The fate of children was of particular concern to nationalist activists. Beginning in 1880, Austrian citizens had been required each decade to register their language of everyday life (Umgangssprache/obcovací řeč) in the imperial census. Speakers of both provincial languages were forced to chose between German and Czech. While the census deliberately made no mention of nationality, Czech and German nationalists increasingly depicted language use as an emblem of national belonging, and viewed the number of Czech or German-speakers as a critical measure of national strength. Because children could learn any language easily, nationalists feared that those children allegedly “born” to their nation could be exchanged, lost, or stolen through education in the “wrong” national milieu or because their parents were indifferent to their nationality.

Nationalist fears about the Germanization or Czechification of children reflected a primordialist understanding of national belonging, as nationalists ascribed “authentic” national identities to many children and families who would not have described themselves in national terms. At the same time these activists acknowledged that national affiliation was dangerously malleable, especially among children. Thus while German and Czech nationalists did not see nationality as socially or culturally constructed, they did view national identification as socially and culturally contingent. Both national camps mobilized against Germanization or Czechification in the name of self-defense or national survival. In reality these campaigns represented aggressive attempts to nationalize ever wider circles of nationally ambivalent children and families, as it was often quite difficult to determine which children belonged to which national community in the Bohemian lands.

Turn-of-the-century Czech nationalists on the left and right responded to

4. Habsburg state officials did participate in alliances with various national movements but remained ideologically “supranational,” and often served as a type of umpire in the event of nationalist conflicts. See Pieter Judson, Exclusive Revolutionaries (Ann Arbor, 1996); Jeremy King, Budweisers into Czechs and Germans (Princeton, 2002); Gerald Stourzh, Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848–1918 (Vienna, 1985).

5. On nationalism and the Austrian census, see Emil Brix, Umgangssprache in Altessteirich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation (Vienna, 1982).

6. See Jeremy King, “The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and...
this dilemma with a campaign to keep Czech-speaking children bound to the Czech linguistic community in Czech schools. The practice of reclaiming children was overwhelmingly a Czech nationalist tradition before 1938, in part because of differences in the way German and Czech nationalists imagined the boundaries of the nation. In the nineteenth century, both German and Czech nationalists belonged largely to middle-class, urban milieus. But while German liberal nationalists promoted a bourgeois ideal of assimilation, defining their nation primarily through the liberal attributes of education, culture, and property ownership, nineteenth-century Czech nationalists claimed to lead a popular movement of the Czech-speaking masses against the tyranny of German privilege. Czech nationalists therefore embraced a far less exclusive criteria for national belonging, namely, use of the Czech language. They did so in part because little besides language use actually differentiated Czech-speakers from German-speakers in the Bohemian lands.

Czech nationalists in the late nineteenth century thus construed German liberals and nationalists as elitist and antidemocratic. They elided populism and democracy, extolling the essentially democratic character of the Czech people and the Czech nationalist movement as an antidote to alleged German authoritarianism. Germanization quickly became synonymous with antidemocratic values within Czech nationalist political culture. While historians typically think of nineteenth-century democratization in terms of expanding individual rights, in the Bohemian lands Czech nationalists used the banner of democratization to make populist demands for collective, national rights. Nationalists' strategic conflation of democratization with nationalization and of Germanization with authoritarianism would have important consequences in the interwar period and under the Nazi occupation.

While the path to social mobility had indeed run through German schools for much of the nineteenth century, Czech nationalists successfully used Austria's guarantees of linguistic and educational equality to achieve increasing parity as Czechs with German-speakers. Article 19 of Austria's 1867 liberal

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7. I found no records of a case in which a German school board reclaimed a child from a Czech school before 1918. In the interwar period approximately forty out of over three hundred cases which reached the Supreme Administrative Court involved German reclamations, most of which took place in the 1930s.

8. Early Czech revivalists, Peter Bugge has suggested, lacked any “markedly Czech traditions or institutions on which to base the national program, so the mere presence of the Czech language itself became the most evident — in fact, the only means to demonstrate the existence of the Czech nation to the surrounding world.” See Peter Bugge, “Czech Nation-Building, National Self-Perception and Politics, 1780–1914” (Ph.D. diss., University of Aarhus, 1994), 34–35, 40–44. On the relationship between German liberalism and nationalism in late nineteenth century Austria, see Pieter Judson, “‘Whether Race or Conviction Should Be the Standard’: National Identity and Liberal Politics in Nineteenth Century Austria,” Austrian History Yearbook 22 (1991): 76–95.
constitution protected the right of all Austrian citizens “to preserve and cultivate” their language, while the Imperial School Law of 1870 stipulated that if forty students in a school district demanded an elementary school in a recognized language, the state was obliged to provide one. By the turn of the century, there were still clear advantages to learning German for citizens of Bohemia and Moravia, but there was little a Czech-speaker could gain by becoming a German. According to the 1900 census, more Czech-speakers (93.7 percent) than German-speakers (91.8 percent) as a whole in Habsburg Central Europe could read and write. Czech-speakers had also achieved near parity in secondary and higher education. Socially, culturally, and politically, German and Czech nationalists were remarkably well-matched foes, particularly at the local and regional levels. Czech nationalists nonetheless continued to equate the battle against Germanization with a larger struggle against German social and political hegemony.

The problem was that in spite of the Czech nationalist movement’s populist self-image, many working-class and rural Czech-speaking parents were not easily convinced that they had a Czech national identity. It was even harder to persuade them that bilingualism or German schools were bad for their children, since bilingualism could still enhance a child’s social and cultural opportunities in the Bohemian lands. For example, Czech- and German-speaking parents in many rural regions of Imperial Austria customarily exchanged their children for the summer or the school year so that they would become fluent in the second provincial language. Karl Renner, chancellor of the First and Second Austrian Republics, recalled that there was hardly a day in his own childhood in Moravia when a Czech child didn’t sit at the family table: “The Czech child called my parents ‘Vater’ and ‘Mutter,’ and we boys called the Czech parents ‘otec’ and ‘matka’ . . . Our entire lives the two families and the individual Tauschkinder remained the best of friends. . . .” This practice did not die out easily. In 1907 the National Union of Northern Bohemia (Národní jednota severočeská) launched a campaign against this practice of child exchange (Kindertausch-handl), but failed to persuade even its own local nationalist organizers to stop sending their children on exchanges: “This nuisance is so widespread in the countryside that


even local notables participate, and it is with a clean conscience that they sit on the leadership committees of the local National Union, Czech School Association, and other patriotic associations and send their children on exchanges to German schools. They justify it with the argument that the Germans also send their children to the Czech schools.”

To counter the threat posed by nationally indifferent parents, the Czech National Council (Národní rada česká) launched a massive campaign in Prague at the turn of the century to convince parents to send their children exclusively to Czech schools. Activists in the National Council tried persuasion and enlightenment first, mobilizing pedagogical arguments against bilingual education. Nationalist pedagogues claimed that children would be ruined for life, intellectually, physically, and spiritually destroyed, and would probably even become criminals, if they were not taught exclusively in Czech. “If you really love your children, allow them to be educated only in their mother tongue!” demanded one 1909 brochure for parents.

In making the case for Czech education, turn-of-the-century Czech nationalists typically paid their first respects to seventeenth-century Moravian pedagogical reformer, theologian, and Czech national icon Jan Amos Komenský, who advocated that children be taught in their native language rather than in Latin. Pedagogical critiques of bilingual education were reinforced by the romantic nationalist ideals of the early nineteenth century, which had stressed language as the embodiment of an essential national spirit. If character and personality itself were tied to language, having two mother tongues threatened to leave children with no stable character or identity at all. In 1883, Jan Kapras, a Czech Gymnasium teacher and nationalist in Brno/Brünn, published a pedagogical manifesto in which he decried what he described as a “Moravian specialty” in childrearing: speaking both German and Czech to one’s children in the home. Learning two languages at once, Kapras insisted, “overburdens a young person’s memory and delays the pace of intellectual development.” Such families ultimately produced children whose ambiguous loyalties posed a threat to the very social order: “They educate children without any national individuality, who sway like reeds in the wind, who do not join any actual society at all, who trespass everywhere they go and are very dangerous to everyone. This is the class of linguistically neutral hermaphrodites, who sail to any wind, call-

14. For Czech nationalist references to Komenský see České dítě a jazyk věnecky (Prague, 1882); Jan Kapras, Reč mateřská orgánem školy obecné a znakem národností (Prague, 1883); České dítí patří do české školy! (Brno, 1899).
ing themselves Czech here, German there, and are raised constantly to go back on their word.”

If that was not bad enough, Czech nationalist pedagogues claimed that Czech children were reduced to passivity and silent humiliation in German classrooms. They quickly became alienated from the school and learned to hate their teachers, work itself, and all kinds of authority figures, including their own parents. A pathetic, servile, and even criminal character was the inevitable outcome. In 1910 the *Národní listy* published an editorial alleging that young thieves and murderers had recently been acquitted, because the children had not been sent to school in their native language. The court had actually considered this to be an extenuating circumstance.

According to these nationalist pedagogues, only the most ignorant, selfish, and shortsighted parent would risk a child’s future by entrusting him to a German elementary school. Of course it might also be the case that the parent had been a victim of the brutal, undemocratic pressure from his German employers and landlords, or the clever tactics of German nationalist organizations, who allegedly sought to “purchase children’s souls” with offers of clothing, Christmas gifts, school lunches, and other material enticements. In fact both German and Czech schools bid for children’s souls at the turn of the century. Heinrich Holek, a working class, bilingual Bohemian, recalled in his memoirs that his own father sent him to a new Czech minority school erected by the Czech School Association in Ledvice/Ledowitz because of the many benefits being offered to children:

> No Czech child should attend a German school! This motto was promoted by the Czechs with great zeal. For my father, however, this propaganda was less decisive than the fact that the children of poor parents were promised clothing and shoes as Christmas gifts. Another consideration was that it could be useful for me to learn to write Czech properly. A number of children of German parents also attended this school.

Even while Czech nationalists engaged in such tactics to attract students, they accused wealthy and powerful Germans of seducing and kidnapping defenseless

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and impoverished Czech children for German schools, eliding the Germanization of children with systematic class oppression. Brno/Brünn, with its German-controlled municipal government, was frequently the setting for such stories. One nationalist newspaper for minority school teachers, *Menšinový učitel*, reported with outrage in 1910 that German nationalist “drivers” in Brno/Brünn lurked in the streets of working-class neighborhoods during school registrations in order to prey on defenseless Czech children: “A mother herself reported that one driver on Špitalská street washed her child, dressed him, combed his hair, gave him a bag of candy, and according to the stupefied mother, led him away to be registered in the German school.”

The middle-class biases of Czech nationalist educational activists emerged sharply in these discussions. Czech nationalists had carefully cultivated a contrast between wealthy German nationalists and passive, victimized working-class Czech parents in order to explain the lack of nationalist discipline in their ranks, and to strengthen the populist image of their movement: “Germans used their respectability and their economic power to entice our poor people with the status and value of the German language. When that did not work, they opened their purses. The Germans began to buy children. And however we may deny it, poverty triumphed among our spiritually plain comrades, and they succeeded,” explained one angry writer for *Menšinový učitel* in 1913. Yet nationalists also fretted over the possibility that working-class parents had neither the best interests of their children nor those of the nation at heart. Some activists speculated that competition by both sides to nationalize “hermaphroditic” or nationally indifferent families had inadvertently given fence-sitters a kind of agency in national flexibility, allowing them to claim rights and privileges from the highest bidder, warning, “From voluntary collections we have created a duty, and support for the poor has become support for notorious lazybones, self-interested parents, a traffic in children.”

Exasperated by the unsatisfactory results of their pedagogical campaign, delegates to a 1906 meeting of the Czech National Council in Prague’s Old Town concluded that “all of the measures which have been used up until now to reduce the enrollment of Czech children in Prague’s German schools have been insufficient.” It was necessary, they agreed, “to resort to more extraordinary measures.”


22. These lists can be seen in SUA, NŘČ, Carton 509. Folder Ia České dítě do české školy, 1908.
ning letters to the renegade parents, warning that they risked being excom-
municated from the national community:

With great regret we have discovered that you send your child to a German
school. We are only fulfilling our duty to those who have offended our
national feelings and consciousness when we amicably inform you of the
consequences of your perverted, nonsensical behavior. Your child does not
understand a word his teacher says, sits passively, does not prosper, is becom-
ing stunted and will only curse you later for arming him for life poorly . . .
Therefore we are calling upon you one last time: if you want to be called a
Czech, send your child to Czech school! And if you do not, we will consider
you a German and there will be no place for you in Czech society. 23

The Czech National Council also urged local Czech associations to expel
members who insisted on sending their children to German schools. They
enlisted the help of fraternity students and the Prague City Council to organize
and enforce social and economic boycotts, and encouraged Czech landlords to
evict renegade parents from their apartment buildings. 24 The Czech Social
Democratic Party and the Association of Czech Progressive Jews both pledged
their support to the campaign, and made direct appeals to their own con-
stituents to remove their children from German schools. 25 The campaign
against renegade parents soon bred a nascent culture of denunciation within
nationalist circles, as the National Council began denouncing individual parents
to local municipal officials in Prague. 26 An anonymous postcard sent to the
Czech School Association (and passed on to the National Council) in 1907 typ-
ically informed nationalist leaders: "Allow me to inform you that the daughter
of the tram driver Pták has attended a school of the German School Association
for four years. The town hall should order him to send his daughter to a Czech
school." 27 Statistics compiled by the city of Prague suggest that these tactics
were at least marginally effective: between 1900 and 1910, the number of
Czech-speaking children attending German schools decreased from 952 to 375
children. 28

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Carton 508, Folder 1 České dítě do české školy, 1905–1906. Folder Zápisové akce Varia,
1903–04–05–06.

23. Template of letter sent to Czech parents. SÚA, NRČ, Carton 509.
24. Letter from NRČ to Spolku majitelů domů, 7 September 1906; "Zápis o schůzí agitačního
sboru pro Prahu VII a VIII." 3 September 1906; letter from Zeman Vojtěch, úředník banky Slavie,
April 1909, all in SÚA, NRČ, Carton 508.
25. Memo from Sekretariát, Československé sociálně demokratické strany dělnické v Praze to
NRČ, 10 August 1909; memo from Svaz českých pokrokových židů pro Čechy a Moravu to NRČ,
20 August 1909, both in SÚA, NRČ, Carton 508.
26. Letter from NRČ to the obecní úřad v Motelech, 11 September 1906; letter to NRČ from
the obecní úřad v Řepích, 1 October 1906, both in SÚA, NRČ, Carton 508.
27. Anonymous postcard sent to UMŠ, passed on to the Czech National Council. SÚA, NRČ,
Carton 508.
How To Reclaim Czech Children From German Schools

At the same time that members of the Czech National Council were campaigning against renegade parents in Prague, Czech and German political parties ratified a national Compromise in Moravia, equipping nationalists with a radical new set of legal tools with which to assert claims on children. In Moravia, a territorial division of the province based on nationality or language use would have been impossible without some sort of population transfer. German-speakers, who comprised 27.9 percent of the province’s population in 1900, were geographically dispersed in cities and towns like Brno/Brünn and Jihlava/Iglau. Instead of dividing territory, German and Czech political leaders in Moravia therefore agreed to divide Moravia’s 2.5 million people between the two nations. Every eligible Moravian voter was henceforth registered to vote exclusively within one of two separate but equal national cadastres, each with extensive collective rights and powers of autonomous self-management over realms such as agriculture, commerce, and education.

The Moravian Compromise also had far-reaching consequences for Moravian children. All district and municipal school boards as well as the Provincial School Board in Brno/Brünn were now divided by nationality, so that German school boards managed German schools and Czech school boards managed Czech schools. Most importantly, Paragraph 20 of the Compromise, the so-called Lex Perek, (named for its author Václav Perek) stipulated, “as a rule children can only be accepted into an elementary school where they are proficient in the language of instruction.”

The Moravian Compromise, which became a model for similar agreements in Bukovina (1910), Galicia (1914), and the Bohemian city of Budějovice/Budweis, offers a unique historical example of both the democratizing and disciplinary potentials of identity politics, of a system of collective rights in practice. Imagining that good fences made good neighbors, the architects of the compromise intended these agreements to reduce or diffuse the social and political effects of the nationality conflict. They did so, however, by recognizing, institutionalizing, and essentializing national categories. Rather than diffusing national conflict over children, the compromise actually enflamed nationalist disputes over which children belonged to which national community, over how to define and enforce the nation’s new rights to its children in practice.

29. Large estate owners were exempted from this rule, and still retained their own separate (non-national) curia for elections and in the Moravian Diet. For background on the political negotiations leading up to the Compromise and more detailed analysis of its other provisions, see Mills Kelly, “Last Best Chance or Last Gasp? The Compromise of 1905 and Czech Politics in Moravia,” Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003): 279–301; Stourzh, Gleichberechtigung, 213–28. 30. Stourzh, Gleichberechtigung, 216, LGBL no. 4/1906, Abt. II Paragraph 20. 31. On compromises in the Bukowina and Galicia see Stourzh, Gleichberechtigung, 230 ff. On compromise negotiations in Budweis/Budějovice and Bohemia, see King, Budweisers, 137–47.
The Lex Perek legally empowered Czech School Boards to reclaim children from German schools if they could prove that they were not legally proficient in German. The result was an annual ritual of German language tests and reclamations across Moravia each September. In many towns most of the first-grade class in the local German school was reclaimed by the Czech school board, after a series of oral exams in which the children were sometimes tested before a panel of school board members, political officials, teachers, and gendarmes. In Jihlava/Iglau, for example, twenty-two out of thirty first graders enrolled in one German elementary school were reclaimed in 1910. In the city of Brno/Brünn alone 926 children were reclaimed in September of 1913. Between 1906 and 1914, more than sixty cases of contested reclamations in which the national identities and language skills of individual Moravian children and their parents were in dispute reached the Imperial Supreme Administrative Court.

In December of 1910, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a critical decision that regulated the reclamation process in Moravia until the empire’s collapse in 1918. The case, concerning sixteen elementary school children from the town of Uherské Hradiste/Ungarisch Hradisch, radically altered the ways in which nationality was legally defined in Moravia. In its decision the court officially anchored the nation’s collective right to its children in law, specifying that as “semi-official national organs,” school boards in Moravia were henceforth “called upon to assert the legal claims of their nation, such that the children who legally belong in the school of a given nationality are not withheld from it.” The Austrian state thereby recognized “the right of every nation in the province to its members.” The creation of this collective right required the restriction of parental rights, the court explained, ruling, “the freedom of parental will in the choice of public schools has been considerably limited to the benefit of the national collective.” The Supreme Administrative Court also explicitly eliminated previous exceptions to Lex Perek for child exchanges. Parents henceforth enjoyed the right to choose between two local schools in Moravia only when their children could demonstrate proficiency in both provincial languages.
Parents in Moravia actually lost far more than the right to school choice through the Lex Perek: they lost the right to determine their children’s national identity. The 1910 decision stipulated that it was possible for children to enroll in a German school even if they were not proficient in the German language as long as they could prove that they belonged to the German nationality. As recently as 1909, the court had insisted that individual self-declaration or profession (Bekenntnis) was the only legal basis for ascertaining national affiliation in Austria. In a major departure from this precedent, the Supreme Administrative Court now stipulated that national identity was no longer to be determined “through a simple declaration of the parents about their nationality . . . in conflicts over believability and truthfulness, this declaration would have to be supported by objective, concrete traits.”

A 1913 Czech pamphlet entitled “How to Reclaim Czech Children from German Schools” specified precisely which objective traits might be considered concrete legal proof of one’s nationality. Local political authorities, the pamphlet instructed, were to conduct lengthy investigations into parents’ social lives, political affiliation, language use, associational life, reading habits, and descent in order to insure that every contested child was assigned to the correct national community and school.

In practice, as a first step, the parents of a nationally contested child were typically required to fill out a survey. Parents’ responses suggest that most of the reclaimed children in Moravia came from working-class or lower middle-class families, and that many came from nationally or linguistically “mixed” marriages. These surveys also reveal that even in 1911, the binary (Czech/German) concept of national identity inscribed in law by the Moravian Compromise was still foreign to many Moravian citizens. In response to the simple question, “to which nationality did your parents profess?” many parents were evasive. Josef Vostál insisted, “I don’t profess to any nationality,” and that his parents also lacked any clear national loyalties. Franz Raus claimed that his parents had belonged to the Catholic nationality. Josef Tours reported that his parents were Czech, that both German and Czech were spoken without preference in his home, that he had listed German as his language of daily life.

37. See Stourzh, Gleichberechtigung, 176. Wolfgang Steinacker, Der Begriff der Volkszugehörigkeitsbestimmung im altösterreichischen Nationalitätenrecht (Innsbruck, 1952). For examples of school conflicts in which the courts upheld profession as the basis for determining national identity before 1910, see Aktenbund II/75 1908, Stadtgemeinde Seestadt und Ortsschulrat in Seestadt v. MiKU, Erkenntnis z. 3410, 1909. ÖstA. AVA, VGH, Carton 300; Budwinski, Erk. z. 6683, 14 January 1905 and z. 11700, 9 June 1906.

38. Budwinski, Erkenntnisse, 1742.

39. Dr. Richard Indra, “Návod, jak reklamovatí české děti z německých škol.” Zákon perkeš, právní příručky pro učitelstvo (Září, 1913), 43.

40. See surveys of Franz Raus, Franz Roček, Josef Tours, Karl Vojáček, Josef Vostál, Franz Rous, MZA, ZŠR, B22 1. Část, Carton 329.
in the census of 1910 but voted in the Czech cadastre in 1911, that his wife was German and that he himself professed to be a German. These parents typically proved to be a bundle of national contradictions. The “objective characteristics” recorded by the surveys often conflicted with one another, undermining a binary understanding of national identity.

When parents in the late Habsburg Monarchy protested a reclamation, they typically deployed liberal discourses that emphasized paternal rights. Josef Hubáček, whose child was reclaimed from a German school in Zábřeh/Hohenstadt, argued in a complaint to the Supreme Court in 1912, “I consider it my right alone to provide for my child and to make decisions about the schools in which I want him to be educated. I consider the interference of the Czech School Board to be an infringement on my free discretionary rights over my child, which appears to have no legal justification whatsoever.” Johann Lehar also made an impassioned plea directly to the Supreme Court to protest his daughter’s exclusion from a German school in Zábřeh/Hohenstadt in 1911. Lehar, a grocer who identified as a German, had been deemed Czech by local officials. In addition to complaining about the violation of his paternal rights, he insisted that personal declaration alone should determine national identity in multilingual regions of Austria, arguing, “It is completely impossible to determine whether my ancestors were of Germanic or Slavic origins. The various professions of nationality made by my ancestors, however, as well as their linguistic competencies, would in any case have been different at different points in time. Feelings alone are decisive in measuring belonging to one or the other nation, and this cannot be determined through the procedures of a court.”

Unfortunately for Lehar, the court disagreed, and his complaint was rejected. Since 1910 the law had been clear: self-declaration was not sufficient proof of national belonging. The Austrian Supreme Administrative Court nonetheless preserved some leeway for parents and children to evade national ascription. Judges explicitly allowed children who failed a language test in one year to

41. Ibid.
42. Deutscher Bezirksschulrat in Iglau an Bezirkshauptmannschaft in Troeltsch, 28 April 1912, z. 3896, wegen schleuniger Einvernahme der Kindeseltern und Erhebung für die Frage der nationalen Zugehörigkeit massgebenden Momente, MZA, ZSR, B22 1. Cast, Carton 329.
43. Hubáček’s son was ultimately permitted to remain in the German school. Beschwerde, Josef Hubáček, Hausbesitzer in Hohenstadt. 14 June 1912, 3, SÚA, SSD/V, Carton 89. Folder II/114 1912, with II/114 1912.
44. The full original text of this letter is published in Stourzh, Gleichberechtigung, 311–16. The original document can be found in Folder II/84 1912, with II/114 1912, SÚA, SSD/V, Carton 89. The court’s decision can be found in Budwinski, Erkenntnisse, z. 9549/A, 19 April 1913.
45. Budwinski, Erkenntnisse, z. 9549/A, 19 April 1913. For a similar case in which a father was assigned a Czech nationality against his will, see “Zur Beschwerde des böhmischen Ortschulrates in Königsfeld. Wesentliche publizierte Gründe zum Erk. z. 12601/1912.” SSD/V, Carton 89. Folder II/98 1912 z. 9188 ex 1912.
enroll in a German school again the following year if they successfully passed the required German test.\(^{46}\) In a bitterly contested 4–3 decision, the court also ruled in 1911 that Lex Perek did not apply to private schools, which could still legally accept children who were not proficient in the German language. German nationalists eagerly used their private schools, kindergartens, and nursery schools in order to prepare children for entrance into German elementary schools, presenting themselves as champions of paternal rights: “If a father wants to send his child to a different school according to his conviction . . . he exercises a certain emergency right when he sends the child to a private school,” argued lawyers for the German school board in one 1911 case.\(^{47}\) Czech nationalists vehemently denounced these private German schools and kindergartens, depicting them as sweatshops where Czech five-year-olds were kept captive and drilled in German grammar without even any summer vacation. Defenseless Czech children in German schools were allegedly “subjected to their employers like workhorses, without even fresh air,” protested one 1913 pamphlet for Czech teachers and parents.\(^{48}\)

Czech nationalists responded to the perceived loopholes in Lex Perek by moving further away from understandings of nationality based on language use. They increasingly defined membership in the Czech nation based on the less easily escapable criteria of ethnicity and descent. In a 1913 case in Valašské Meziříčí/Wall–Meseritsch school board members claimed, “The right of a nation to educate its children in their maternal language cannot be obstructed simply because the child masters a second language.”\(^{49}\) Czech nationalists now claimed that so-called Czech children belonged in Czech schools regardless of their ability to speak German, dismissing parental claims to belong to the German nation as a kind of false consciousness. In a round of negotiations over Lex Perek in 1911, a Czech parliamentary deputy insisted, “parental rights are really only a pretense used by German employers to exercise force on Czech

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46. See Aktenbund II/45 1910, Aktenbund II/46 Böhmischer Ortsschulrat in Seelowitz v. MfKU, Erk. 1814. ÖstA, AVA, VGH, Carton 304. For example, in the school district of Třebíč/Trebitsch near Jihlava/Iglau 93 out of the 128 children whom the Czech school board attempted to reclaim at the start of the 1911–1912 school year had actually been successfully reclaimed for Czech schools in the fall of 1910, but reenrolled in a German school again in 1911 after brushing up on their German. z. 10881, An den deutschen kk Bezirkschulrat in Iglau-Land, Deutsche Volksschule in Trebitsch Stadt, Schülerereinschreibung pro 1911-1912. 17 April 1912, MZA, ZSR, B22 1. Cást, Carton 329.

47. Aktenbund II/115 1911, Böhmischer Ortsschulrat in Komein vs. MfKU, 4 May 1912, Verhandlungsprotokoll, Beratungsprotokoll, and Stiznost z. 1875, ÖstA, AVA, VGH, Carton 310. See also Geine Eickart, 1909, 284–85. The Supreme Court also stipulated that while children were contested and their cases made their way through a complicated bureaucracy, they could remain enrolled in the schools originally chosen by their parents. Aktenbund II/108 1910 Böhmischer Ortsschulrat in Königsfeld, z. 10.299, ÖstA, AVA, VGH, Sig. II, Carton 305.


parents.

The purpose of the Moravian Compromise, argued the Czech School Board in Třebíč/Trebitsch in 1910, had been to “prevent the absorption of one tribe by the second.” Achieving this goal required that national identity no longer be a matter of personal choice or whim: “National belonging must be ascertained by considering all of the actual conditions and relevant circumstances, and a very wide surveillance of both individuals and government offices must be permitted [for this purpose].” The Austrian courts nonetheless prevented attempts like these to reclaim children purely on the basis of descent, stipulating that as long as the children were fluent in German they could not be reclaimed on the basis of an alleged Czech nationality alone.

Parents of bilingual children retained the right to choose a Czech or German school until the monarchy’s collapse.

The practices of national ascription authorized by Lex Perek were but one manifestation of a larger trend toward identity ascription in modern European societies, as states attempted to render populations legible with censuses, passports, identity papers, and other forms of surveillance. Yet in the multinational Habsburg Empire, the driving force behind this movement to categorize was not the state itself, which remained ambivalent about national ascription. It was rather a popular nationalist movement, which mobilized to inscribe its claims on children in the law. Nationalists in late Imperial Austria claimed to speak on behalf of the masses, but used the collective rights they won to first constitute national communities. Many parents themselves were not easily persuaded that bilingualism was dangerous, that assimilation was threatening, or that ambiguous national loyalties would do more harm than good to their children. Only with the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy were Czech nationalists able to enforce their claims on allegedly Czech children and discipline renegade parents without being restrained by a supranational state.
National Self-Determination?

In 1918 Thomas Garrigue Masaryk consigned the multinational empire to the dustbin of history in the name of democracy’s triumph: “On the whole, great multinational empires are an institution of the past, of a time when material force was held high and the principal of nationality had not yet been recognized, because democracy had not been recognized,” he declared. As Czech nationalists assumed state power in 1918, they knit democratic values, national self-determination, and ethnic character into a tightly woven tautology. Particularly in the wake of the revolutions of 1918–1919, local Czech nationalist activists repeatedly demanded that the new state mobilize against the Germanization of their children in the name of defending democracy and minority rights. In a 1922 treatise Václav Perek argued that it was Czechs, not Germans, who needed to be protected by the Minority Rights Treaties from the threat of denationalization. Germans in the borderlands of Bohemia, he argued “don’t need the protection of the peace treaties for their development, because they have retained the greater power and greater rights. On the other hand the members of the Czech nationality living there, the Czech minority, must be brought under state protection if they are not to be destroyed or denationalized.

Reclamations continued, but the rules of the game changed dramatically. As in Austria, a Supreme Administrative Court adjudicated conflicts over reclaimed children in interwar Moravia, where the Lex Perek remained in effect. One of

55. For more on the influence of local nationalist pressure groups on Czechoslovak educational, language, and land policy in the founding years of the Czechoslovak republic, see Mark Cornwall, “The Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880–1940,” in The English Historical Review 109, no. 43 (September 1994); Jaroslav Kučera, Minderheit im Nationalstaat: Die Sprachenfrage in den tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen, 1918–1938 (Munich, 1999); Daniel Miller, “Colonizing the German and Hungarian Border Areas During the Czechoslovak Land Reform, 1918–1938;” Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003): 303–19.
56. Václav Perek, Ochrana menšin národnostních dle mírových smluv a skutečný poměry v naší republice (Prague, 1922), 17. For similar petitions from local Czech nationalists see also č. 7851, 22 November 1920, SÚA, MS, 1918–1951, Carton 376; Memo from předseda NRČ, 12 September 1919, SÚA, NRČ, Carton 187; Pamětní spis, “Svazu národních jednot a matic o nápravě poměrů v místech národnostně smíšených,” Prague, 20 September 1922, SÚA, MS, 1918–1951, Carton 376; Provozování v slovanské Praze, 8 November 1921, SÚA, Národní jednota severočeská, Carton 9.
57. In Bohemia, presumably, parents could still chose between German and Czech schools in the interwar period. While the Lex Perek remained in effect it appears that other aspects of the Moravian Compromise did not.
the first cases to reach the court concerned eight children from Moravský Krumlov/Mährisch Kromau. In this case the parents asserted that their children were members of the German nation and fluent in the German language. Local school officials, however, had identified these children as Czechs. The children were removed from the German school in the fall of 1919 with the help of local gendarmes. The Supreme Court used the case to outline the legal principles that guided reclamations for the next twenty years. In this pathbreaking decision, Czech justices sanctioned the reclamation of the children in order to guarantee “minority rights” and “human rights,” and to enforce the laws against illegal denationalization anchored in the Czechoslovak Constitution and the Treaty of St. Germain, concluding, “Constitutional and human rights regulations require that, when circumstances permit, a child is to be educated in the language of his nationality.”

Before 1918, Lex Perek had merely specified that children could not attend a school if they were not competent in the language of instruction. After 1918, children could only attend a German school in Moravia if they proved that their fathers belonged to the German nation, regardless of their language abilities. Although Czech nationalists had mobilized for decades around the pedagogical principle that children would be irreparably stunted if educated in a second language, the state now demanded that non Czech-speaking children of Czech fathers and German mothers immediately transfer to the nearest Czech school. In the case of seven-year-old Franz Vojtěch, for example, the court concluded, “The fact that the child has not mastered the Czech language due to the influence of a German upbringing by his mother is not decisive in this matter,” and ordered the child to transfer to a Czech school.

As in Imperial Austria, when a child’s nationality was contested, local political authorities were empowered to launch an investigation to determine each child’s “true” nationality based on so-called objective traits. The Supreme Administrative Court itself was not empowered to investigate and determine a child’s nationality, but merely to rule as to whether conclusions drawn by local and provincial authorities represented a “logical possibility.” Hence, the court refused to specify the relative weight of different factors, such as descent, culture, personal declaration, family ties, and education, and instead explicitly preserved the latitude of local authorities to weigh the evidence in each individual case as they saw fit. For the parents of reclaimed children in Moravský

58. Z. 6962/22, Wolframitz/Olbramovice, SÚA, Nejvyšší správní soud, (NSS), Carton 857. The court cited both the Treaty of St. Germain and paragraphs 34, 130, 131, and 132 of the Czechoslovak Constitution to support this claim. The Lex Perek was never extended to Bohemia.
59. Z. 18098 Bartošovice/ Partschendorf, Z. 19.594/33, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858. For other cases in which the court elaborates this position on the relationship between language use and nationality, see Z. 3220/23, Z. 6962/22, Z. 9106/22, Z. 3221/23, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857.
60. Z. 78/24, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857. See also Z. 1826/26, Z. 27893/28, Z. 12856/28, Z. 27893/28, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858.
Krumlov/Mährisch Kromau, this process did not end well. Through its investigation the Provincial School Board ascertained that the children’s parents had “emigrated from the surrounding Czech regions,” and that these were “in no way children of German descent.” Local investigators concluded, “The parents of these children declare themselves Germans simply out of stubbornness and lack of self-consciousness.” The Supreme Administrative Court concurred, and the parents’ complaint was dismissed.61

While the Czechoslovak state did consider denationalization a serious crime, interwar reclamation cases reveal that denationalization was understood to be a crime against the national collective, not against individuals. Laws prohibiting denationalization and protecting national self-determination or minority rights did not guarantee the rights of individuals to determine, express, or cultivate their own nationality as they saw fit. To the contrary, in order to protect the nation’s collective right to its children, the state mobilized to investigate and determine the objective nationality of thousands of nationally contested children between 1922–1938. School officials enlisted the testimony of the local police, soldiers, butchers, bakers, census takers, neighbors, long-lost family members, and local officials to testify about the origins, education, language use, social life, and reading habits of contested children’s families. Investigations about contested children required Czech citizens to inform on their neighbors on a massive and unprecedented scale. The widespread denunciations in Czech society during and after the Second World War may have been fostered in the name of protecting minority rights during the Habsburg and interwar period, as Czechs were encouraged to inform on parents who attempted to Germanize their own children.62

The testimony of those parents whose children were reclaimed by Czech school officials offers a rich picture of how parents in bilingual families and communities narrated their own identities, and how they made educational decisions for their children. As in the Habsburg Monarchy, the overwhelming majority of contested children came from working-class, lower-middle class, or peasant families, and a significant majority (around 70 percent) also came from so-called mixed marriages.63 Children in interwar Czechoslovakia, as in the Habsburg Monarchy, were born with their father’s nationality unless their parents were unmarried. The court permitted two important exceptions to

61. Z. 6962/22, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857.
62. For analysis of Czech denunciation during and after the Second World War, see Benjamin Frommer, National Cleansing: Retribution Against Nazi Collaborators in Post World War II Czechoslovakia (New York, forthcoming); Chad Bryant, “Making the Czechs German: Nationality and Nazi Rule in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, 1939–45” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002).
63. These statistics come from my own survey of 100 random reclamations cases. See the files in the SÚA, NSS, Cartons 857, 858, and 859.
this rule. First, it was possible to claim that a child’s father had changed his nationality in the course of his own lifetime, that a man with Czech parents had become a German, and was therefore entitled to pass his German nationality on to his child.64 Second, the court accepted the claim that under certain circumstances the nationality of a child differed from that of his or her father. Until the 1930s this claim was typically successful only if the child’s father was dead or had abandoned the family.65

It did not take long for Moravian parents to learn these rules. While many did not privilege nationalist priorities as they chose schools for their children, they did gradually learn to articulate their own interests and identities using the national categories and narratives deployed by school officials and the state. Parents from Czech-speaking regions or with Czech-speaking ancestors increasingly described themselves as Germanized Czechs, rather than as individuals without clear national loyalties, in order to secure the right to send their children to a German school. They acknowledged the nation’s claims on their children by invoking their right to a German education as Germans, rather than demanding the right to choose any school for their child using a liberal discourse of paternal rights.

Parental testimony from the reclamation trials in the small Moravian town of Valtice/Feldsberg reveals how once nationally hermaphroditic individuals began to narrate their identities in more binary terms in the early 1920s. Valtice/Feldsberg, on the border of Lower Austria, was first incorporated into Moravia after the First World War.66 Seventeen children from the village were reclaimed from the German elementary school in the fall of 1919, and their parents were all interrogated about their nationality and about why they had chosen to enroll their children in German schools. Anton Mrázek, the father of Agnes und Marie, a security guard, testified that although he had spoken Czech at home with his own parents as a child, he now considered himself a German. He hoped to later send his children to Austria for their secondary education. The children’s mother was German and she testified that her daughters could speak only so much Czech as they had learned from other children in the streets. Josef Fialka was a shoemaker who had moved to Austria in 1899, and claimed that he had considered himself a German ever since. He wanted his daughter Marie to attend the German school “so that she learns at least one language properly.”

64. This principle was elaborated early on in the following early decisions: Z. 3220/23, Z. 14445/23, Z. 22210/23, Z. 2078/24, Z. 17.227/22, SÜA, NSS, Carton 857.
65. See for example Z. 12703/22, SÜA, NSS, Carton 857. Early on the court rejected reclamations in several of these cases because the Czech father was dead or had abandoned the family.
Josef Jurčička, the father of three children, was a pensioned railway worker who spoke only Czech with his own parents as a child. He declared that he was now a German, spoke only German at home, and wanted his children to attend the German schools because the Czech state had forced him into early retirement. Josef Urbánek, a table maker, also declared that he was born a Czech but had become a German, because the Czechs in town did not support his furniture business.

Local political authorities called upon members of the Czech school board in Valtice/Feldsberg to counter this parental testimony. Georg Kasulíč declared that he knew all of the families of the reclaimed children well, having lived in the village for twenty-two years. He insisted that all of the contested families were notoriously Czech, spoke Czech at home and were of Czech descent, a conclusion which the principal of the local Czech school (not surprisingly) affirmed. Yet in several of these cases, the court ruled that local authorities “had been satisfied with merely proving the Czech origins of the fathers,” and had failed to offer sufficient evidence to counter the parents’ own claims that they had become Germans.

Other parents responded to the state’s insistence that objective traits rather than personal profession determined national belonging by joining German nationalist associations, fire brigades, or political parties, and invoking their reading habits and social contacts in order to prove their Germanness to local investigators. Eduard Jedelsky, a factory office worker in Skalice/Skalitz in Southern Moravia, was declared to be a Czech by the local Czech mayor, and his child was reclaimed from the local German elementary school shortly thereafter. The mayor and a local Czech teacher testified that Jedelsky only claimed to be German because of pressure from his boss at the factory. Jedelsky, however, contested the reclamation in 1925 by evoking his record of participation in the German fire brigade and the Bund der Deutschen. In fact, he had even been elected to the local town council as a representative of the new Nazi Party. In a similar case, the worker Ignaz Nasadil in Mohelnice/Müglitz testified that he sent his children to the German school because it offered religious instruction. Nasadil also cited his membership in the local German Catholic Association to prove his German identity, but this factor was dismissed because he had joined the German association only after his children were reclaimed from the German school.

Parents of contested children may not have become committed nationalists, but they answered state officials in nationalist terms in order to assert their own interests. Contested parents affirmed binary understandings of national identity

67. All the above parental testimony is from SÚA, NSS, Carton 857. z. 5518/24, Valtice/Feldsberg.
68. Z. 22539/25 Skalice/Skalitz, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857. Skalice/Skalitz had 573 Czech residents and 39 German residents according to the 1921 census. Pohl, ed., Orientierungs-Lexikon.
69. Z. 8453/24, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857.
even when they contradicted the social realities in which they lived. However, while claiming an identity as a Germanized Czech and evoking associational membership offered strategies to evade a reclamation, these tactics were by no means foolproof. It was no simple task for a “born” Czech to prove that he had become a German in interwar Czechoslovakia, and it became increasingly difficult to make this claim successfully in the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1928, Franz Kocourek was reclaimed from his elementary German school in Olomouc/Olmütz. The child’s father attempted to prove that he had become a German over the course of his lifetime. The local police reported that the child’s father had attended German schools all his life and lived in Vienna for fourteen years, where he married a German woman. He intended to move to Austria at the next opportunity. The court nonetheless ruled, “In view of the child’s father’s Czech origins, of his earliest Czech education in the family, and in view of the fact that he associates with members of both nationalities in public, it has been proven that he still belongs to the Czech nationality.” In a similar case in 1935, Christine and Karl Sláma’s claim to have become German was rejected by the court because the authorities determined that Karl did not “exclusively use the German language in his own household, and the only newspaper he reads is the Moravské noviny.” In its determination to prevent the Germanization of Czech children, the state thus imagined that extraordinary social and cultural boundaries separated the German and Czech populations of Bohemia and Moravia. School officials and the courts required that parents who claimed to have become Germans prove that they had completely renounced their Czech families, the Czech language, Czech culture, and Czech-speaking friends. They demanded that these parents actually live in an enclosed German universe that truly existed only in the fantasies of the most radical nationalists.

In many of these cases officials mobilized old nationalist myths from the Habsburg Monarchy to dismiss parents’ claims to be German as a kind of false consciousness. School boards argued that in order to rectify the supposed history of forced Germanization before the First World War, they had to give more weight to any trace of Czech descent than to self-identification or cultural factors. In Brno/Brünn in 1929, for example, Rudolf Vyroubal was reclaimed by Czech school authorities from his German elementary school. His father was a member of the German Social Democratic Party, had attended German schools his whole life, identified himself as a German, participated in German associations, and testified that his child spoke little Czech. But in 1920 Vyroubal’s father had registered as a Czech in the census. A police investigation also determined that Vyroubal’s parents were born “in purely Czech villages,” and that the child’s father continued to speak Czech with workers in his shoe factory.

70. Z. 27893/28, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858.
71. Z. 16512/35, SÚA, NSS, Carton 859.
The Ministry of Education soon concluded that the entire family remained Czech, because the father’s “indisputedly Czech” origins would have remained unchanged, but for the “violently effective” Germanization policies of city officials before 1918, which had made it “impossible to defend individual Czech residents who were Czech by descent and conviction from denationalization.”

Czech school officials and the courts also relied on gendered binaries between the public and private sphere as they sought to ascertain an individual’s authentic national identity. In the public realm, nationally unreliable and financially dependent parents allegedly adopted a false national consciousness because of undemocratic German pressures. The domestic sphere, ostensibly free of conflict, interests, or ulterior motives, was meanwhile depicted as the space in which a family’s authentic national identity was revealed. Parents’ own testimony nonetheless sharply revealed the limits of this liberal discourse. National identity was not infrequently contested within households, as family members contradicted one another and testified against each other. František Snajnar, a carpenter in Židlochvice/Grossseelowitz, declared to investigators in 1924 that he and his wife were both Czech, and that he had agreed to enroll his daughter Julie in the German school solely because “my wife is anti-Czech, and I can’t argue with her if I want to have peace at home.” His wife Marie told a different story. She testified that she herself was German, had attended German schools, and wanted Julie to attend German schools in order to perfect her German language skills. There was also disagreement in the Trejba household over the family’s true national identity. While the contested child’s mother claimed to be German, her own sister testified against her that the whole family was Czech, and that her sister “denied her Czech origins because she is hoping to receive support from the Germans in the event of an emergency.”

Officials invoked the public/private binary to declare a Polish Jew a Czech in 1937, even after he himself testified that he had only once registered as a Czech in the census, because he thought it might improve his chances of gaining Czechoslovak citizenship. Wilhelm Trattner’s two oldest daughters testified about their father, “Given his Polish nationality and Jewish descent it is actually difficult to say if he is a German or a Czech. He has no defined nationality at all.” An investigation soon produced four German witnesses who declared Trattner a German, and two Czech neighbors who claimed him as a Czech. Faced with this contradictory evidence, the court concluded “the testimony of Wilhelm Trattner himself can be accorded no validity because of his countless contradictions and repeated retractions,” and dismissed his daughters’ testimony as equally useless. Yet if Trattner and his daughters provided no clues as to the

72. Z. 5707/29, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858.
73. Z. 20928/24, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857.
74. Z. 7645/25, SÚA, NSS, Carton 857.
family’s “true” national identity, the court affirmed that state officials had been correct to lend more credence to the testimony of the two Czech witnesses, who had "spoken about the Trattner's familial relationships, where national inclinations are much more genuinely and honestly revealed, since they are not influenced by various public considerations." Never mind that Trattner himself had explicitly testified that such public considerations, namely his desire to acquire Czech citizenship, had motivated him to register as a Czech in the 1930 census.75

Trattner's case is interesting because it also reveals the court's inconsistent stance toward Jewish identity. Trattner's Jewish child was successfully reclaimed from a German school on the basis of her alleged Czech nationality. In 1929, however, in a similar case involving a Jewish child, German school authorities in Brno/Brünn attempted to reclaim seven-year-old Franz Fried from Czech schools because they claimed the child's father was German. At that time the Supreme Court ruled that a Jewish child could not be reclaimed from a school as a member of the German or Czech nation, stipulating that Jews comprised a separate nationality in Czechoslovakia and were therefore not subject to Lex Perek.76

Following Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, local nationalists and the Czechoslovak state intensified their efforts to protect democracy by rescuing children deemed Czech from German schools. In the 1930s, Czech nationalists increasingly exploited the court's ruling that a child's nationality could differ from that of his or her father to reclaim children born of mixed marriages from German schools. Until the 1930s, the court adhered to a fairly strict paternalist model, but beginning in 1929, Czech school districts began to reclaim children with German fathers and Czech mothers. They argued that the German fathers of these children actually had no influence on their children's identities because they worked outside the home all day long and left childrearing responsibilities to their Czech wives. This logic produced bizarre rulings, as in the 1936 case of Richard Hänzel in Brno/Brünn. The court ruled that young Richard was a Czech, although his father had emigrated from Germany and his mother was Polish. He had been reclaimed by German authorities from a Czech school but the Provincial School Board rejected the reclamation based on the fact that the child's father "fully entrusts childrearing to the mother, as he himself admits." Although Richard's mother was not even Czech, the Supreme Court concurred that "as a member of a Slavic nation she raises her child in a Czech spirit," and that Richard therefore belonged in a Czech school.77

In no case was this argument accepted when the roles were reversed. Elfriede

75. Z. 13270/37, SÚA, NSS, Carton 859, also Z. 1269/34. SÚA, NSS, Carton 233.
76. Z. 16046/29, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858.
77. Z. 3834/29, SÚA, NSS, Carton 858.
Dušanek was also reclaimed by Czech school authorities in Brno/Brünn in 1935. German school authorities also attempted to invoke the gendered division of labor to contest the reclamation. Her Czech father, Otto Dušanek, an assembly-line mechanic, was rarely at home and her mother spoke little Czech, so the spirit of Elfriede’s education in the home was fully German. The court disagreed, concluding that Dušanek “whose relationships and customs as well as his behavior in everyday life bear a Czech character” was no less influential in his home because of his absence during the daytime. “The father, a Czech, shares a common household with the family, provides for the child, and exercises his educational influence,” the court affirmed. In the mid-1930s the Supreme Administrative Court repeatedly ruled that busy working Czech fathers firmly exercised a Czech influence on their children at night and on weekends. German fathers who worked outside the home, however, were determined to have voluntarily ceded their right to transmit their nationality to their children.78

In the 1930s Konrad Henlein’s rising Sudeten German Party (SdP) increasingly turned these ascriptive practices against the Czechoslovak state, in campaigns for domestic and international support. The long, bitter, and ultimately violent school conflicts in Hlucín/Hultschin offer a powerful example of how the protofascist Sudeten German Party and eventually the Nazi Party used local nationalist school conflicts for their own political ends. The story of Hlucín/Hultschin also illustrates the conflicts within interwar Czechoslovakia between two irreconcilable understandings of national self-determination. The case pitted the state’s assertion of a collective right to national self-determination, which seemed to require aggressive practices of national ascription, against parents’ demands for individual national self-determination, the individual right to freely choose a national affiliation. Ironically, parents ultimately turned to Henlein and eventually to Nazism to secure this right.

Hlucín/Hultschin, a region outlying the city of Opava/Troppau, was populated predominantly by German-identified, Catholic families who spoke a Moravian dialect. The region, with a population of 48,005 according to the 1921 census, belonged to Prussia between 1740 and 1918, when it was handed over to Czechoslovakia at Versailles. In the early 1920s the new Czechoslovak nation-state, seeing the so-called moravci as authentic Czechs who had been forcefully Germanized by the Prussian government, pursued a policy of Czechification, reducing the number of German schools in the region from forty-one to three. The 1921 Czech census meanwhile counted 39,209 Czechoslovak residents and 7,707 Germans in Hlucín/Hultschin, as census officials counted all residents who spoke the Moravian dialect as Czechoslovak based on their language use, even if they claimed to be Germans. Nevertheless,

78. Z. 15.406/35, SÚA, NSS, Carton 859. For parallel examples see Z. 1249/34, Z. 13269/37, SÚA, NSS, Carton 233.
German political parties secured 43.6 percent of the votes in the region in the parliamentary elections of 1924 and 61.8 percent of the votes in 1929, with the German Christian Social Party taking the lead. In 1935, Henlein’s Sudeten German Party won 65 percent of the votes in Hlučín/Hultschin, a rate of support on a par with that among Germans in Czechoslovakia as a whole.79

Many parents in the predominantly Catholic region, mistrustful of the Czech schools for both nationalist and religious reasons (the new Czech teachers in town were seen as “Hussites”), responded to the state’s Czechification policies by enrolling their children in the nearby German schools of Opava/Troppau or sending their children to the private German schools supported by the German Kulturverband. By 1932, 551 children from Hlučín/Hultschin were enrolled in private German schools and 591 commuted to German schools outside their school district, while 233 children attended the two remaining German elementary schools in the district. In 1936, thanks largely to SdP mobilization and agitation, 2,232 pupils registered for German schools in Opava/Troppau from the region. The government responded by closing ten more German elementary school classes and two German secondary schools in Opava/Troppau, so that there was now space for only 277 of these children in the existing German schools. The parents of 1,800 children in Hlučín/Hultschin meanwhile unsuccessfully requested permission from the state to educate their children privately at home. That same year forty German residents of the town, including eleven private German teachers, were arrested for anti-state activity and espionage.80

Shortly thereafter, SdP representatives intervened on behalf of the German parents. The German school board in Opava/Troppau requested that the Provincial School Board in Brno/Brünn reopen two of the closed German schools and create new German classes in Czech schools where empty classrooms were available. The Provincial School Board agreed to erect the classes, but only after a commission investigated and confirmed that each child accepted into a German class was a certifiable member of the German nation based on so-called objective traits, in accordance with Lex Perek. Meanwhile, German nationalists continued to draw attention to Hlučín/Hultschin in propaganda aimed at Germany, which responded with generous financial contributions to support private German education.81

81. “Aufnahme von Kindern aus dem Hultschiner Ländchen in Troppauer Schulen,” Präsidium des Landesschulrates in Brünn Z. 1507 prás./38, Bundesarchiv (B.Archiv), R. 1501/127120. For examples of Sudeten German propaganda about Hlučín/Hultschin, see Hermann Janosch, Das Hultschiner Ländchen (Ratibor, 1930). Sudeten German parliamentary delegate Josef Slány also wrote...
According to parental complaints, the nationality of their children was determined "exclusively based on the arbitrary decision" of a commission of seven members, which included only two German representatives. In several cases the commission could not reach an agreement about the nationality of contested parents and children, and the decision was made based on a majority vote, with committee members voting along national lines.\textsuperscript{82} The conflict escalated until the final weeks before the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland. On 7 September 1938, three hundred mothers from Hlučín/Hultschin demonstrated in front of the offices of the District School Board in Opava/Troppau and then marched to the SdP headquarters to demand new German schools. Two days later, Czechoslovakia's President Edvard Beneš received a delegation of SdP representatives, who repeated these demands. Beneš made no promises, and later that night a Czech nursery school in Hlučín/Hultschin was blown up by Nazi terrorists.\textsuperscript{83}

The Czech state thus continued to tighten its grip on children deemed Czech in the late 1930s. The reclamations frenzy reached a fevered pitch by the late 1930s, when even German kindergartens in Prague, where Lex Perek was not legally in effect, were shut down for accepting Czech children. In one such case the Czech writer Josef Čapek, a fierce opponent of Nazism who died in the concentration camp in Belsen in 1945, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education on behalf of a German nursery school in Prague. His own daughter had attended the school, where Čapek testified she had most certainly not been Germanized: "When in 1927–1928 I sent my five-year-old daughter to your kindergaten, which is truly exemplary in pedagogical and hygienic respects, I couldn't see some kind of institution for the denationalization of children from any possible perspective," he attested.\textsuperscript{84} He had wanted his daughter to learn German so that she would have the opportunity to attend a German university and enjoy the social and cultural benefits of bilingualism. Such appeals were rejected, and the contested children in the school were forced to attend Czech kindergartens.

By 1937, protecting the republic from Nazi values seemed to require that even the children of a Čapek be rescued from their parents' poor judgment, and from the growing and overriding threat of Germanization. Since the late nine-

\textsuperscript{82} "Aufnahme von Kindern aus dem Hultschiner Ländchen in Troppauer Schulen," Präsident des Landesschularates in Brünn z. 1507, präs. 38, B. Archiv, R. 1501/127120.

\textsuperscript{83} Německová, "Vývoj školské problematiky," 178.

\textsuperscript{84} Letter from Růžena Ehrmannová, majitelka soukromé německé mateřské školy v Praze XII, Prague, 6 November 1937; Letter from Josef Capek, 3 November 1937, Městský školní výbor v Praze, č. 52463, April 1936, all in SUA, Zemská školní rada, Carton 38.
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Teenth century, Czech nationalists had claimed a monopoly on democratic values. After 1918, local nationalists defined concepts such as national self-determination and minority rights around their collective claims on children. These discourses were now adapted to confront the Nazi threat, as nationalists elided Germanization with Nazification, and the movement to protect the ethnic Czechness of Czech children took on unprecedented urgency.

From National Ascription to Racial Selection

Not surprisingly, reclaiming “German” children allegedly lost to interwar Czechification was a high priority for the many Sudeten Germans who served the Nazi state. Following the annexation of the Sudetenland in September 1938 and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia six months later, the Nazis attempted to reclaim allegedly German children in new ways. Occupation officials harnessed local nationalist practices of collective education and national ascription, previously promoted under the banners of democracy and minority rights, to realize their own racial program and war aims. In the name of the German nation’s right to educate “its” children, Sudeten German Nazis initially flooded officials in Berlin and Prague with petitions for new schools, swimming pools, and nurseries for their children, which they argued were necessary to compensate for recent Czech colonialism and to secure the loyalty of nationally ambivalent or hermaphroditic families.

The critical difference between Nazi reclamations and the Czech reclamations of the interwar period was that after 1938, racial appearance became a basis for reclaiming Bohemian and Moravian children for the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft.

85. For in-depth analysis of Sudeten German politics leading up to the annexation of the Sudetenland and Sudeten German attitudes toward and participation in the Nazi administration see Volker Zimmerman, Sudetendeutsche im NS Staat: Politik und Stimmung der Bevölkerung im Reichsgau Sudetenland (Munich, 1999), and Ralf Gebel, Heim ins Reich! Konrad Henlein und der Reichsgau Sudetenland (Munich, 1999).


87. The Nazis created two generous slush funds for the purpose of “strengthening Germandom” in the Sudetengau and Protectorate: the Borderland Welfare (Grenzlandfürsorge) fund in the Sudetenland and the Volksstumsfond in the Protectorate. For an overview of the projects supported by the Volksstumsfond, see Volkstumsfond 1942, Einzeliibersicht, SUA, ÚRP, Carton 269. For examples of requests for schools and social welfare programs from Sudeten German officials to rectify alleged interwar “Czechification” and “colonization,” see Memorandum an das Reich und preußische Ministerium des Innern, v. Bürgermeister der Stadt Troppau, October 10, 1938, B.Archiv, R 1501/127120; Grenzlandfürsorge Sudetenland, Regierungsbezirk Karlsbad 1/5 2086/39, Karlsbad June 23, 1939, B.Archiv R 1501/127122; Grenzlandfürsorge Sudetenland, Regierungsbezirk Aussig, Ib Volk 101/00, 1 September 1941, B.Archiv R1501/127121; Grenzlandfürsorge Sudetenland, Anträge auf Gewährung von Beihilfen zur Pflege und Förderung des Deutschums, 1941, B.Archiv R1501/127121.
In spite of the Nazi demands for Lebensraum, few Germans could be found to settle the eastern lands once Czechoslovakia’s borders had been overrun, and Czech workers were far too critical to the war effort to expel eastward. In 1940, Nazi leaders such as SS Obergruppenführer (later Reichsprotektor) Reinhard Heydrich and deputy to the Reichsprotektor Karl H. Frank, himself a Sudeten German, concluded that a final solution to the “Czech Problem” would have to be postponed until after final victory. They abandoned ambitions to Germanize Raum or territory by expelling Czechs eastward in favor of a grotesque plan to Germanize the 50 percent of Czechs estimated to be racially valuable by Nazi racial scientists. This Germanization scheme was justified precisely in the name of reclaiming Germans allegedly lost to Czechification over the centuries.88 Germanization began in the schools: many Czech schools were closed, new German schools, kindergartens, and day care centers took their place, while German language instruction became pervasive and mandatory and curricula were Nazified. In November of 1939, Czech universities were closed for the duration of the war.89 At the same time, Nazi officials began a campaign to register every resident of the Protectorate as either a German Reich citizen or Czech subject. National ascription was now used to anchor an imagined racial hierarchy into law.

This drive to classify created a whole new set of problems for Nazi officials. Putting Nazi racial policy into practice proved easier said than done in Bohemia and Moravia. While the Nuremberg laws clearly identified Jews based on the religious profession of their grandparents and parents, the regime never established consistent guidelines on how to distinguish Czechs from Germans.*1 As they attempted to implement the Nazi racial program, Sudeten German Nazis and local school officials therefore typically relied on longstanding civic definitions of Germanness that had been promoted by German nationalists.

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88. Konrad Henlein himself opposed any plans to “Germanize” Czechs, arguing for complete territorial separation (i.e., expulsion). See Gebel, Heim ins Reich, 289–326. For Germanization plans outlined by von Neurath and Frank in the fall of 1940, see Václav Král, Lesson from History: Documents concerning Nazi Policies for Germanization and Extermination in Czechoslovakia (Prague, 1960), Doc. 6, 54–63. For analysis of Germanization policies pursued by the Third Reich, see Bryant, “Making the Czechs German,” chap. 2–3.

89. On measures to repress Czech education in the Protectorate, see Jiří Doležal, Česká kultura za protektorátem: školství, písemnictví, kinematographie. (Prague, 1996); Bryant, “Making the Czechs German,” chap. 4.

90. In Poland, newly registered Volksdeutsche were classified into four categories based on their “degree” of Germanness. These criteria were circulated in the protectorate but not adopted as official policy. Abschrift des Reichsführers SS, Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums. Erlass über die Überprüfung der Bevölkerung in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten, SUA, URP, Carton 520. Doris Bergen has argued that these criteria created an incentive to anti-Semitic violence in the occupied East, as questionable candidates for Germandom could “prove” their “Germanness” through violence against Jews. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of Volksdeutsche and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–1945,” Journal of Contemporary History 29, no. 4 (1994): 569–82.
since the late nineteenth century. Many residents of the Protectorate and Sudetenland were able to choose whether to register as Germans or Czechs. If Nazi racial doctrine insisted that people's value or human worth could be determined on the basis of their outer appearance, local officials often determined the race of nationally ambiguous individuals based on their cultural and political values. In March of 1939, shortly after Nazi troops marched into the protectorate, Frank specified, "A German national is one who himself professes allegiance to the German nation, as long as this conviction is confirmed by certain facts, such as language, education, culture, etc. Any more precise elaboration of the term 'German national' is not possible given current relationships."  

In June of 1940 the first decisive regulations for admitting Czech children to German schools were passed by the Reichsprotektor, based very much on this circular logic. These regulations specified that "decisive for enrollment is the position of the parents [regarding] current political relationships." The first Czech-speaking children accepted (indeed required) to attend German schools were children of mixed marriages, followed by children from families that were "German in previous generations and only Czechified over the course of time." Last in line were "children from pure Czech families," whose parents embraced Nazi values and wished to send their children to German schools: children like Ota Filip. 

School authorities were not, however, provided with guidelines with which to distinguish between children in the second and third categories, between allegedly "Czechified" Germans and "Germanizable" Czechs. The ordinance was merely followed by a list of criteria for assessing the racial desirability of potential New Germans. Those children placed in the "purely Czech" category were questioned about their previous disciplinary record in school, current and previous views of the parents on the German nation and National Socialism, the type and strength of the parents' national consciousness ("nationally conscious, nationally weak, or nationally unaware") as well as the parents' social and cultural position, professional achievements, and economic and property relationships. Those who answered these questions to the satisfaction of local German school officials could be considered Germanizable.

92. Ie 5062 IV–39, Berlin, 29 March 1939, SÚA, ÚRP, Carton 520. For other examples of Sudeten German school officials who relied on profession to draw "racial" distinctions between Germans and Czechs, see Abschrift, Der Reichsprotektor in Böhmen und Mähren, Prague, 1 May 1940, no. EIU 118/40, SÚA, ÚRP, Carton 508.
93. Aufnahme tschechisch sprechender Kinder in deutsche Schulen, 28 June 1940, SÚA, ÚRP, Carton 295.
94. Merkblatt für die Begutachtung von Vorhaben eines Besuchs deutscher Schulen durch tschechische Volkssugehörige, SÚA, ÚRP, Carton 295. On disputes within the administration over the use of "race" or "conviction" as the criterion for Germanization, see Gebel, Heim ins Reich!, 298–305.
National hermaphrodites therefore did not disappear under Nazi rule. Even if they constituted a numerical minority by 1939, the nationally ambivalent “Zwischenschicht” (in-between strata) featured prominently in reports of Nazi officials and education authorities, precisely because such individuals forced the Nazis to define the boundaries of the German nation. In the initial months of the occupation Nazi officials were frustrated by the reluctance of many alleged Germans in the Protectorate to register as German citizens, who correctly anticipated that German citizenship might entail unpleasant duties — such as the obligation to register for mandatory labor service or the Wehrmacht. With the German army’s victory in France, however, the tables turned, and there was soon no shortage of German-speakers or Czech-speakers who applied for German citizenship or to send their children to German schools. After the war Czechoslovak officials estimated that at least 300,000 alleged Czechs had registered as Reich citizens during the war, and that 143,000 Czechs had become Germans after 1939 and then tried to switch sides again after 1945. Nazi data indicates that between March 1940 and December 1941 alone, 80,000 protectorate subjects (1 percent of the population) joined the German Volksgemeinschaft.

The Nazi state actively sought to secure the loyalties of the Zwischenschicht, inadvertently giving the category new purchase. Not surprisingly, parents soon made claims on the Nazi state by deploying nationalist discourses of Czechification or Germanization, using their national flexibility to their advantage. Some parents, for example, made successful requests for welfare assistance based on their claim to have raised their children as good German nationalists in spite of overwhelming pressures to become Czech. Olga Střeka was reportedly forced to move with her four children to Plevnice/Plewnitz after the death of her Czech husband in 1928, where “she raised her children to be upstanding Germans in purely Czech surroundings, in spite of the most bitter poverty, without ever succumbing to the influences of Czechdom.” Keeping one’s children German in interwar Czechoslovakia was now recognized to have been a service to the Volksgemeinschaft, and she was rewarded with 400 RM. Josef Stančík, father of three, meanwhile requested a grant to support his family in
Olomouc/Olmütz. The security police chief in Olomouc/Olmütz recom-
mended approving the grant, even though Staněk’s father was Czech, and
he himself had attended Czech schools for several years. Authorities saw in
Staněk (and his children) good potential members of the Volksgemeinschaft, and
a chance to secure his loyalty to the regime through welfare benefits: “Politically
Staněk has not yet come out, but he sympathizes with Germandom. The Race
and Settlement Main Office has determined that he and his family are
Germanizable.”99

In another case, the family of Heinrich Toušek requested permission from
the Office of the Protectorate to move from the Protectorate to the Sude-
tengau, ostensibly on account of his economic victimization at the hands of
the local Czech population. Officials supporting Toušek’s case claimed, “Not a
single word of Czech is spoken in his home. His wife was born in Markersdorf
[Markvartice], and in spite of the fact that she was in Czechoslovakia for twenty
years, she still can’t speak a single word of Czech.”100 Unfortunately for Toušek,
another local investigation revealed that he was also an active member of a
Czech building cooperative and a leader of a local Czech nationalist welfare
organization. The report elaborated that “in spite of his German origins
[Toušek’s] activity was directed to the fullest extent against Germandom, as is
proven by the fact that he not only raised his three children to be members of
the Czech nation, but was forced to leave the Sudeten German area of Znaim
[Znojmo] when it was occupied.”101 Toušek apparently had been driven out of
the Sudetenland into the Protectorate along with many other Czechs after the
Nazi invasion, and now hoped to return as a German. His appeal was rejected.

The primacy of Nazi claims on children often shaped administrators’ deci-
sions in cases where nationally hermaphroditic families requested support from
the Nazi state. Toušek’s request would have been granted if his children were
still in school, his file indicated.102 Nazi concerns about the Zwischenschicht may
ironically have created some agency for nationally flexible parents to assert their
own interests, as it did during the Habsburg Monarchy and interwar period.
At the same time, discourses of Germanization and Czechification obscured
national hermaphroditism, by insisting that every individual had only one
authentic national identity. These discourses also camouflaged the agency and
responsibility of individuals who freely changed their national affiliations
during the war.

99. Letter from Josef Staněk an Stellvertretenden Reichsprotektor Daleuge, Olmiitz,
26 September 1942, and to the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei, 20 November 1942, SUA, ÚRP,
Carton 269.
100. Letter to Reichsprotektor, Brünn, 13 February 1941, SUA, ÚRP, Carton 292.
101. Oberlandrat in Brünn an den Herrn Reichsprotektor in Böhmen und Mähren, 28 May 1941,
SUA, ÚRP Carton 292. For more on Toušek, see Bryant, “Making the Czechs German,” chap. 1.
102. Abwanderung von deutschen Volksangehörigen nach dem übrigen Reichsgebiet, 8 August
1940, SUA, ÚRP Carton 292.
While occupation officials accepted many nationally ambiguous Nazis into the German Volksgemeinschaft, their attempts to forcibly Germanize Czech-identified children against the will of their parents failed miserably and were largely abandoned. Most infamously, following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, the Nazis kidnapped nine Czech children whose fathers were executed in the retaliatory massacre at Lidice, and sent them to Lebensborn homes for forced Germanization and adoption by German families. Nazi racial planners ultimately hoped to expand this horrific kidnapping scheme to include all children of executed resistance fighters and Czech political prisoners, who, according to Himmler, “could of course become the most dangerous avengers for their parents, if they are not humanely and correctly raised.” Yet Frank’s closest advisor Robert Gies reported dismal progress on efforts to Germanize the kidnapped children a year later. Nazi authorities had been unable to arrange any adoptions, “since it would have cost us a considerable disturbance in the Czech population,” Gies explained. Frank ultimately conceded failure, ordering that the program be discontinued.

Historians typically analyze Nazi Ostpolitik as either the ideological invention of Reich racial engineers, leaders, and social scientists in the Reich, or as a function of wartime pragmatism. While both ideology and pragmatic concerns played important roles in shaping the decisions of occupation authorities, they cannot adequately explain either the origins of Nazi intentions or how pragmatism was understood on a daily basis in occupied Bohemia and Moravia. The Nazis imposed what was by any account a brutal regime in Czechoslovakia, deporting and murdering Jews and Communists, confiscating property, and suspending civil rights and political rights. Why then did the Nazis stop at Germanizing Czech children, although it was their stated intention to do so?

103. Himmler to Sollmann, Tgb. No. 26/31/43g, June 21, 1943, B.Archiv. NS 19/345. For detailed accounts of this Germanization scheme see memo to SS Standartenführer Dr. Brandt from Deutscher Staatsminister für Böhmen und Mähren, N. St. M IV C- 35 j/43 g. 13 June 1944, B.Archiv, NS 19/345. This document is also published in Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals (Washington D.C., 1950): 4–5, 1030–32.

104. Memo to SS Standartenführer Dr. Brandt from Deutscher Staatsminister für Böhmen und Mähren, N. St. M IV C- 35 j/43 g. 13 June 1944, B. Archiv, NS 19/345.

The history of Czech nationalist reclamations and mobilization around children can help explain the failure of forcible Germanization in the Bohemian lands.

From Germanization to Reich-loyal Czech Nationalism

Czech nationalists on both the right and left responded to the Nazi seizure of power by intensifying and radicalizing a now decades-old struggle to keep Czech children ethnically Czech. In 1940 the illegal Communist newspaper \textit{Rudé Právo} already conflated the traditional fight against the Germanization of children with a battle to protect the essential democratic values of the Czech nation, declaring, “They will never succeed in Germanizing Czech teachers, Czech pupils, and Czech schools. Czech teachers, parents, and pupils will defend themselves . . . to uphold their cultural and national values, their language, and their spirit.”

At the same time, Czech Communists and middle-class feminists and the right-wing collaborationist government together called upon Czech women to devote themselves fully to the task of protecting the Czech ethnicity of their children in their homes. These efforts represented an ironic reversal: Czech and German nationalists had spent most of the twentieth century wresting children from the control of nationally indifferent parents to serve the needs of the nation. In the face of the Nazi threat, they now constructed nationalist education in the home as the only hope for national survival. In 1939 the underground magazine \textit{V boj} appealed to Czech women: “The Germans are opening new German schools where there used to be none. This is your business, women. It is in your hands, whether our children grow up to be Czechs or Germanized, patriots or traitors.” In the summer of 1939 the Czech feminist magazine \textit{Ženský obzor} insisted that “especially in current times,” the burden fell on Czech women to protect and promote the “healthy nationalism” of their children: “The tepidity of the nation can mostly be blamed on an insufficient understanding of national education in the family. Women too can strive so that our culture is and remains distinctive, pure, and wholly our own,” editors urged.

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their readers. Right-wing Czech conservatives and collaborators, like many other nationalist regimes in occupied Eastern Europe, also accented linguistic and racial purity in their appeals for national unity. The Czech National Unity Party, which led a short-lived authoritarian regime between September of 1938 and March of 1939, proclaimed in newspapers on the day of its founding, “We will be a national state, and therefore foreign influences cannot be allowed to shape our new lives.”

These Czech nationalists successfully mobilized Czech parents against the real and perceived threats of Nazi Germanization under the Nazi occupation. Informants’ reports in the Protectorate and Sudetenland were rife with warnings about Czech parents’ and teachers’ resistance to German education. In Zábřeh/Hohenstadt, where the Czech school was closed in 1942, parents reportedly registered their children in the next village, where many were taken in by relatives so that they could attend the few remaining Czech schools. Czech children in that region not only rejected food distributed by the Nazis in schools, but allegedly threw it at their German teachers in the streets, according to Nazi security reports. Czech teachers, Nazi informants warned, “openly and actively seek to influence Czech youth through their lessons as well as in their private lives, such that national resistance among young people is becoming especially powerful.” By 1943 the Ministry of Education had spent five million crowns to “reeducate” 12,500 Czech teachers, while 5,000 Czech teachers were reportedly sent to concentration camps during the Nazi occupation. Occupation officials nonetheless agreed that repression alone could not sufficiently counteract the perceived treachery of Czech educators.

112. Ibíd., no. 192, 9 June 1941, 2387.
113. Ibíd., no. 41, 17 January 1940, 656.
114. Bryant, “Making the Czechs German,” chap. 4; Doležal, Česká kultura, 51; Franz Langhans, “Die Erziehung zum Reichsgedanken.” Ansprachen und Vorträge (Prague, 1943), 442.
Heydrich lamented in 1942, "We can't lock up all the Czech teachers," as occupation authorities began to devise new strategies to secure the loyalties, or at least consent, of Czech youth.115

In the face of widespread resistance on the Czech right and left to the Germanization of Czech children, the Nazis began to pursue the less controversial path of Nazifying them as Czechs. This policy reached its climax in the Nazi Kuratorium for Youth Education. The Kuratorium, headed by Czech Minister of Education Emanuel Moravec, was established shortly after the assassination of Heydrich in 1942 to coordinate mandatory youth service, physical and ideological education for Czech youth. By the summer of 1944, 500,000 Czech boys and girls between the ages of ten and eighteen had been incorporated in the organization. The explicit goal of the Kuratorium was to "give to youth that which they cannot get from parents or from the school."116

The Kuratorium was initially perceived by many Czechs as a pernicious Nazi scheme to Germanize Czech children, and received accordingly. The Communist newspaper *Rudé Právo* warned, "Czech youth are estranged from the nation and with the help of the Kuratorium have turned against their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters."117 At a Kuratorium event in Prague in 1943, which included a series of sports and intellectual competitions for Czech children, one observer lamented that the Czech participants "live in the conviction that as sports stars they have to obey no one at all," and that their teachers only encouraged insubordination.118 Eduard Chalupa conceded in his report to authorities in Berlin, "The situation among the youth was impossible and depressing . . . Unfortunately I have to conclude that we are dealing here with an almost organized and deeply rooted resistance, which has infected a good 60–70 percent of the assembled middle school youth."119

But if adults mistrusted the Kuratorium as a tool of Germanization in 1943, a year later Nazi informants' reports took on a remarkably different tone. Through trial and error, the Kuratorium developed an ambiguous doctrine labeled "Reichsgebundener tschechischer Nationalismus" (Reich-loyal Czech nationalism) by observers. Through programs such as "Heydrich's Summer Relaxation Camps for Czech Children" and the "Week of Czech Youth," the

118. Rezessionserscheinung, 30 December 1943, SUA, Kuratorium, Carton 43.
119. Beobachtungen während des Jugendtages, Prague, 20 September 1943, SUA, Kuratorium, Carton 43.
Kuratorium increasingly attempted to harness Czech nationalist traditions to the Nazi state. In the final year of the Second World War, it became more and more common for Czech boys and girls to parade the outward signs of Czech ethnicity, singing nationalist songs, speaking Czech, and wearing Czech costumes under the Nazi banner. Contemporary observers were conflicted about the meaning of these displays of Czech nationalism within the Kuratorium. While some saw it as evidence of Czech youth’s successful incorporation into the Third Reich, others feared that the Kuratorium threatened to breed rebellion, revolution, or at least passive resistance among Czech youth. While it may be impossible to reconstruct the actual attitudes of Czech children toward the Kuratorium, the ambivalence of contemporary commentators is itself revealing. The Kuratorium confused observers precisely because it was a Nazi response to a priority shared by the Czech right and left, that Czech children remain ethnically Czech.

The Kuratorium, reported Nazi informants, was increasingly taking on the character of an organic Czech nationalist youth movement. Indeed, many youth leaders in the organization boasted previous experience in fascist youth groups such as the otherwise marginal Czech nationalist Vlajka or patriotic organizations such as the Sokol (Czech gymnastics association). Nazi observers claimed that Reich-loyal Czech nationalism was actually the invention of the Czech pedagogical activists who worked within the Kuratorium: “The activist, Reich-oriented Kuratorium employees, above all the considerable number of Czech youth leaders, sought within themselves an idea, a program that they believed to have found with the formation and promotion of a Reich-loyal Czech Nationalism. They push open themes that have been avoided up until now, like worldview, race, and nation, etc.” Security police anticipated, “it is only a matter of time until this Reich-loyal Czech nationalism is openly promoted as the ideological basis of education in the Kuratorium.”

Nazi police reports suggested that the work of the Kuratorium had already contributed to increasingly stronger assertions of Czech nationalist consciousness among children and adults at the local level, boasting, “local events of the cultural division have already become little national climaxes reaching well beyond the youth themselves.” They specified that young workers and


121. Bryant, “Making the Czechs German,” 342.


123. Ibid.
Artisans seemed particularly receptive to Kuratorium programs, even if they still faced pressures to resist Nazism from teachers and family members. Yet while Reich-loyal Czech nationalism inspired cautious optimism among Nazi occupation officials, it also marked a clear change of direction for Nazi Germanization policy. Informants also cautioned that this development rendered any attempt to denationalize or Germanize Czech youth “difficult, if not impossible.”

Reich-loyal Czech nationalism was most prominently on display during the Week of Czech Youth in Prague in the summer of 1944. Official propaganda explicitly promoted the festival as a Czech nationalist event. The Czech newspaper Národní politika encouraged the entire Czech population to participate as spectators, advertising the festival’s national significance: “At the Strahovský stadium girls will dance in national costumes from all regions of our homeland and Czech national songs will be heard from morning until night . . . And all of you, who will be the spectators, should remember that it is Czech youth before you, the sons and daughters of your nation.” That week Czech children dressed in traditional Moravian costumes marched through the streets of Prague and were demonstratively greeted with cries of “Nazdar!” and noisily applauded, “at which point the mood clearly slid over into chauvinistic extremes,” reported one visiting Hitler Youth official. A second lengthy report from a Hitler Youth official to Berlin contrasted the 1944 festivities to the weak and disorganized event the previous year. The Kuratorium had succeeded, wrote Oberstammführer Krome, in promoting “the immediate impression not of a Czech youth which is dying out and brooding with dark plans against the Reich, but of a Czech youth, which is marching, dancing, and singing for a better European age, under the leadership of their great German neighbors.”

Other Nazi officials were less confident in the loyalties of Czech youth. Oberbannführer Riebensahm reported to Berlin that popular enthusiasm for the Week of Czech Youth had indeed reached an awe-inspiring climax at a final performance, where Kuratorium members led a cheering crowd, including Minister of Education Emanuel Moravec himself, in a sing-along of well-known Czech national songs. “In these moments the mood in the room almost

124. Unser Einfluss auf die ältere Schuljugend, Prague, 21 April 1944, SÚA, Kuratorium, Carton 43.
125. Kuratorium für Jugenderziehung.
126. “Praha- hostitelka,” Národní politika, 30 June 1944. See also “Poznáváme českou mládež,” in Přitomnost, 1 August 1944, in SÚA, Kuratorium, Carton 103.
127. Sicherheitsdienst RF SS SD Leitabschnitt Prag, 8 April 1944, B. Archiv, NS 6/410. The Czech Sokol was a mass, paramilitary Czech nationalist gymnastics association that was banned after the Nazi invasion.
corresponded to that of a German Nazi Party assembly during the fight era. Occasionally I could not ward off a certain feeling of uneasiness,” he confessed.129 Such suspicions were confirmed by a Czech observer who wrote an anonymous letter denouncing Kuratorium leaders to a local Nazi official in the summer of 1944: “I beg of you to bring order to the Kuratorium camps. The instructors are unreliable rascals. They play forbidden games, drink, listen to foreign radio broadcasts and prepare themselves for the arrival of the Bolsheviks.”130 While Nazi officials emphasized that they had successfully harnessed Czech nationalism to their cause, they were simultaneously uncertain to what extent they could control this powerful force. Another Nazi informant speculated that the Kuratorium’s young nationalists might one day grow up to be revolutionaries, with whom the Reich would be “forced to reckon.”131

These conflicting reports reflected the genuine ambivalence and disagreement among contemporary observers about the meaning of Czech nationalism during the Nazi occupation. Was it a form of collaboration? Resistance? There could be no clear answer, because Reich-loyal Czech nationalism emerged from the shared, dominant concerns of the Czech right and left alike, that Czech children remain ethnically Czech. The Kuratorium was thus the product not only of self-declared Czech collaborators, who organized and staffed Heydrich’s relaxation camps, but of a Czech nationalist resistance, which asserted confidently throughout the war that democratic political values were innate to Czech ethnic character, and that protecting the ethnic purity of Czech children contributed to the defense of a democratic political culture. The Kuratorium was a Nazi response to the specificities of Czech nationalist political culture, the culmination of a fifty-year-long nationalist struggle over the Germanization and Czechification of children. Through Reich-loyal Czech nationalism, the occupying regime at least temporarily traded its failed visions of Germanizing Czech children for the far less contentious program of Nazifying them as Czechs.

Conclusions

After May 1945, the doctrine of Reich-loyal Czech Nationalism was quickly forgotten. The terror of Nazism throughout Eastern Europe was remembered in large part as the violence of forced denationalization. According to this logic, Czech families would never be safe from the pervasive threat of Germanization as long as they were forced to share their communities or their state with German-speakers. Immediately following the German defeat, Czech soldiers, local security forces and militias began a violent campaign to rid the Bohemian lands of its German citizens, expelling over 700,000 Germans by the end of

131. Ibid.
1945. Two million more Germans were stripped of their citizenship and expelled in the “organized” transfers that began in January of 1946, with the blessing of the international community. The expulsions forced officials to face the thorny problem of determining who was German and who was a Czech one final time. The Czech government repeatedly ordered Czech social workers to search expellee and prison camps and German orphanages for “suspiciously” Slavic children who might have been kidnapped and forcibly Germanized by the Nazis, but only a handful of children of mixed marriages ever turned up.

Tracing nationalist reclamations of children from the Habsburg Monarchy to the occupied Protectorate helps to explain a curious paradox: the Germanization of children in occupied Czechoslovakia deserves to be counted among Nazism’s greatest failures. It was the stuff of elaborate and grotesque ambitions that were never realized, and ultimately abandoned altogether. Yet the Germanization of children continues to feature prominently in Czech popular memories and historical narratives about Nazi Ostpolitik. Most often these accusations of Germanization correspond more closely to Czech nationalist discourses dating back to the Habsburg Empire than to the realities of daily life under Nazism. Policies typically described by Nazis, Czech nationalists, and by historians as the Germanization of Czech children are perhaps better understood as the Nazification of their nationally ambivalent or intermarried parents, of side-switchers and fence-sitters like Ota Filip’s father.

The conflation of Nazification with Germanization nonetheless served the interests of both Nazis and Czech nationalists during the occupation and afterward. For the Nazis, the elision of “German” with “Nazi” defined dissenters within the Volksgemeinschaft. Those who questioned Nazism’s political values simply were not real Germans. It also allowed a flexible approach to those frustrating national hermaphrodites, who

132. Hlas lidu, a newspaper of the Czech People’s Party in Budějovice/Budweis, cautioned in 1947 “we must not allow ourselves to make Czechs out of Germans, but then again, we must not allow ourselves to make Germans out of Czechs either. Many mixed marriages, and especially the children from those marriages must be examined very carefully, so we do not commit any injustice.” Hlas lidu, 27 June 1945, 3–4. Cited in King, Budweisers, 195. On the dynamics of national ascription during the expulsions see Bryant, “Either German or Czech,” 683–706; Benjamin Frommer, “Denouncers and Fraternizers: Gender, Collaboration, and Retribution in Bohemia and Moravia,” in Women and War, ed. Wingfield and Bucur; King, Budweisers, 190–202. The presidential decree which stripped Germans of their citizenship in 1945 simultaneously ruled that citizens who had “become” German during the occupation could remain in Czechoslovakia if issued a certificate of “national reliability” by a District National Committee.

could be accepted into the German nation so long as they (or their parents) professed to a Nazi worldview. For Czech nationalists, the collapse of Germanization into Nazification reinforced a traditional Czech nationalist image of an essentially democratic Czech ethnicity. These discourses ultimately effaced differences between the Czech Right and Left in the Protectorate and the Sudetenland after 1938, as Communists, socialists, and feminists asserted that by mobilizing to protect the ethnic purity of Czech children they were simultaneously contributing to a greater struggle to defend democratic values and promote social justice.

Germanization in the east has recently become a topic of considerable interest to German historians, who seek new contexts in which to explore the complexities of Nazi racial policy and the origins of the Holocaust. These historians have situated the Holocaust not only in the dynamics of a "cumulative radicalization" on the eastern front, but within a larger population policy designed to transform the racial demography of Eastern Europe. Yet once the ambition to Germanize was directed toward individuals rather than land and property, it signified a radical departure from Nazi policy toward the Jews. The term Germanization itself suggested that there were Poles and Czechs who could become part of the German Volksgemeinschaft, requiring a somewhat flexible approach to racial categorization. Nazi officials promoted Germanization policies by explicitly invoking and capitalizing on a history of national ambiguity in Eastern Europe, using discourses of "re-Germanization" to recruit candidates with questionable ethnic credentials. Jews, in contrast, could never be Germanized or re-Germanized in the eyes of Nazi ideologues, nor could they be Nazified.

Moreover, while Germanization was very real if defined as a violent system of transferring economic wealth, political power, and social privileges into Nazi hands, policies designed to forcefully remake Czech children and families into self-identified Germans were a disappointing failure to the Nazis. Given the actual development of Nazi Germanization policy during World War II, we should be skeptical of narratives about the Germanization of children under


Nazism, many of which perpetuate nationalist myths and discourses born in the nineteenth century. These myths ascribe a Czech nationality to parents and children who may not have themselves identified as Czechs, effacing a long history of national indeterminacy in East Central Europe. Germanization narratives also validate a logic of ethnic purity that was at the heart of both Nazi racism, the long Czech nationalist struggle to prevent the Germanization of Czech children, and the forced population transfers of the postwar years.\textsuperscript{136}

This is no coincidence. Examining the nationalist political culture built around children reveals more commonalities than differences between German and Czech nationalisms in the Bohemian lands. The potential within Czech society for collaboration with the Nazis, national ascription, denunciation, ethnic cleansing, and participation in a Communist dictatorship did not result from the corruption of a liberal democratic tradition by the Nazi experience, or mere imitation of the Nazi example, as historians often claim.\textsuperscript{137} These events in Czech history were made possible by a shared political culture developed over more than fifty years, in which children stood at the center of political mobilization and nationalist self-understanding.

A critical reader might question why we should worry so much about the sins of Czech nationalists. Czech-speakers were indeed unjustly persecuted by a militarized Habsburg state and by German nationalists during the First World War. Czechoslovakia was certainly one of the more welcoming places in interwar Europe to be Jewish or belong to a national minority. The interwar Czechoslovak Republic also impressively outlasted almost every European democracy, before being trampled and violently exploited by the Nazi regime. Why focus so obsessively on the agency of individuals who were undeniably often subjected to forces beyond their control?


Czech nationalists merit this scrutiny precisely because they acted in the name of democracy, more loudly, more proudly, and over a longer period of time than perhaps any other mass nationalist movement in modern Europe. The lesson, however, is not that interwar Czechoslovakia should now take its place among the bad and undemocratic nationalist states of Central Europe. Like all interwar democracies, Czech national democracy bristled with disciplinary and liberatory potential. Democratic societies today still face powerful tensions between collective rights seen to be critical to the functioning of a pluralist, democratic, egalitarian society, and the liberal rights of the individual. Interwar Czech and German nationalists promoted a particular ideal of national democracy, in which principles such as minority rights and national self-determination centered around collective rights (such as national claims on children) rather than on principles of liberal individualism. In this framework individual parents sometimes lost the right to determine the nationality of their children, a question that only the state was competent to rule on.

138. Recent works that problematize traditional east/west, liberal/illiberal binaries in typologies of nationalism include Eley and Suny, Introduction to Becoming National: A Reader, Eric Weitz, A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation (Princeton, 2003); Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation (Chicago, 1996).


140. These tensions are at the heart of contemporary political and theoretical debates about issues such as affirmative action, multiculturalism, and feminism. See for example Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights (Oxford, 1995); Nina Yuval-Davis, “Women, Citizenship, and Difference,” Feminist Review 57 (1997): 4–21.

The history of reclamations suggests that before asking the question “How well did interwar democracies in Eastern Europe protect minority rights?” we need to address a more basic question: “What did minority rights mean in interwar political culture?” The actions of Czech nationalists were contradictory or hypocritical only if we measure interwar Czechoslovakia against an ahistorical ideal type: a model of democracy centered on liberal individualism that came to be the norm only after the Second World War, in the shadow of fascism and communism.142 This model of democracy, not coincidentally, spelled doom for many forms of collective education, as the evil of totalitarianism was frequently located in excessive political claims on children and interventions into private family life.143

It is tempting to view nationalists and their claims on children as a cancer to be isolated and excommunicated from the Czech democratic tradition (like renegade parents). Unfortunately, nationalist educational activists cannot be so cleanly excised from the history of Central European political culture. At the level of popular politics and everyday life, nationalist claims on children and reclamations of children were at the heart of Czech understandings and expectations of democracy. We cannot rescue democracy from nationalism in East Central Europe, any more than parents could rescue their children from nationalists.

143. On the importance of parental rights in the nuclear family to postwar German reconstruction politics in general, see especially Robert Moeller, Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany (Berkeley, 1993), 69–70. For contemporary examples of writing that defined Nazi and Communist barbarism through its claims on children, see Erika Mann, School for Barbarians (New York, 1938); Alfred Brauner, Ces enfants ont vécu la guerre (Paris, 1946), 180–99; Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutschen Fragen, Deutsche Kinder in Stalin's Hand (Bonn, 1951), 78; Hans Köhler, “Erziehung zur Unfreiheit,” in idem, Jugend Zwischen Ost und West (Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1955), 60. Sudeten German nationalists also attempted to claim victim status by contrasting their own institutions for collective education with the totalitarian, invasive tactics of the Nazis. See for example Keil, Die deutsche Schule and Eduard Burkert, “Die Auflösung der sudetendeutschen Jugendbünde und die Einführung der Hitler-Jugend,” in Deutsche Jugend in Böhmen, ed. Peter Becher (Munich, 1993).