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Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007 [pb 2009]. Pp. xvii, 378. ISBN: 978-0-674-02451-9.

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Chad Bryant's fine *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* is the only overarching history of Bohemia and Moravia under Nazi rule written after the fall of communism. The book has enjoyed generally positive reviews—and deservedly so, since it makes important contributions to two burgeoning fields of research: the forging of national identities in central Europe, and the remarkable variety of Nazi occupation policies. In the Czech lands, as in other borderland regions of Europe, these two stories were deeply intertwined.

Bryant (Univ. of North Carolina) argues that Nazi policies forever altered the terms of Czech and German nationality politics. In charting this transformation, he provides a rich, nuanced history of the Protectorate (the Nazi designation for the core Czech lands). He treats Munich and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the various phases of occupation politics in the Protectorate, and the Final Solution in the Czech lands. He addresses relations between Edvard Beneš, head of the government-in-exile, and the underground resistance. He describes daily life in the Protectorate, not least by relating jokes told at the time, and finally covers the postwar expulsion of the Germans and how Nazi rule facilitated the imposition of communism in Czechoslovakia.

Bryant suggests that, prior to 1939, nationality was a matter of individual choice. One chose to be Czech or German by individual acts: speaking Czech or German, participating in Czech or German associational life, or sending children to Czech or German schools. Some inhabitants of the Czech lands, however, considered themselves neither Czech nor German; they were so-called amphibians. Others were bilingual and could easily pose as Czech or German (often, whichever seemed most opportune). Bryant argues that the Nazi occupation changed all that. In their efforts to Germanize the Protectorate, the Nazis insisted on discriminating Germans from Czechs. Though this process was no easy matter, “nationality, something once acted out in civil and political society before the occupation, was now something that the state affixed to individuals” (252). Although one of the book's reviewers has questioned the degree of individual choice that existed in earlier decades,¹ Nazi occupation in fact brought a hardening of national identities. This is hardly surprising: from 1939 to the end of the war and beyond, Nazi officials and Czech politicians manipulated and heightened the ethnic rivalry for their own ends.

Throughout the occupation, Prague was ruled by Nazi officials, most of whom came from the Reich, and a collaborationist regime under the aging (some would say senile) Emil Hácha. Yet despite Nazi hegemony, Protectorate Germans (those who had lived in Bohemia and Moravia prior to 1939) had tense relations with their Reich counterparts who, in their view, were arrogant and insufficiently anti-Czech. The first Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath, eager to assuage the Czech workforce, initially tolerated Czech displays of national loyalty, but after war broke out in September 1939, and particularly after the defeat of France, the Nazis clamped down on the Czech national movement. Although von Neurath had planned to Germanize the Protectorate by assimilating half of the Czechs as Germans and deporting the rest, the more fanatical Reinhard Heydrich, who replaced him as protector in September 1941, introduced racial screenings to push forward Germanization. Yet, like Neurath earlier and others later, he faced a dilemma: pursuing the ideological goal of Germanization would compromise the pragmatic goal of aiding the Nazi economy and war machine. In Czech lands, at least, pragmatism trumped ideology (see below). In June 1942, Heydrich died from wounds sustained during an assassination attempt by the Czech underground. The Nazis reta-

1. See Tara Zahra, *Central European History* 41 (2008) 325–28.

liated with draconian acts of retribution such as, most (in)famously, the complete obliteration of the village of Lidice. In the final two years of occupation, Karl Hermann Frank, a Sudeten German, was the leading Nazi official in the Protectorate. He detested Czechs but recognized their economic importance for the Nazi regime.

Meanwhile, as Bryant demonstrates, Czechs were also divided over policies and goals. Beneš tirelessly aimed to restore the Czechoslovak state to its pre-1938 borders. Eager to win over the Allied powers, not least the Soviet Union, the one great power that had not let the Czechs down at Munich, Beneš encouraged the Czech underground to pursue dramatic resistance actions, particularly sabotage in factories and attacks on infrastructure (as well as the assassination of Heydrich). But the underground knew too well the futility and the consequences of such actions. Lidice, which Beneš turned into a great propaganda coup for the cause of Czechoslovak statehood, was a nightmare for Czechs at home. Beneš also worried that his support was ebbing, and, indeed, many Czechs felt their exiled president had no real understanding of the Nazi occupation—the drab existence of everyday life, the pressures to collaborate, and the reality of Gestapo surveillance and terror. In addition, while Czech patriots at home long urged the total expulsion of Germans after the war, Beneš arrived at this position only late in the war: as a savvy politician, he eventually recognized that this policy could unite all Czechs and made the cause his own, with a vengeance that betrayed the Czech interwar ideals of humanism, freedom, and democracy.

Why were so many Czechs eager to expel Germans? At first glance, their zeal might seem odd. Czechs, after all, were spared the worst excesses of Nazi occupation. Bryant draws apt comparisons between Czechs and Poles under Nazi rule. Unlike Poles, Czechs had a government, albeit a collaborationist one; enjoyed a legal associational life; and neither went hungry during the war nor endured arbitrary terror. A Czech who was not a targeted victim of the Nazis—a Jew, a Roma or Sinti, or a political resistor—had little reason to fear arrest. Bryant and others have argued that Czechs benefitted from Nazi eagerness to maintain their industries and workforce for the war effort. Even Hitler came to view Czechs fairly positively. By 1942, he was praising their work ethic and claiming that up to half of all Czechs carried Nordic blood. But their privileged situation only intensified their fury toward the Germans—a theme Bryant should have emphasized more. For individual Czechs, unlike Poles, confronted moral quandaries in deciding whether to collaborate with the Nazis; Poles never even had the choice. Czechs had to weigh resistance against its consequences, while Poles had little to lose by resistance. The ethical ambiguities that Czechs faced led to demoralization and the very compromises they made with themselves, their countrymen, and the Nazis fueled their anger toward Germans.

And angry many were. On 5 May 1945, Czechs in Prague and elsewhere rose up against Nazi rule. They raped, robbed, beat, and murdered their German neighbors. They placed Germans in nasty interment camps, and eventually marched them out of the country. Beneš and his government allowed the violence to continue unchecked. Indeed, the returned president spent the summer of 1945 winning approval from the Allies for an “organized” transfer of Germans out of the Czech lands. At least one reviewer has questioned Bryant’s assertion that Beneš’s anti-German policies were the great unifying force in Czech politics. Recent archival research, he suggests, casts doubt on the ubiquity of popular violence against Germans; it now seems that state authorities not only tolerated the abuses, but in many cases actually initiated them.² Indeed, although Bryant carefully discloses differences among his historical subjects, he is surprisingly unnuanced on this point: “Hating the Germans became the only clear, unambiguous aspect of Czech national identity that survived the occupation” (220). While anti-Soviet feeling was rampant in Poland, where the expulsion of Germans was the only popular policy of the emerging communist regime, in Czechoslovakia communism enjoyed some genuine support, obviating the need to generate popular enthusiasm on the basis of anti-German feeling alone. Nonetheless, many, if not most, Czechs wholeheartedly supported Beneš’s anti-German policies, as their government confiscated Germans’ property, shut down their schools and their university in Prague, and banned their associational life. Sadly, Czechs even viewed Jewish survivors of the Holocaust as “German” and treated them as harshly as their alleged countrymen. By 1950, the census

2. See David Gerlach, *H-Net Reviews* [HABSBUURG] (May 2008) <www.miwsr.com/rd/1030.htm>.

counted 94 percent of Bohemia's population as Czech (3) and only 165,117 Germans remained in all of Czechoslovakia (250). Three million Germans had left their former homes in the Czech lands (256).

In his Conclusion, Bryant shows how the Nazi occupation facilitated Soviet-style communism in the Czech lands: "Nazi rule had taught an important lesson: raw power and violence won out over fundamentally democratic values of negotiation and compromise" (259). But there was more. Nazi rule brought much greater state intervention into the economy, making the postwar nationalization of industry easier. The Nazis had also privileged and empowered the working class; workers were thus that much more confident in their support of socialism and the Soviet Union. Finally, the Nazis destroyed the fabric of civil and political society. Moreover, with the expulsion of the Germans, Czech associational life lost much of its vitality. After 1945, the old style of civic life, with its emphasis on clubs and associations, no longer had its *raison d'être*. Early in *Prague in Black*, Bryant notes that "the book is, then, primarily about loss" (11). In some ways, this may have been for the best: Czechs and Germans no longer engaged in bitter, frenzied local disputes. But as this perceptive work shows, far more was forfeited than gained—along with their German and Jewish populations, Czechs lost their democratic, humanistic, and moral ideals.