

# Summary

## **Ethnic statistics in the Bohemian Lands in 1880–1930**

### ***The mechanisms, problems and consequences of ethnic classification***

In the 19th century the national idea asserted itself in the European milieu as a new leading form of collective identity. The modern nation was created in the course of a process in which the strata carrying national awareness were persuading the wide masses that loyalty to a nation would be beneficial for them, as it would help to solve social and economic problems. Not without reason is it said that nationalism was the new religion of the 19th century. In a way, the idea of a nation offered a replacement for the old religious “securities”. This process of persuasion and symbolical integration of masses into the nation was a socially political process of enormous significance.

The national ideology and nationalism influenced the political representatives and national activists of all main ethnic groups in the Bohemian Lands (Czech, German, Polish) more and more. In the final years of the monarchy’s existence, nations were becoming the basic constituent of Cisleithania and its constitutional system more and more, and they started to be institutionalised.

The group rights created under Cisleithania (concerning education and the language of communication with state offices) – the initiator was the principle of equality of nations (national tribes) enshrined in the 1867 constitution – and adopted by the first Czechoslovak Republic required a formal classification of citizens, as the state administration needed information about the language and ethnic situation to be used as material for administrative tasks. Thus the dilemma of the classification procedure arose, as different classification procedures could generate partially different answers to the question who was who from the ethnic aspect. Therefore one of the main aims of this book is to examine how setting the criteria and way of carrying out ethnic or language statistics influenced the final figures. Naturally, we do not avoid even such questions as what influences and interests were reflected in setting the criteria, or if another setting could or could not have been better, more effective and more beneficial.

What is the main subject of our book? We try to measure the political value which had been attributed to the census. We would like to point out the typical conflict situations (on the central, regional, as well as local level) which the ethnic conflicts had caused both during censuses and the interpretation of their results. We will also include the question of the validity of the census material, i.e. the verification of the results. However, we do realise that national campaigns during censuses manifested themselves, on average, more in the “polarisation of the social climate” than in numerical results.

We analyse the interest stances and opinions of the individual parties involved – state power, municipal governments, nationalist organisations, political parties, etc.; we even mention statisticians. The media discourse concerning ethnic classification in censuses and the attitude of the population towards it was created mainly by national activists. The numerical results of censuses of the language of daily use (nationalities) were important for them. If they were favourable, they legitimised their activity and self-stylisation into the roles of leaders of nations, which, in their minds, were clearly delimited, and mobilised the public to support their efforts. If the results failed their expectations, it was necessary to justify the failure, especially by external factors (state intervention, unfair practices of the opponents, etc.). That is why both politicians and activists carried

out very energetic campaigns in the preparatory and census phases, and subsequently formed the public discourse regarding the results. They were very active by means of nationalist organisations (the so-called defensive unions – Czech *Národní jednoty* and German *Bunds der Deutschen*), newspaper articles and parliamentary interpellations. When analysing and evaluating the media discourse regarding censuses, it is therefore necessary to be very cautious, and also to “counterbalance” using the evaluation reports written by state bodies and research detachment.

Is the definition of ethnicity (nationality, language of daily use, etc.) in censuses a mirror reflecting a realistically and clearly existing ethnic division in society? Or does it tell us more about the construction of ethnic categories within political ideologies? Certainly the latter, mainly because a census is not a scientific enterprise removed from a political framework, but rather a political battlefield, where contradictory ideas of “real” identities fight each other. The reward is a category in the census which “scientifically” legitimises the existence of a socially imaginable community.

As a census is a state act (the act of a state monopoly), it is possible to give a good demonstration of state interest on the manner of carrying out ethnic classification.

In Cisleithania the nationality principle was not the fundamental principle of the political system. This is how Cisleithania differed radically from the successor states after WWI. The Habsburg Monarchy entered the era of liberalisation and democratisation as a supranational empire with the cultural, social and economic supremacy of German-speaking elites, which, however, were not recruited only from ethnic Germans. At a time when even the idea of national equality asserted itself as a part of the modernisation processes, and when national identity pushed itself into the position of the most important form of collective identity, the multinational monarchy had to adapt its system to it. There came a process of balancing the interests of the various ethnic groups transforming into modern nations. This process could hardly be entirely “fair”. The state power necessarily took into consideration the political power of the representatives of the various ethnic groups and, what is more, even this state power naturally consisted of people, who were also influenced by period identification offers and ideologies. It was therefore difficult to expect that the offices could be entirely impartial in the sense of some kind of neutral Austrian nation.

In 1872, the International Statistical Congress in Saint Petersburg decided to investigate the language situation in censuses. Taaffe’s government in Cisleithania reacted to this by introducing a category called “the language of daily use” (“Umgangssprache” in German which would be literally “language of common communication” in English, but “language of daily use” is the most frequent translation) into the census in 1880. The language of daily use was defined quite vaguely as a language which a person generally uses in communication. Only in 1910 did the Ministry of the Interior specify the interpretation in the sense that it should be a language which a given person predominantly used, both in communication at home and in public (at work).

Probably the deciding motive which led the Cisleithanian government to this solution (and not to introducing the mother tongue or a family language) was the legal recognition of the possibility of assimilation, i.e. preventing the “seclusion” of nationalities and, ultimately, supporting the preservation of state unity. Investigating the national situation by means of a census of the language of daily use corresponded with the state interest; it was not the support of either Czech, German or Polish nationalism, although the state was logically interested in having as many of its citizens as possible being able

to communicate in German – German assimilation was the most advantageous for it. Cisleithania continued to investigate the language of daily use until its end. Each person had to state only one language of daily use (contrary to Belgium, for example), which was partly in contrast with the conception of the investigated category language of daily use. The declared goal of investigating the language of daily use remained the same for all four Cisleithanian censuses in 1880–1910: “to objectively ascertain, in the administrative and political interest, the language character of settlements and territories, which follows from the language contact of the population in daily practical life.” Therefore in the case of the language of daily use, it was *de jure* an objective category, but *de facto*, by 1900 at the latest, a definite shift towards a subjective category took place, albeit only in the internal guidelines of the state authorities and not on the “outside”, i.e. in the legislation and in the instructions for filling in the census forms. Already in the census in 1900 the Ministry of the Interior decided that in all cases of complaint the objective criterion of the language of daily use must never be used against the free declaration of the respondent. The census enumerators were forbidden to change the data given by the respondents. This was actually getting close to surveying nationality, although, according to the law, the census enumerators still formally had the right to check the recorded data.

The Achilles’ heel of the Cisleithanian censuses were the municipal authorities. They were the ones who, in the vast majority of cases, the state entrusted with performing and checking the censuses, including the selection of the census bodies (enumerators and inspectors). However, the municipal authorities were, unlike the state authorities, often heavily nationalised, which led, in linguistically mixed regions, to pressure on a part of the respondents (usually in the form of threats such as losing their jobs or being evicted), manipulation and falsification of data. Although the state offices emphasised that the census bodies were forbidden to change the statements of persons about the language of daily use, it was proved to occur all the same. Considering the insufficient control mechanisms (inspections of the work of the local census bodies were performed only randomly), it also occurred that the language of daily use of a person that was recorded was different from the one the person stated. A part of the people stated a different language of daily use than they would have without the pressure of the external environment.

Unlike in the previous period, in the Czechoslovak Republic it was nationality that was directly subjected to a census. However, not even the concept of nationality is as unambiguous as it may seem at first sight. It can be interpreted both subjectively (as a free choice of an individual according to their sense of belonging) and objectively (based on external attributes, especially language). Given the way in which the Czech national activists and politicians criticised the Cisleithanian censuses of the language of daily use, we would expect that the new state power would concentrate exclusively on removing the external pressure, e.g. from the side of employers, i.e. to allow each individual to state their nationality according to their free will.

However, it was not so, because the new state power, unlike its predecessor, identified directly with one nationality (the concept of the “national state of Czechs and Slovaks”) and to this it adapted even its national policy. The state’s interest was to provide the highest possible number of members of the Czech (“Czechoslovak”) nationality and, conversely, to reduce the proportion of national minorities as much as possible. This was reflected in the “definition” of nationality in censuses. The one from the 1921 census

read as follows: "Nationality is understood as the membership of a nation, whose primary external feature is the mother tongue. The Jews may declare their nationality as Jewish."

The ineptness and ambiguity of this definition was completely intentional. The linking (though not obligatory) of nationality to the mother tongue gave the state authorities the possibility to decide where it was necessary to understand nationality as an objectively (linguistically) given category and where as a subjectively volitional category, with the clear aim of finding the highest possible number of members of the Czech and nationality. The reason for this hybrid procedure is clear – on the one hand, the state power wished to prevent people of Czech and mixed ethnic origin from having the possibility to register (albeit voluntarily) with the German nationality (tens of thousands of labour migrants into a predominantly German-speaking environment), and on the other hand it wished to give the possibility or imperative to register with the Czechoslovak nationality even to individuals whose mother tongue was not Czech or Slovak although they were of Czech or Slovak origin (individuals born or raised in a linguistically German or Hungarian environment), or who were not of Czech origin at all, such as the Poles and people speaking a mixture of Czech and Polish in Cieszyn Silesia).

The reason for the recognition of the Jewish nationality and not linking it to any language was, among other things, an attempt to weaken the German nationality in the Bohemian Lands (which a part of the Jews would otherwise register with).

The state authorities had, unlike in Cisleithania, the power to assign a nationality based on external features, even if it was in contrast with the personal declaration of the given person. Citizens were therefore asked to state the nationality which they corresponded with their own conviction; however, when expecting "unsatisfactory" answers, the state implemented a more thorough official verification than in Cisleithania.

The Czech politicians and national activists criticised the perished Austrian state for not preventing involuntary (i.e. insincere) records of the language of daily use sufficiently, or even deliberately. However, the Czechoslovak legislation connected with censuses led up to the paradoxical situation in which the state, while significantly reducing involuntary records resulting from pressure on dependent strata, simultaneously refused to recognise even voluntary assimilation (at least not in the case of "Czechs" declaring German nationality and "Slovaks" declaring Hungarian nationality).

Censuses were carried out, like in the time of the Austrian state, in two ways – by self-enumeration (the forms were filled in by the head of the family) and by census enumerators. In the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic the latter method was deliberately chosen in "problematic" districts where there was a danger that a part of the people would, at variance with the state interest, refuse to register with the Czech nationality.

The census bodies were no longer appointed by local authorities but directly by state authorities, where the discrepancy between the ethnic composition of cities like Opava (Troppau), Liberec (Reichenberg) or Znojmo (Znaim) and the proportion of census enumerators of German nationality is quite clear.

The definition of nationality used in the first Czechoslovak census provoked criticism not only among politicians of minority nationalities, but due to its lack of scientific quality and purposefulness even among European demographers. Before the second census (1930) the State Council of Statistics committee in the Czechoslovak Republic therefore proposed the following formulation: "Nationality is recorded with each

citizen subjected to a census (both of Czechoslovak and foreign citizenship) according to the language which the respondent has learned the best and which they use the most often; it is generally the mother tongue. Besides Hebrew, the Jewish language also includes the so-called jargon.” On the one hand, this definition specified the relationship between language and nationality, and on the other hand it conditioned registering with the Jewish nationality by the knowledge of the corresponding language. However, the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior did not accept the recommendation of the State Council of Statistics, and approved a formulation about recording nationality in the upcoming census that was much closer to the formulation from 1921, and therefore also to the stance of the Czech nationalist circles: “Nationality is generally recorded according to the mother tongue. A different nationality than of which the mother tongue gives evidence can be recorded only when the respondent does not speak the mother tongue either in their family or their household and at the same time is fully proficient in the language of the given nationality. The Jews, however, can register with the Jewish nationality at any time.”

In a document setting out the grounds for its decision, the Ministry of the Interior explained the rule change as follows: the formulation from the 1921 census was unacceptable to the Supreme Administrative Court. The court added the reading of the word “usually”, which should refer to unclear cases of nationality changes. The new formulation from 1930, in the view of the Ministry, achieved a clear logical connection between the first sentence (setting out the rule) and the following two sentences (setting out exceptions to the rule). The second sentence defined the situation in which a change of nationality was considered to be complete, in order to avoid nationality-based disputes such as those which had occurred in 1921, when the NSS annulled several decisions by the census authorities and political authorities.

In the 1930 census, it was finally accepted that the mother tongue was not the sole criterion for determining nationality. However, an exception was only possible in cases when the respondent did not speak this mother tongue in his/her family or household, and at the same time was fully proficient in the language of the “non-native” nationality. If the authorities found any indications whatsoever that the respondent was able to speak Czech, then they uncompromisingly rejected any declaration of German nationality by an “ethnic Czech”. Only the Jews were still able to choose freely between the subjective and objective conceptions of nationality.

The Czechoslovak policy of censuses in the interwar period did not deviate from the European practice of the time in any way, it even ranked, compared to the European average, among the more moderate ones. The period context is important in this respect, so that we would not fall victim to implementing today’s evaluation criteria on a different time and different evaluation system. The state organisers of censuses always had specific intentions in mind, often of a political nature. Disproportions in the recorded figures in the monitored period tended to grow. It would seem that these disproportions were more distinctive in Poland or Germany than in interwar Czechoslovakia. When putting the intentions, which were to be achieved by censuses, into effect, it did not matter so much whether the views were “subjective” or “objective” or whether the nation was a “language” or “state” one; everything could be interpreted according to the goal which was being followed.

Sometimes the pressure on the “right” results of censuses initiated by the state interest was a little too “successful” even in the first Czechoslovak Republic. We discussed in

detail the case of the census in Cieszyn Silesia in 1930, where the census policy led to such a bad numerical result of the Polish nationality that even the State Statistical Office refused to take responsibility for it, as given the figures from 1921 and uncompromising demographic indicators (a higher birth-rate of the Polish compared to other nationalities in the Bohemian Lands) it was scientifically indefensible. That is why before the numerical results were published, several thousands of individuals were reclassified from the Czech to the Polish nationality – such juggling with figures had little to do with expertise, although the Statistical Office tried to maintain the impression of seriousness. The book also deals with four specific subtopics. The first of them is the national identification of the Jews in censuses in 1880–1930. We show to what extent the specific position of the Jewish minority, its perception both by the state power and the majority non-Jewish society, and to some degree the ambivalent stance of the Jews themselves on the issue of their own identification was manifested in censuses.

For the Jews from the Bohemian Lands registering the language of daily use was a problem. They represented at least a bilingual section of society and they found it difficult to decide on just one language. In case the national activists' ideas about the large numbers of "their" nation failed, they found themselves amidst a conflict of interests of nationalists from various camps, campaigns, conflicts and wrath. The Jews' choice of the language of daily use was closely monitored especially in regions where the language and nationalities were mixed; the reaction to their surroundings usually did not take long. Manifestations of dissatisfaction increased the tension between the Jews and the non-Jewish society, strengthened economic nationalism targeted at the Jews and an anti-Semitic atmosphere in general. The Jews' decision to choose a certain language therefore took place only after a careful evaluation of the situation and the potential impacts under different circumstances than with the majority non-Jewish population. This was due to their minority status, specific position in society and considerable pressure coming from various sides. Such a choice can therefore hardly be considered as free in the truest sense of the word.

In the Bohemian Lands, the so-called Jewish issue in the censuses of the time constituted a significant part of the reflection of the tense Czech-German relations. The language/national registration of the Jews in censuses had a practical direct impact not only on the everyday life of the representatives of the Jewish minority, but it significantly affected even the situation of other minorities (in the Bohemian Lands especially German). Although the focus of the subtopic lies in the interwar period, to ensure the proper understanding of the whole context it was also necessary to pay considerable attention to censuses carried out in 1880–1910. This enabled us to monitor both the continuation of some aspects connected with registering the Jews in censuses and to appropriately contextualise new consequences, seeing as it was the new state where, in the censuses, the so-called Jewish issue considerably affected the factual position of the members of the Czechoslovak – and, under the new circumstances, ruling – nation. While in the Bohemian Lands this occurred particularly in the relations to the local Germans and only on a local and regional scale, in Slovakia the abovementioned gained, due to a considerably larger Jewish community, supraregional significance in the relations to the local Hungarians. The same as in the case of Slovakia applied to Carpathian Ruthenia in the case of the Ruthenian-Hungarian relations.

Another subtopic deals with the phenomenon of the so-called private censuses, whose aim was to question the results of state censuses, to become their counterweight. We

introduce the main trends in the development of private censuses, we deal with the question of the motives leading the organisers to their realisation, the transformation of the composition of the organisers and also the change of the state's attitude to these actions after 1918. We outline the difficulties in the preparation and realisation of some private censuses and we show the reflection of the self-enumeration activities in the period press representing both the opinions of their organisers, or possibly sympathisers, and their opponents and critics. In the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic, organising private censuses was outlawed and their organisers were called to account. A part of the chapter dealing with the post-1918 period therefore also includes the argumentation of all parties involved (organisers, active collaborators and those subjected to censuses on the one side and state administration and, at the highest instance, the Supreme Administrative Court on the other side) regarding the issue of private censuses, which is demonstrated here on specific cases, and the same is done regarding the question of sanctions for the organisation of or active participation in private censuses. Private censuses were usually carried out under the direction of nationalist (the so-called defensive) unions (*Národní jednoty*, *Bund der Deutschen*) and umbrella organisations (*Česká národní rada*, *Deutscher Volksrat für Böhmen*). We describe their activities during censuses (not only the private ones) in detail in the penultimate subtopic. Following the introductory synthesising outline regarding the creation of the organisational structure of the Czech national unions and German *Bunds*, we analyse the mechanisms used for the mobilisation of masses for the national idea and also the steps taken outside the public discourse, such as collecting materials for parliamentary interpellation or attempts to intervene in the work of political administration. A separate chapter is constituted by the description of the numerous activities of the *Česká/Československá národní rada* (Czech/Czechoslovak National Council) in the years of the last Cisleithanian census and state censuses.

In the local milieu it was, beside municipal governments, especially important employers who had a strong influence. On the example of Wilhelm Brass, an entrepreneur from Zábřeh and the chairman of *Bund der Deutschen Nordmährens* in one person, the last subtopic presents a model situation where, due to his economic superiority, a strongly nationally aware individual distinctively entered the field of the national political struggle linked to censuses with the aim of achieving the best possible numerical results for “his” nation on the language border.

We believe that the main asset of the book lies in linking and comparing the Cisleithanian and first Czechoslovak Republic period. The existing practice in Czech historiography tended to (and perhaps still tends to) monitor national conflicts connected to censuses before 1918, while the disadvantaging of the “non-ruling” ethnic groups in relation to the Austrian Germans was pointed out. A detailed analysis of the situation in the first Czechoslovak Republic has not been performed so far (excluding partial studies), perhaps because the replacement of the language of daily use by nation was considered to be a universal cure that affected all old maladies. However, it was not so. Whereas in the Cisleithanian censuses the German political representation benefited from greater consideration by the government than the Czech or Polish representatives (in relation to Moravia or Austrian Silesia), after the First World War the tables turned to the benefit of the Czechs.

When dealing with the subject of national movements and nationalisms, Czech historiography usually ignores Austrian/Czech Silesia, which we consider to be a great

handicap. This is because the analysis of the ethnic aspects of censuses in regions with a large Polish-speaking part of the population (Cieszyn Silesia) shows links between the registration of the language of daily use/ethnicity and the level of social, economic, ethnic and educational emancipation – the higher the social prestige of the given language, the more demanded its registration in censuses was and the greater the pressure on the members of “inferior languages/ethnic groups” in a mixed milieu was – whether it was pressure direct or indirect. In Cieszyn Silesia this manifested itself before 1918 in the registration of the German (but also Czech) language of daily use by a number of members of the Polish ethnic group. The Czech national activists did not mind non-violent assimilation, whose existence they denied in the case of migrants from the Bohemian inland to the German-speaking border area, in the case of thousands of migrants from Galicia in Cieszyn Silesia. The knowledge of Cieszyn Silesia, as well as the unrest in the Hlučín region that was annexed to the first Czechoslovak Republic in February 1920, encourages us to be very restrained and especially cautious when dealing out plus and minus signs in our evaluation of the national policy of Cisleithania and the first Czechoslovak Republic. To confuse the state or national interest with a universally valid “higher principle” always tends to be deceptive.

Comparing the results of censuses of the language of daily use before the First World War and censuses of nationality after the First World War in the Bohemian Lands has been the subject of both academic and journalistic interest for almost a century. The Czech concept traditionally stresses that the increase of the share of the Czech nationality under the first Czechoslovak Republic is, beside demographic trends, mainly the result of establishing a fair criterion of nationality, unlike the previous “artificial” category of language of daily use.

Nowadays, this concept can no longer hold. The idea of nationality as a clearly definable and natural category, which is intrinsic to each individual since birth, is problematic, while the degree of the problematic nature is directly proportional to the degree of regional and local multiethnicity and inversely proportional to the level of education. Furthermore, the term “nationality” alone is, in essence, just as ambiguous as the term “language of daily use”; it always depends on its interpretation – both in science and in the state ordinances for the corresponding census. The concept of nationality in the first Czechoslovak Republic was, similarly to the Cisleithanian interpretation of the language of daily use, a link of science and politics – it was set to suit the state interest. An unbiased scholar should not equate it to justice.

When analysing the statistical results, we will reach interesting findings if we do not keep to the level of nationwide data, but look instead at the differences in the individual regions, districts and municipalities. The analysis of linguistically mixed districts and municipalities, where the change of the state census category manifested itself the most, is especially informative.

Due to a different settlement situation (a bigger representation of linguistically mixed regions), a bigger decrease of the German nationality in the 1921 census occurred in comparison with the German language of daily use in the 1910 census in Moravia and Eastern Silesia than in Bohemia. The reason is that in several Moravian and Silesian districts and in a number of local municipalities the German language of daily use was retained or even increased before the war, despite the influx of migrants from Czech-speaking and Polish-speaking regions – the reason were campaigns and both



direct and indirect pressure of “German” town halls during censuses and the indifference of a number of people to ethnic identification. In Bohemia the linguistic boundary before the war was much more distinct and was disturbed only in several regions by labour migrations (Western and Northwest Bohemia).

The analysis extending beyond the nationwide level proves that the increase of the Czech nationality in 1921 was caused, on the scale of the entire Bohemian Lands, especially by the factor of the new state power and the related change of the census criterion, while other factors (introducing the Jewish nationality, new legislation concerning citizenship, territorial reorganisation) played only a small or insignificant role in it, though they could reflect strongly on the local or regional figures.