

HERITAGE AND MEMORY STUDIES



Edited by Victoria Shmidt

# The Politics of Disability in Interwar and Socialist Czechoslovakia

Segregating in the Name of the Nation

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## The Politics of Disability in Interwar and Socialist Czechoslovakia

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# The Politics of Disability in Interwar and Socialist Czechoslovakia

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Victoria Schmidt*

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Cover illustration: A shot from the film *Jak Vašiček přišel k nohám* (“How Vashik got his legs”),  
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# List of Archives and Used Abbreviations

*Archiv Akademie věd České republiky*, Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences (AAV)

*Archiv Masarykovy univerzity*, Archive of Masaryk University (AMU)

*Archiv města Brna*, Brno State Archives (AMB)

*Archiv Národního muzea*, Archives of the National Museum, Prague (ANM)

*Archív UK (A) – Univerzita Komenského*, Archive of Comenius University (UK (A))

*Archiv Univerzity Karlovy*, Archive of Charles University (AUK)

*Národní archiv*, National Archives of the Czech Republic (NaP)

*Národní filmový archiv*, National Film Archive, Prague (NFA)

*Slovenský národný archív*, Slovak National Archives (SNA)

*Státní okresní archiv Karlovy Vary*, State Archive of Karlovy Vary (SOkA KV)

*Státní okresní archiv Karviná*, State Archive of Karvina (SOkA Ka)

*Státní okresní archiv Nový Jičín*, State Archive of Nový Jičín (SOkA NJ)

*Štátny archív v Košiciach*, State Archives in Košice (SaK)

*Universitätsarchiv, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*, University Archive, LMU Munich (LMU A)

Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archive, Central European University (OSA)



# Introduction

## The Politics of Disability: Structure and Agency in Nation Building in Czechoslovakia

*Victoria Schmidt*

### Abstract

Along with a review of current approaches to the politics of disability in CEE countries, the introduction provides a methodological reflection of our archival studies. At the beginning of the volume, we reflect on its retrospectivity, perspectivity, selectiveness and particularity – the four main criteria of good historical narration introduced by Klaus Füßmann as the main frames of the communicative act with the potential listeners to our historical narration.

**Keywords:** historical narrative, nation building, structural violence, public health, disability, Roma

Once, I asked my colleague, a young and very professional speech therapist, to review a thesis by a Roma student whom I supervised. The research for the thesis pointed to the positive role of bilingualism in the speech development of preschool Roma children. My colleague rejected my request, claiming: “I cannot be fair – I hate the Roma because they destroyed our perfect system of special education.” This echo of the institutionalized lie concerning special education and other realms of politics of disability is not an exception among scholars and practitioners, even those only in their twenties and thirties. The outcomes of recent activities targeted at disclosing structural violence against people with disabilities and ethnic minorities remain negated by Czech and Slovak professional communities, whose members directly participated in establishing, legitimizing and practicing extreme forms of surveillance over people with disabilities and the Roma. Despite their crucial role in perpetrating institutional violence,



educators, helping professionals, anthropologists and geneticists have not performed the task of truth-seeking concerning the history of the violation of human rights. The core meaning of transitional justice, the attainment of the sense of justice lost in the past, is still unapproachable for postsocialist communities of perpetrators, the main target groups of political regret.

The task of overcoming the “bad” past of Czechoslovakia where people with disabilities and the Roma were placed into institutions, sterilized and exposed to other tough forms of surveillance mainly operates as a part of the international agenda, while professionals (except the very recent attempts by a few Czech and Slovak historians) avoid undertaking activities that would lead toward possible reconciliation. Being unclear, the line between truth and lies about the impact of diverse professional communities on structural violence continues to divide the professionals in Czech and Slovak societies, blocking the possibilities for sustainable practices of reconciliation. The lack of data concerning the history of structural violence has inclined human rights activists to put forward a victim-centered model for Roma and people with disabilities, the main target groups of sustained and oppressive surveillance. Among other risks, the particular focus on individual stories precipitates revictimization of the Roma and the disabled in current campaigns aimed at promoting their rights. Thus, the lack of participation among the successors of perpetrators leads to limiting people with disabilities and the Roma in producing their own knowledge about the history of violence perpetrated against them.

This volume aims to bring the shattered history of the participation of knowledge makers (scholars and helping professionals) and knowledge users in the structural violence against people with disabilities and the Roma into analytical focus. Two interrelated problems hinder the redefinition of approaches toward the historical experience of structural violence: first, the focus on particular periods, mainly from the point of view of the political regime (either the First Republic, the Protectorate or the socialist period) and, second, the narrow range of theoretical approaches regarding the driving forces leading to violence. Any act of violence “can only be understood by unraveling the (sometimes deep) layers of history it is enfolded.”<sup>1</sup> Putting forward a particular period in order to ascribe a special role to the political regime in shaping the practices of segregation and surveillance<sup>2</sup> makes the

1 Dwyer, ‘Violence and Its Histories.’

2 In his survey about the role of surveillance of the Roma in the professionalization of the police in Germany, Leo Lukassen has elaborated a comparable set of obstacles preventing a

idea of the role of the past in recent segregation shattering. In contrast to other CEE countries,<sup>3</sup> the politics of disability in Czechoslovakia remains on the margins of historical reflections. The focus on a specific period only provides a fragmented understanding of the reproduction of structural violence from one period of political history to another. Apart from neglecting historical continuities, the emphasis on a particular political period prioritizes such driving forces as the peculiarities of the political regime, mainly in terms of their official ideologies, while other powerful factors that produce segregation (such as the formation of an academic elite or the institutionalization of realms such as public health, police, education) remain undeservedly ignored.

The recent boom in studies aimed at exploring the vicissitudes of socialist policies concerning the Roma directly proves this stance. In their monographs, Celia Donert (2017),<sup>4</sup> Plamena Stoyanova (2017)<sup>5</sup> and Matěj Spurný (2011, 2016)<sup>6</sup> elaborate a wide range of historical continuities between socialist discourses and practices concerning the Roma in the interwar period. Eszter Varsa (2017)<sup>7</sup> directly focuses on the coherence in reproducing the most extreme form of “anti-Gypsyism,” the call for exterminating the Roma, in Hungarian public discourse between the 1930s and the 1950s. Indicating an ambitious interrelation between interwar and socialist policies leads these authors to revise the taken-for-granted accusation of socialist regimes in establishing and rooting the practices of segregation. Recognizing the impact of historical continuity in reproducing overt and doctrinal racism updates the previous generation of historical reflections concerning the postsocialist strategies of desegregation and deinstitutionalization that directly opposed the postwar period to the interwar period<sup>8</sup> or socialist policies to postsocial-

comprehensive historical narrative about the Roma in Germany: the lack of an extended time span in the majority of studies about the Roma; the rupture between labeling the Roma and their own self-identity; and the unmet demand to place the history of the Roma within the wider context of German history. Lukassen, ‘Harmful Tramps,’ p. 74.

3 It is reasonable to compare the number and diversity of publications aimed at exploring the history of disability in the former Yugoslavia and Hungary with the obvious lack of such texts about Czechoslovakia.

4 Donert, *The Rights of the Roma*.

5 Stoyanova, *Tsiganite v godinite na sotsializma*.

6 Spurný, *Nejsou jako my*; Spurný, *Most do budoucnosti*.

7 Varsa, ‘The (Final) Solution.’

8 In her study of the socialist oppression against the Roma, Sokolová (*Cultural Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 67) also idealized the interwar period as aimed at integrating the Roma into the process of nation building.

ist strategies.<sup>9</sup> Along with the current trend toward redefining the historical roots of segregation, recognizing the role of institutions such as education, welfare policy and public health in shaping the framework of segregation remains underestimated, especially in relation to the role of these institutions in nation building. The consistent shift from indicating ruptures in the history of policies concerning the Roma to recognizing the continuity in reproducing segregation calls for more systematic studies embedding the history of the Roma in structural violence that obliges historians to consider behaviors and actions that were once never considered violent such as special education, public health or welfare policies.

This volume tells the story of the mutual interrelation of two processes: (1) nation building in Czechoslovakia and (2) practicing the analogy between disability (and other related concepts, such as defectiveness or invalidity) and ethnicity as an output of the nation-building process and a driving force behind the reproduction of its core scenario over different political regimes throughout the twentieth century. In terms of Jörn Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness, interconnecting the politics of disability with nation building produces a genetic historical narrative. By framing the past as dynamic, altering and undergoing change, genetic narrative disrupts historical continuities concerning the interrelation between actors, the discourses they either authored or animated, and the policies developed by such actors.<sup>10</sup> Despite its promising design for elaborating explanatory schemes, genetic narrative challenges scholars by requiring a balance between consistency and objectiveness in a chosen narrative practice. Klaus Füßmann offers four criteria aimed at framing the reflection of the historian toward achieving a better quality of narration, including both rigorous study and meaningful narration.<sup>11</sup> We apply Füßmann's approach to introduce our study by reflecting on its retrospectivity (*Retrospektivität*), perspectivity (*Perspektivität*), selectiveness (*Selektivität*) and particularity (*Partikularität*) as the main frames of the communicative act (*Kommunikativität*) with you, the readers of this book.

Retrospectivity aims at elaborating the time line of a historical study, which ensures emancipation from the influence of political stances leading

9 Zoltan Barany, in his monograph *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*, has clearly delineated the differences in policies during different periods – despite the fact that he made quite a disputable decision to fuse the interwar and WWII periods into one and remained extremely uncritical toward the postsocialist period, describing it as totally positive in terms of overcoming the previous experience of discrimination against the Roma.

10 Rüsen, *History*, p. 34.

11 Füßmann, 'Historische Formungen.'

to either great expectancy or disappointment and resulting in angry feelings against past actors. Solving the task of emancipation from political affiliation with the past relies on the revision of traditional time lines in favor of recognizing the continuity between different periods as a key trigger for changing attitudes toward the main driving forces behind such symbolic forms of history of the segregation of the Roma and people with disabilities. In order to avoid historical labeling of a particular political regime, whether the interwar period, the Protectorate or the socialist era, as the most responsible for structural violence, we construct retrospectivity as the continuity between the interwar, Protectorate and postwar periods. By leaving the pathetic ruptures in Czechoslovak history at the margins of our attention, we emancipate ourselves from the necessity to evaluate the system of education and care for people with disabilities and ethnic minorities as either a matter of pride or shame. Instead, rhetoric concerning disability is interpreted as a highly rationalized tool serving the interests of particular political groups.

Currently, the pendulum swinging between sacralization and demonization of the past, which has swayed in the historiography of Czechoslovakia for a long time,<sup>12</sup> is being replaced by the dilemma between a utilitarian view on the past as bringing either useful or pernicious consequences and reflection on the multiple outputs affecting their transformation. Marking Czechoslovak history as ambivalent, this methodological shift brings a different set of questions for historical reflection. What was the impact of the interwar policy in the periphery, namely, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, with its obvious attribution to internal colonialism? What was the role of the institutional welfare reforms enacted by Protectorate authorities in the transformation in the public expectations of the next generations of Czechoslovak people? Is it enough to disclose the continuity between a utilitarian approach to minorities and people with disabilities during the socialist period and current neoliberal stances concerning inclusion for limiting the role of the socialist legacy in contemporary policies? The attractiveness of utilitarian modes of thinking in interpreting the past calls for systematic revision of such categories as meaning, usefulness or harm concerning the history of reforms, especially in the context of nation building. Tracing the continuities in policy making operates directly in favor of recognizing the wider range of consequences and flows of influence in line with a genetic narrative.

12 Koeltzsch and Konrád, 'From "Islands of Democracy."'

Historical continuity emancipates historians from traditional narratives by challenging their values and ideas concerning the “proper” mode of institutional development and the role of such agents as civil society or epistemic communities. Stressing continuity remaps the composition of actors, the ideas they bring into action and the outputs of their activities, which also operate in favor of negating the previously established traditional view on “right” and “wrong” flows in the politics of disability. For instance, in this book, we challenge the view on Czech racial science in its diverse performances (eugenics, racial anthropology, and medical genetics) as noninfluential in developing policies concerning people with disabilities and ethnic minorities, which remains a kind of taken-for-granted suggestion.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, by tracing the reproduction of eugenic discourse during the postwar period, we demonstrate its powerful influence on the process of equating the Roma with the disabled during the socialist period that determined legalizing such extreme forms of structural violence as forced sterilization and mass placement of the Roma children into residential care institutions.

Conceptualizing the past in terms of continuity contests such notions as path dependence and path departure – in favor of deconstructing the homogeneous view on a particular period of political history and recognizing the changes in the composition of driving forces during that period. Thus, this book offers lenses for deepening the view on the interwar, Protectorate and postwar periods in terms of the ongoing and internally contradictory process of nation building. Shifting the focus from the ruptures between the “grand” periods to the continuities in changes encourages a clearer understanding of the complexity of the interrelation among actors, ideas and policies. Our study is anchored by several overarching questions. What became of the disability discourses that “lost” their impact on policy making? How did actors transform their ideas for making their arguments more suitable to answer the calls by authorities? How did actors interrelate ideas and policies? By operating as a pillar of Czechoslovak identity, the politics of disability not only reflects the vicissitudes of nation building in the past but also challenges the current attempts to ensure integration for people with disabilities and ethnic minorities.

By recognizing the legacy of the past as a driving force behind contemporary discourses, practices and the composition of actors, perspectivity constructs the meaning of historical narrative for the present. This volume traces the analogy between disability and ethnicity, which was shaped within Czechoslovak nation building and has remained a key driving force

13 Šimůnek, ‘Czechoslovakia,’ p. 141.

informing the thinking of different political actors. The shattered response of the Czech authorities and the public to the recent pressure by the European Union concerning the rights of people with disabilities and ethnic minorities cannot be explored without taking into account the analogy between disability and ethnicity accompanying the politics of disability over the twentieth century. The historical weight of this analogy and the lack of awareness about it affect contemporary attempts aimed at creating sustainable policy that recognizes the rights of people with disabilities and the Roma. Though the analogy between disability and ethnicity may reflect an international trend,<sup>14</sup> the specifics of the Czechoslovak case especially illuminate the role of racial assimilationism, one of the most influential flows of liberal racism, which was also practiced by Czechoslovak authorities in a consistent way, and which remains on the margins of consideration among the contemporary experts who participate in policy making concerning disability and ethnicity.

The practical orientation of this book targets the policy of assimilation common for ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, who were seen as only potentially belonging to the nation – under the condition of achieving certain standards for the proper mode of life and functional health (equated with the ability to work). By tracing the reproduction of the analogy between disability and ethnicity within ongoing policy-making processes concerning assimilation, this volume engages in radical negation, which contextualizes the practices and discourses concerning assimilation in terms of historical continuities and recognizes their impact on contemporary approaches. Appearing within the interwar debates about demographic policies aimed at regulating the undesirably high birth rates of Ruthenians and Slovaks, the analogy between disability and ethnicity was transferred to the realm of policies concerning the Roma during the socialist period and started to influence comparable policies in other CEE countries, especially Hungary. This history of the analogy crossing spatial and temporal borders stresses the special role of the reflections regarding the contemporary Czech politics of disability. The main research question underlying the chapters in this volume is: Which combination of driving forces brought the analogy between disability and ethnicity into action within different realms of the politics of public health? This question establishes an interrelation between retrospectivity and perspectivity, which motivates the selection of sources and their analysis.

14 Stone and Rutledge, *Race and Ethnicity*.

By juxtaposing the main sources of data and suitable theoretical frameworks, selectiveness operates in favor of solving the dilemma of historicization vs. theorizing, moving toward balancing between rigorous data searches and comprehensive interpretation. We focus on the role of professional or epistemic communities as a part of the political elite who brought into action the politics of disability during the transfer from peripheral nationalism targeted at emancipation from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to state-building nationalism during the interwar and postwar periods. The state-building process orchestrated the shift of nationalism as mass movement to the ideology of political elites, especially those responsible for producing expert knowledge aimed at legitimizing state power.

Our study stresses the role of epistemic communities aimed at developing public health or influential politicians who engaged in administrating public health to increase their political capital – such as Jozef Tiso or Jan Šrámek, the leaders of the Slovak and Czechoslovak People's Parties, respectively. Comparing the various nation-building projects produced by different elites remains beyond the ambitions of this book; it is the approaches to carry out the agenda of public health and garner the resources for implementing such an agenda that represent the focus of our analysis. Mapping the elites and their stances toward public health as a means to practice political power operates as a key research tool. As such, we focus on the most remarkable debates addressing the politics of disability and their impact on elaborating particular institutional strategies to provide education and care for the disabled.

Exploring these debates, both public and professional, is supplemented by visual analysis of the photos and outreach films that circulated among diverse target groups as a main tool interconnecting science and propaganda. The depictions from internal reports for professional use arranged the perception of the arguments provided by experts for the politicians who made decisions concerning the politics of disability and minorities. Their analysis concentrates our attention on a complex and fluid relationship between experts and elites rather than simply reproducing the discourses that shaped and were shaped by the debates. The outreach films constituted a major consumer market for new prescriptions concerning public health, disease and minorities, and their analysis targets a sort of social biography of the main ideas and discourses concerning disability and the nation elaborated by experts and advanced by elites. Both realms of visual analysis recognize the instrumentality of images in state control over the population and the attempts to establish efficient vehicles of legitimizing surveillance. Undoubtedly, visual tropes reflected the struggle of political elites in conquering public health as a main channel for legitimizing themselves.

Even a brief overview of the continuity among the ministers of health<sup>15</sup> in interwar and socialist Czechoslovakia provides strong evidence in favor of choosing this focus for historical interpretation. The first three ministers, also professional physicians, Vavro Šrobár,<sup>16</sup> Ladislav Prokop Procházka,<sup>17</sup> and Bohuslav Vrbenský,<sup>18</sup> presented the interests of the liberal elite that relied on the international legitimation of the new state and put forward the task to “civilize” the periphery, which was seen as “backward” in terms of health care. Further, the Ministry of Health and Physical Culture was led by Jozef Tiso<sup>19</sup> and Jan Šrámek, the most prominent leaders of Slovak and Czechoslovak People’s Parties. The influence of the pro-Catholic nationalistic lobby affiliated with the People’s Party can be seen as embedded in the administration of public health in interwar and postwar Czechoslovakia. Tellingly, three ministers between 1945 and 1972, Adolf Procházka, Josef Plojar,<sup>20</sup> and Vladislav Vlček, were the members of this party. Even though the latter two were members of the Communist Party, in their approaches, it is possible to

15 We are referring to the Ministry of Health and Physical Culture between 1920 and 1938.

16 The first Czechoslovak minister of health, the Slovak physician and politician Vavro Šrobár (1918-1920), maintained a consistent political affiliation with the Agrarian Party. Simultaneously with the function of heading the Ministry of Health and Physical Culture, he led the *Ministerstvo pro sjednocení zákonodárství a organisace správní* (Ministry of Law Unification). Later, Šrobár obtained the position of the minister of education. Advocating a systematic pro-Czech vision for the development of Slovakia, Šrobár shared the main priorities of the international agenda – fighting against infectious diseases as a part of “civilizing” nonhistoric areas of the new state. Contemporary evaluation of his impact on the policy making concerning public health has varied from defining him as a knight of democracy (on this see his biography by Josette Baer, *A Life Dedicated to the Republic: Vavro Šrobár’s Slovak Czechoslovakism*) to an oppressor of the interests of Slovaks (Pasner, *Osudové okamžiky Československa*).

17 Ladislav Prokop Procházka (1920-1921), who was a prominent lobbyist for international standards and paid attention to their institutionalization in Czechoslovakia, did not belong to any political party but led the new State Institution of Hygiene. Mášová, ‘Bojovník s byrokracií.’

18 Bohuslav Vrbenský (1921-1922), who represented the Czech Socialist Party, actively supported the attempts to delegatize prostitution and advanced the Law on Combating Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

19 Jozef Tiso (1927-1929) was a leading politician in the Slovak People’s Party and headed the First Slovak Republic in 1939.

20 Josef Plojar, the seemingly irreplaceable minister of health for 20 years (1948-1968), is an example of a unique politician able to combine various strategies of reinforcing his political capital. Having a “questionable” past as a priest, he was yet able to advance his career in the Communist Party and had a permanent need to reinforce his political image and symbolic capital. According to Western experts, he operated as an agent and performed special missions in Austria and Germany during his official visits, but undoubtedly, focusing on obstetric services and the health of mothers and children, Plojar achieved amazing results in improving the image of his ministry and of himself.



recognize an affiliation with the Catholic Church.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, among 20 ministers between 1918 and 1989 (including Ján Bečko, who performed this function within the Czechoslovak government in exile between 1939 and 1945) only five were professional physicians, while three were priests.

The supersession of the ministers of health due to their political affiliation obviously reflected the history of political struggle and compromises but for the aims of our study, this fact highlights the need to explore public health as a stage for major political games and to understand the politics of disability as embedded in the political performance of state building. This volume deconstructs the history of public health along two interrelated dimensions, by recognizing the impact of nation building on the politics of disability and by tracing the infiltration of Czechoslovak nationalism by the particular concepts of health and disability. Starting with the analysis of the attempt by liberal elites to establish public health as a kind of civil religion contesting traditional Catholicism, we move to the history of the transformation of the politics of disability into strategies of segregation against ethnic minorities, especially the Roma.

Emphasizing the role of the elite struggle for achieving power during the interwar and postwar periods explains our particular attention to the remarkable role of the German-Czech relationship in elaborating the care and education for people with disabilities during the Protectorate period. Undoubtedly, the Czech professionals resisted to the Nazis' plan to select and exterminate children with mental disabilities. Along with it, the national socialist approach to differentiating people with disabilities according to their adaptability (*Angepasstheit*) and duration (*Leistungsfähigkeit*) obviously infiltrated the postwar Czech rhetoric concerning functional health and deployed the institutionalizing special education as dividing people with disabilities into the groups according to their usefulness. During the interwar and postwar periods, German experts in disability remained in the shadows of the political struggle concerning the Czechoslovak nation. In addition, the Czech experience of the direct influence of racial hygiene during the Protectorate continues to challenge historians seeking to compare and differentiate between the discourses of disability in German and Czech special education. Investigating the influence of German approaches requires different types of narratives – with a more particular focus on national identity as a tool in propaganda wars. Tellingly, the pride felt by Czechs

21 In 1972, the physician Jaroslav Prokopec became another irreplaceable minister of health until the end of the socialist period, which can be seen as the end of the era of the influence of the nationalistic lobby on public health.

regarding their system of special schools for children with disabilities was reversed through arguments in favor of German predominance and influence: thus, during the Cold War, the evidence of the reproduction of the German model of special education by the interwar Czechoslovak authorities was one more argument in the never-ending propaganda wars between the socialist and Western blocs.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, this point of view challenges the time line of our study and calls for deeper analysis of the role of the late imperial period in the formation of prerequisites for the close interrelation between nation building and special education. Undoubtedly, this task affects our plans for future studies.

By summarizing the purposes of historical narrative, particularity delineates the limits of applied methodology and the options for its modification. This book concerns public health – that institution which holds a very specific position among other two-sided, structure-agency, bodies of theory about nation building. In contrast to education, welfare policy or social work, public health has not acquired the status of a coherent alternative option within critical approaches such as critical education or critical social policy aimed at emancipation from surveillance and oppression by practicing radical negation of the grounds of prostrate approaches to discourses and practices. Established within the process of intensive state building and the institutionalization of an international government after World War I, public health remains quite a unique institution, which can be attacked due to its insufficient operation in favor of choosing the “proper” way of reform. Does this imply that the dilemma of a utilitarian view vs. reflexivity cannot be solved concerning the history of public health in any way other than choosing a utilitarian view? Our study offers the choice in favor of reflexivity – by linking public health with the politics of disability and tracing the interrelation between them as challenges for the reflections of contemporary actors. Tracing the historical continuity in reproducing the analogy between disability and ethnicity as a source of the arguments in the diverse campaigns initiated by various actors allows us to revise our view on particular strategies as either “bad” or “good” and turn toward a more thoughtful evaluation of the past of public health in Czechoslovakia. The structure of book serves this task.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, “Building the Czechoslovak Nation and Sacralizing Peoples’ Health: The Vicissitudes of Disability Discourse during the Interwar Period,” aims at identifying and exploring the main pathways for connecting the discourse of health to the nation’s identity

22 Baier, *Schulen für Behinderte*.

as a substitute for traditional religion in interwar Czechoslovakia. The first chapter, "Establishing National Public Health in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Contexts and Contests," discusses the composition of political actors that brought into action the project of sacralizing people's health as well as the limits of this attempt. The second chapter, "The Discourse of Disability: A Noah's Ark for the New Nation?," focuses on the diverse streams of practicing such sacralization regarding people with disabilities. The third chapter, "Politics Concerning the Roma during the Interwar Period: Therapeutic Punishment vs. Benevolent Paternalism," explores the echo of this policy in the strategies around the Roma as they started to be seen as functionally unhealthy. This chapter discusses the specifics of the policy concerning the Roma in different, historical (Bohemia) and nonhistorical (Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia) parts of interwar Czechoslovakia, and then turns to the legal frames and theoretical arguments for tough surveillance over the Roma introduced by interwar authorities within the combat against infectious diseases.

The second part, "Postwar Institutionalization of Care for the Disabled: Toward a Universalized Discourse of 'Defective Gypsies,'" focuses on the three main and mutually interrelated realms of producing and practicing the violence of knowledge: special education, physical anthropology and genetics. Their interplay is seen as a main prerequisite of coalescing disability and ethnicity in the practices led to structural violence. Chapter 4, "Special Education in Czechoslovakia between 1939 and 1989: Toward Multilevel Hierarchy of Defectivity," focuses on the interdisciplinarity of postwar applied scientific approaches to "defective" children and its direct influence on the practices of education and political rhetoric about those who were labeled as defective. Victoria Shmidt introduces the role of intensive institutionalization of special education in Nazi Germany in the vicissitudes of the Czech approach to the children with disabilities during the Protectorate and explores the fixing of some institutional and discursive German patterns in the politics of disability during the Third Republic period. Then, Frank Henschel explains the rupture between the first decade of socialist policy and the composition of driving forces made the eugenic turn possible and desirable by various groups of interests later. The next chapter, "The Intersectionality of Disability and Race in Public and Professional Discourses about the Roma in Socialist Czechoslovakia: Between Propaganda and Race Science," stresses the interrelation between public and professional discourses presented in anthropological surveys as the grounds for producing intersectional knowledge that remains able to block any attempts to change the social order concerning the Roma since the 1960s

and until today. Also, this chapter pays special attention to the international agenda of racial assimilationism worked in favor of the reproduction of nationalist rhetoric and emancipation from any affiliation of postwar race science with German racial hygiene – supplemented by universal codes for nationalist consciousness as part of a more general outlook on the world.<sup>23</sup> The last chapter, “The Forced Sterilization of Roma Women between the 1970s and the 1980s: The Rise of Eugenic Socialism,” investigates the transfer from eugenics to medical genetics in postwar Czechoslovakia, which led to introducing sterilization, including the enforced application of it against the Roma.

Retrospectivity, perspectivity, selectiveness and particularity shape the cultural discourse that ensures the communicativeness of the historical narrative and its readers. By either producing or consuming historical narratives, we accept the role of the medium in reflecting upon the self-justification (*Selbstvergewisserung*) of previous generations of scholars.<sup>24</sup> Such acceptance leads us toward solving such dilemmas as rupture vs. continuity, fact vs. interpretation, historicization vs. theorizing, by either emancipating ourselves from univocal historical evaluation or making ourselves attackable by political manipulations. This volume aims at providing options for historical reflection by those who grapple with structural violence against ethnic minorities and people with disabilities – in favor of empowering them with the ability to recognize, negate and change and, finally, to move from knowledge about institutional violence to its acknowledgement.

## About the author

**Victoria Shmidt** has a PhD in Developmental Psychology (1998, Russian Academy of Education) and a PhD in Social Work and Social Policy (2012, Masaryk University). Since 2011, Dr. Shmidt has been working on the issue of the policies concerning ethnic minorities in the Czech lands and the role of various academic communities in producing the discourses and practices of segregation.

23 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

24 Rösen, *Geschichte*, p. 113.