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Resurrection and Revolution. Austro-Catholicism, German Nationalism, and National Socialism in Slovenia (1933–1941)

Abstract: This article analyzes the nature of ethnic Germans' identities and nationalisms in what is now modern Slovenia from the beginning of the Third Reich in 1933 to the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941. The reactions of these Germans to world and local events are examined through the prism of local German-language media and archival sources, which show that ethnic Germans at this time were conflicted by multiple identities and nationalisms: one that most strongly aligned with the German nationalism of National Socialist ideology, and one that was marked by a robust Austro-Catholic regional identity aligned with conservative Christian Austrians in neighboring Austria. This article therefore adds to an understanding of the appeal of National Socialism for and types of nationalism of ethnic Germans outside of the Third Reich, as well as the role of religion in Austrian identity formation in the early twentieth century.

Key Words: German history; Austrian history; German nationalism; National Socialism; Catholicism; Slovenian history

In the period immediately following the end of the First World War, almost one-quarter of the tens of millions German-speakers in Europe lived outside the borders of the German Reich.¹ After the end of the Great War, a small portion of these so-called *Volksdeutsche*, or ethnic Germans located outside of the Reich, lived in the former Habsburg crownlands of Carinthia, Carniola, and the southern portion of Styria.² These regions became part of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), bordering the new Republic of Austria

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and housing an ethnic Slovene majority accompanied by a not inconsiderable number of formerly Austrian German-speakers. The ethnic German minority in Slovenia was, unlike the Germans of Poland or Hungary, a largely urban, wealthy, educated, social elite who were highly cognizant of their former position as the dominant ethnic group in Habsburg Austria, and paid attention to political events happening throughout the interwar period in both Germany and Austria.³

Though relatively small in number, the history of this German minority in interwar Slovenia can tell us much about German nationalism, the appeal of National Socialism, and the power of religion in the molding of a distinct Austro-Catholic German identity. In this article, I will examine the ways in which the German-speaking minority of Slovenia reacted to and were shaped by events in Germany after the National Socialist seizure of power in 1933, as well as political events in Austria through the 1938 *Anschluss*, up through the Third Reich's 1941 invasion of Yugoslavia.⁴ I analyze the dynamics of ethnic Germans' nationalism and identity in Slovenia, as a minority group in a Slavic country that bordered on a large German-speaking country. This analysis is based primarily upon German-language newspapers in the context of their editorial stance and readership, whose articles are understood to be at times expressing widely-held opinions as well as urging or imploring a certain viewpoint upon portions of its readership who feel different about a topic.⁵

As will be shown, the German press in Slovenia at this time had strong pro-Nazi sentiments, which was partly shared and partly opposed by their readership. Through the prism of the pro-Nazi editorial stances of the German press, I argue that Germans in Slovenia had multiple types of nationalisms: one, strongly in line with the German nationalism of National Socialism, and another type of nationalism that I call 'Austro-Catholicism', an ethno-religious identity, which was resistant to the allure of Nazi ideology and lay rooted in the concept of a German and Catholic Austrian cultural identity. These complex identities and nationalisms among the Germans of Slovenia were at times in conflict with each other and were shaped by ongoing political events in interwar Europe.

The core insights of this article are: that there were different types of German nationalisms in interwar Slovenia and these were shaped by the political events of the time; that, though many Germans in Slovenia were supportive of National Socialism, a significant minority were more resistant; and that, based upon the pro-Nazi slant among the German press at the time, the nature of these conflicting identities and the influence of both National Socialism and a distinctive Austrian Catholic culture upon the German minority in Slovenia can be distinguished.⁶

German-speakers within the borders of what is now modern-day Slovenia, who were separated almost overnight from the German-majority countries of Germany and Austria after 1918, reacted negatively to their newfound status as an eth-

nic minority in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. They did this in part as a response to the reversed power relations in the region, as the new Slovene-majority authorities consistently pushed to reduce the public presence of the German language and culture.⁷ One subtle response that was taken can be seen in a report by John Dyneley Prince, the U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, who wrote that, in Slovenia, “the Austrians counted 100,000 Germans, but the Yugoslavs reckon only 40,000 of these people.” He explained this “great discrepancy” as due to “the fact that many real Germans of this territory, who for commercial reasons are bilingual, now prefer, for obvious political causes, to count themselves as Slavs under the present regime, although they still continue to use the German language among themselves.”⁸ Thus, in the immediate post-war period and through much of the following interwar period, many Germans in Slovenia emphasized cultural and social ties to neighboring Austria and the Weimar Republic, the largest German-majority states in Europe, as a way of pushing back against what they viewed as oppressive “slovenization” measures to take away their German identity.

German identity in Slovenia in the first years of the interwar period was defined by a shared Germanic culture, language, and history. Religion as well was an important cultural issue for some of Yugoslavia’s more than 500,000 ethnic Germans.⁹ For example, many Germans in Slovenia, who were overwhelmingly Catholic, viewed the leadership of the largest German cultural association in the kingdom with suspicion, as they were perceived to be overly Protestant.¹⁰ Such religious and cultural divisions among Yugoslavia’s diverse ethnic German population made it difficult ever to present a united political front for representing German interests in the country.¹¹

Despite certain religious differences between Slovenia’s Catholic German population and Protestant Germans in the rest of Yugoslavia, religious identity remained in the background throughout the 1920s, as the secular aspects of German culture and education were perceived to be more strongly under attack. Through cultural and political organizations, Germans in Slovenia attempted to maintain and strengthen their unique German cultural identity, as well as to reverse the closings of German-language schools. These attempts largely failed, however, and with the onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, the prevailing mood among many Germans in Slovenia was exploited by the National Socialist German Workers’ Party.¹²

The rise to power of the Nazis in Germany gave, for some Germans in Slovenia, not only a needed political ally that would strengthen their hand within Yugoslavia, but was also a means of rejuvenating and reinforcing the spiritual connections to Germandom that were in danger of being severed by the perceived aggressive and oppressive Slovene-majority authorities.¹³ Though many German nationalists in Slovenia were immediately enticed by the rise to political power of the National

Socialists, a subset of others remained wary. After the NSDAP and its political allies gained a majority of seats in the 5 March 1933 Reichstag election, the Slovenia-based German-language newspaper *Deutsche Zeitung* cheered the wide range of voters who had made the “German wonder” of “Adolf Hitler’s liberation movement” a success.¹⁴ Welcoming the “turnaround of the German people and its fate” that the Nazis’ political breakthrough had caused, the *Deutsche Zeitung* castigated critics who had “prophesied the deterioration” of the Nazi Party and its ability to “take power through legal means.” The paper declared that “Adolf Hitler has [...] through legal means [...] achieved the German revolution, the uplifting of the nation [*Aufbruch der Nation*], the Third Reich.”¹⁵

Putting the blame on “communists” and “lackeys of Moscow” in burning the Reichstag, the paper rejected the notion that the Nazis had achieved their electoral victory through illegal or violent methods.¹⁶ The *Deutsche Zeitung*’s accusation of communist terrorism in Germany was one reason for its support of the NSDAP’s political victory: “The elections [...] are of great significance for Europe, since it signals the liquidation of Communism.” The paper also explicitly included the German minority community in its celebration of the result of the 5 March election. “Not only the Germans in the Reich or in Austria, but rather all Germans in the world joyously and, deeply moved, thank God that He has sent the German *Volk*, of which we are a part [...] the right man [...].”¹⁷

The *Deutsche Zeitung*’s crowing over the NSDAP’s electoral success was tempered by its awareness that a significant portion of its readership held critical views of the violent tendencies of the Nazis. Stressing the legal methods by which the Nazis gained power was intended to reassure or placate that segment of German-speakers in Slovenia which was skeptical of aspects of National Socialism, while the paper’s clear joy about the significance of the National Socialists’ ideology for the renewal of the *Volk* shows that there was also a considerable amount of Germans in Slovenia who were supportive of or, indeed, fanatical in their shared beliefs with National Socialism.

The paper’s strongly-worded reference to God’s involvement in the rise of National Socialism reflects a robust Catholicism and Christian identity among German-speakers in Slovenia that, until then, had been largely apolitical. By linking Christianity with the Nazis, the *Deutsche Zeitung* was attempting to persuade those Germans who felt strongly about their religion and opposed the anti-Christian tendencies of the National Socialists that the revolutionary movement was not a threat to their way of life.¹⁸ As well, the *Deutsche Zeitung*’s stringent anti-communism suggested that aspects of that ideology, perhaps its atheism, was considered especially threatening to strongly Catholic Germans in Slovenia. Such linking together of disparate aspects of National Socialism’s appeal – its anti-communism, legal meth-

ods, and spiritual deliverance of Adolf Hitler to power – demonstrate the ways in which the German minority in Slovenia was not only divided in its views of National Socialism, nationalism, and identity, but how deeply held for some their Catholic faith was.

The *Deutsche Zeitung's* reporting on events in Austria as well reflects a shared sense of an Austrian identity among German-speakers in Slovenia that was distinct from that of Germans in the Reich. On the occasion of an attempted assassination of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß in October 1933, the paper expressed relief that “the shots were not fatal, and we are happy that they were not deadly.”¹⁹ With the growing strength of the Austrian National Socialist Party (*Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei*, DNSAP) creating a threat to Dollfuß's ruling by decree in early 1933, the Austrian Nazis began a period of several years marked by domestic terrorism, civil war, bombings, and political suppression.²⁰ As a reflection of its German-speaking, Austrian-affiliated readership, the *Deutsche Zeitung's* repudiation of the violence carried out by National Socialists in Austria was meant to reassure both devout Catholic Germans in Slovenia as well as the Yugoslav authorities that this type of ideological warfare would not be spilling over the border. But the paper's inclusion of Slovenia's German-speaking population in the racial *Volksgemeinschaft* points as well to a large segment of the minority community that sympathized, at least in some ways, with aspects of the extreme German nationalism of National Socialism.

Both of the types of German identity that I have discussed so far in this paper, pro- and anti-National Socialism, reflect the different strands of German nationalisms that, by the mid-1930s, had begun to emerge among the German minority in Slovenia. German proponents of National Socialism in Slovenia who supported Hitler's takeover of power and sought Austria's inclusion into Nazi Germany maintained this sentiment, but had to remain muted due to the hostile attitude of the Yugoslav and Slovene governments. Other German nationalists, some of whose Christian identity precluded them from fully embracing National Socialism, were apprehensive about the Third Reich's intentions towards Austria and Slovenia's Catholic German populations, though they nonetheless remained passionate about their German identity as an ethnic minority within a Slavic-majority country.²¹

This burgeoning split in nationalisms can be seen in a *Deutsche Zeitung* article that emphasized how Hitler had succeeded, shortly after taking power, in getting “millions of Catholics” to “heartily support” him, including his predecessor as chancellor, Franz von Papen.²² In addition, the paper relayed a speech given by von Papen in January of 1934 about the “Christian principles of the Third Reich.”²³ Though in prior speeches von Papen had been critical of certain aspects of the Nazi regime, the *Deutsche Zeitung* selectively edited its reports to include only excerpts that posi-

tively emphasized the ways in which Christianity and National Socialism were compatible.²⁴ In this way, the *Deutsche Zeitung* tried to persuade skeptical Catholic Germans in Slovenia of the merits of National Socialism, and show that Nazi ideology was compatible with their religious identity.

The German newspapers' perspectives on events in Austria demonstrated as well that German-speakers in Slovenia were not completely convinced about the unity of the German people in regards to a distinct Catholic-Austrian identity.²⁵ Reporting on this "cleavage" that had arisen at a time when "history is being made for the German *Volk*", the *Deutsche Zeitung* expressed deep skepticism over the "tragedy" of the implications of the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, which had stipulated that "Austria must remain independent." The paper lamented the "one half of Austrians" who were "ideologically and politically [inclined] towards the Reich", while the other half embraced Catholicism as a means of "[placing] itself [...] away from the natural arc of history of each geographically-separated body of the *Volk*." It added, "these two parts of the Austrian people are in a mighty struggle against each other."²⁶

A sovereign, German, and Catholic Austria split the unity of ethnic Germans of the former Habsburg Empire and competed with the Third Reich for their loyalty. "A small group of neo-Austrians on the Danube is trying to make world history," complained the *Deutsche Zeitung* in June 1936. "First, six and a half million [ethnic Germans] were culturally and politically disenfranchised and in every way made defenseless. Then came the conflicts and showdowns that led to the defeat of Fascism [in Austria] and to a victory for the clericals." The paper lamented that the "Austrian government lies in the hands of a group of people who completely pursue the policies of the Vatican."²⁷

The *Deutsche Zeitung's* derision of an independent Austria and what was becoming a unique Catholic and German Austrian identity demonstrates the ideological cleavage that had split German-speakers' identities between pro-Nazi nationalists and anti-Nazi Austro-Catholics in Slovenia after the rise of National Socialism in the Reich. While the first several post-war years had seen the forced exclusion of Austria from Germany, the Nazis' taking of power in the Reich and explicit calls for *Anschluss* changed the dynamics of how German identity was shaped among the minority communities of East and Central Europe. Before the establishment of the Nazi state, Germans' identities and nationalisms in Slovenia could be defined in terms of a shared language, culture, and history. That Hitler established racial criteria in determining who was a German narrowed the spectrum for who could be a part of the *Volk*. For example: Catholic, ethnically German residents of Lower Styria or Carinthia who were married to Catholic, German-speaking, and ethnically Slovene spouses would not be able to include their family in this new *Volksgemeinschaft*. For those German-speakers in Slovenia who identified themselves as strongly

by their German language and culture as by their Roman Catholic religion or affiliation to an independent, Catholic Austria, the new German nationalism as defined by National Socialism was not especially appealing, and the Third Reich was not the welcoming homeland for European Germandom that it was touted to be.

The *Deutsche Zeitung's* attacks on the Catholic characteristics of Austria and German identity, as well as its lament over the “defeat of Fascism”, represent a culture war. This culture war, in contrast to the 1920s, was not occurring between Slovenes and Germans but between Germans themselves – between traditionalist Austro-Catholic Germans and more Reich-oriented German nationalists. At risk was the spiritual unity of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and with it, the national renewal of the German people that had been ushered in by the National Socialist revolution. If Hitler, as an embodiment of the living will of the entire German *Volk*, demanded the loyalty of every single German in the world, then it was intolerable for there to be a source of loyalty for millions of Germans other than National Socialism. One of the major tasks of the *Deutsche Zeitung*, as a de facto arm of National Socialist ideology outside of the Third Reich, was to convince the Germans of Slovenia who were not already devoted to the Nazis of the necessity of becoming so – to end any and all conflicts about German identity and nationalism. This ideological cleavage among Germans in Slovenia intensified after the Third Reich’s “seizure of power in Austria” was “bloodlessly completed”, in March of 1938, as described by the Slovenia-based German-language *Mariborer Zeitung*. The paper repeatedly stressed that there had been “nowhere in all Austria any confrontations.”²⁸ Reporting on Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg’s farewell address before giving up power, it quoted in full his speech, with his accusations of the “news about Austria” being “made up” and printing his final appeal: “So I depart in this hour from the Austrian *Volk* with a German word and with a heart’s desire: God protect Austria!”²⁹

The *Mariborer Zeitung's* description of the *Anschluss* of Austria to Nazi Germany demonstrates the continued mixed reaction among Slovenia’s German minority to National Socialism’s brand of German nationalism and identity. Calling the *Anschluss* a “seizure of power” left open to its readership the question of whether this was a good or bad thing; the term *Machtergreifung*, depending upon one’s politics, signified either the extension of the beginning of the “national revolution” that had begun in Germany in 1933, or a naked power grab by a violent minority with authoritarian aims.³⁰

The *Mariborer Zeitung* illustratively portrayed Adolf Hitler’s entrance into the Austrian capital as “all Vienna” on the street to “experience the historic hour of [his] arrival.” Calling him chancellor instead of *Führer*, the paper noted the “great interest” and “excitement” of the people that “[grew] from hour to hour.” It described the Wehrmacht’s “invasion” as having been met with “indescribable jubilation” and

“fraternization” (*Verbrüderung*) from the Austrian population.³¹ The *Mariborer Zeitung* explained to its readers that Italy, also a majority Catholic country, had not “obliged itself to [...] protect Austria from Germany” and that both Italy and Germany had the “duty” to lead the “fight against the world-destroying Bolshevism.”³² Describing the National Socialist takeover of Austria as widely welcomed by Austrian citizens, whose “indescribable jubilation” at finally being reunited with their ethnic brothers was clearly evident, was an attempt by the *Mariborer Zeitung* to persuade its anti-Nazi readers that the *Anschluss* was not a negative event, but was, rather, popular, legitimate, and indeed legal.³³ Excusing Italy’s non-interference showed these German-speaking readers that their Catholic religious identity was not under threat in Austria and would not be so should the Slovene lands ever join the Third Reich. By emphasizing the positive reception of the Wehrmacht and Adolf Hitler’s entrance into Vienna, the paper was thereby marginalizing anti-Nazi sentiment among German-speakers in Slovenia, who were supposed to see that events in neighboring Austria were considered by the vast majority as a good result, with no negative consequences. Combining the “duty” of both the Third Reich and Fascist Italy to “fight against world-destroying Bolshevism” shows as well that many Catholic Germans in Slovenia had strong feelings opposed to communism.

But the *Mariborer Zeitung* refrained from wholly supporting the *Anschluss*, as can be seen in its unedited broadcasting of Schuschnigg’s proudly Austrian farewell, and this reticence to do so indicates that anti-Nazi sentiment in the German minority community of Slovenia remained significant. The paper’s repeated use of *Reichskanzler* instead of *Führer* lent credence to the view that this was a legally permissible action and mollified skeptics of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement. Such nuanced reporting on these events demonstrates that, although perhaps not the more popular opinion, anti-*Anschluss* or anti-Nazi sentiment retained a considerable presence among the German minority in neighboring Slovenia, many of whom held these opinions in large part because of their Roman Catholic faith and affiliated Austrian identity.

Throughout the 1930s, as Nazi Germany experienced increasing economic growth and foreign policy successes, many Germans in Slovenia became ever more supportive of the Third Reich and Hitler’s policies. For example, the Reich embassy in Yugoslavia reported to the *Auswärtiges Amt* in June of 1938 that, after the “situation of the local Germans [had...] considerably worsened”, the “achievement of Greater Germany” has aroused “fantastical hopes for an improvement” in local conditions. The same report noted that this was true for all Germans in Yugoslavia, not just those in Slovenia who “honestly perceived [...] the swastika [...] as the first step to their own liberation.”³⁴ It is clear as well that, for at least some of the more passionately nationalist Germans, professions of loyalty to Yugoslavia at this time were

merely window-dressing in an attempt to maintain good relations between the Third Reich and Yugoslavia. This was confirmed in a report by the *Auswärtiges Amt* from December of 1938 that, although noting that the “situation of the Germans in Yugoslavia had never been content since the establishment of the state”, it was crucial for the Reich’s foreign policy that the minorities maintain good relations with the authorities so as to ensure stability.³⁵

While there were clearly many German-speakers in Slovenia who strongly identified with the Nazi version of German nationalism, they were not the entirety among the minority community, and this nationalist identity in fact conflicted with other German-speakers’ Roman Catholicism and sense of connection to Austria. Yugoslav authorities, who had good reason to suspect National Socialist sentiment among members of the German community, were uncertain how many “real” Nazis in Slovenia there were, and how many were loyal citizens. Indeed, a member of the Yugoslav intelligence services wrote that it was “hard to tell” who was an “*ex-Untersteirer* who is German” and “who is a ‘cross-breed’ and changes sides when it is opportune.”³⁶ It is therefore difficult to determine exactly how many Germans in Slovenia were pro-Nazi nationalists and how many were anti-Nazi traditionalists. It is clear that a majority at least were supportive of many aspects of National Socialism, though just how large this majority was likely grew and decreased over time in response to political events and actions taken by the Third Reich.

Relations between the German minorities and the Yugoslav authorities deteriorated through 1940,³⁷ as the new Serbian-nationalist military government “arrested the entire ethnic German leadership” of the country, who then, after being released, did their best to assure the new leaders of their loyalty.³⁸ After Italy’s ill-advised decision to attack Greece in October of 1940 precipitated the Wehrmacht’s invasion of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, the country was partitioned between the different Axis powers: Germany completed the geographical expansion of the Greater German Reich by annexing³⁹ northern Slovenia, whose “population according to Nazi ideology was amenable to speedy Germanization.”⁴⁰ Though some Nazi-oriented Germans in Slovenia were actively serving the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) intelligence and military sections from the time of the *Anschluss* to the 1941 invasion,⁴¹ the majority of ethnic Germans were kept in the dark about the Nazis’ intentions and obeyed the Yugoslav military’s mobilization orders after 6 April.⁴²

Ethnic Germans in annexed Slovenia had become, after more than two decades, spiritually and geographically re-united with European Germandom in the eyes of both, the nationalists who had been desiring such a reconnection throughout that time and the occupying National Socialist forces. The now-Nazified and renamed *Marburger Zeitung*⁴³ welcomed the “inevitable” result of the Wehrmacht “liberating” Slovenia’s ethnic Germans. The paper explained to its readers that a “new

time” had begun for the region, since the “social state in the truest meaning of the word” of “Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich” meant that the “*Volksgemeinschaft*, of which we had until now been separated by the unbearable Versailles system, [now] spans our beloved [...] Styria.”⁴⁴ German occupation signified the end of the “twenty-two years” that “the public use of our German mother tongue” had been “refused.” “Now the time has come where we can once more openly profess our German *Volkstum*,” proclaimed a newspaper editorial.⁴⁵ Marburg/Maribor and the rest of Lower Styria were now free, according to the National Socialist-dominated rhetoric of the local German-language newspaper.⁴⁶ In line with the newspaper’s sentiment, the Nazi leadership did indeed see the invasion and occupation of Slovenia as a liberation. Since the late 1930s, the Reich Foreign Ministry had viewed the Slovene government and Slovene people’s actions against Germans as “terrorist activities.” Contrary to local German nationalists’ views of these actions (at least as espoused in the German-language press) the Reich embassy reports detailed how they saw anti-German attitudes as permeating Slovene society, from the authorities, to the press, to the local civilians themselves.⁴⁷

The *Marburger Zeitung*’s framing of the German invasion was an attempt to explain to the apprehensive segments of its readership why the Wehrmacht’s annexation had spiritual importance for Slovenia’s minority community. The paper’s confident tone laid claim to being the true opinion of Slovenia’s entire German minority in approving the Third Reich invading and occupying Yugoslavia. In interpreting the Nazis’ invasion for its readership, the *Marburger Zeitung* thereby exposes the fault lines that divided German-speakers in Slovenia in their identity and nationalisms: those German nationalists who were ardent supporters of National Socialism and believed in their belonging to the *Volksgemeinschaft* could rejoice at their liberation from Slavic overlords, while others, whose identities were shaped as much by their Christian faith and affiliation to the Austria of the Habsburgs, could have been torn between their desire to regain their prior privileges while living in a German-dominated society and their distaste over being ruled by a Nazi administration.

Though fervent nationalism ran deep among many Germans in Slovenia, Catholicism’s role in society was also persistent and strong, as evidenced by the *Marburger Zeitung*’s framing of contemporary events. At Easter, the paper celebrated the Christian holiday with “the sign of the victorious flags of Adolf Hitler.” The paper’s editorial equated Christ’s rising from the dead with the Nazi invasion; just as Jesus Christ’s resurrection had brought humanity out of darkness and into a new age, so too did Hitler and the Wehrmacht accomplish a similar phenomenon in Yugoslavia and Europe. Notably, the paper published a full-length photograph of the *Führer* looking nobly into the distance, in full military uniform, but without any outward sign of the infamous Nazi swastika.⁴⁸

German-speakers' Roman Catholic identity was clearly deeply-held and widespread in Slovenia, as the *Marburger Zeitung's* extensive efforts to relate to the Christian denomination evince. That the newspaper would show a full-length photograph of Adolf Hitler but decline to display the Nazi swastika suggests that a not inconsiderable number of those Germans who had strong anti-Nazi views were ambivalent at best in how they felt about the *Führer*. However, while some Germans in Slovenia felt more strongly about their Catholic identity than their German nationalism, this was not the case for many others. Although almost all Germans in Slovenia were Roman Catholic, a great many of them were supporters of National Socialism, and their religion did not interfere with or cause them to question their identifying with the radical German nationalism that the Nazis espoused. Partisan warfare in Slovenia and Yugoslavia was particularly brutal during the Axis occupation, and much has been written about the role of Slovenia's Germans during this occupation that is beyond the scope of this article.⁴⁹ What I have identified as the Austro-Catholic Germans in Slovenia, though a minority in the German community, were very apprehensive about the Nazi occupying force. This anti-Nazi sentiment was documented by a report written by the American embassy in March of 1942, which understood the arrival of National Socialism in Slovenia as a situation where "room must be made for a new mystic religion of blood and race as practiced by the old German race", an action that would lead to the "abolition of Catholicism."⁵⁰ Such unease with National Socialist ideology in thought and practice explains partly why local and foreign National Socialist ideologues expended such effort to persuade and recruit those Catholic Germans in Slovenia who were hesitant to join the Nazi cause.⁵¹

For German nationalists who had cheered the rise of the Third Reich that heralded the revolution that was to renew the *Volk*, the events of April 1941 established the dominance of a German identity and nationalism in Slovenia that was in step with National Socialism. Other nationalists who had, as Roman Catholics and Austrians, contested this intra-German culture war were glad to have their prior social status and privileges restored, but not necessarily at the expense of either the violence and atrocities that were to come, nor, indeed, of their religious identity. Despite the pro-Nazi stance of the *Marburger Zeitung* after Slovenia came under German occupation, not all Germans in Slovenia agreed that the National Socialist regime was a liberation. While the Germans of Slovenia became once more a part of the German *Volk*, the nature of this *Volk* was not one that all approved of.

As the ultranationalist Nazi Party first increased and then strengthened its political power in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the ethnic German minority in nearby Slovenia found itself in a divided community. On one side of this divide, most Germans in Slovenia embraced what they saw as a movement and international force that could improve their position within Yugoslavia while also rejuvenate

nating and reinforcing the spiritual connections to Germandom that had been existentially threatened by the Slovene-majority's perceived oppressive post-war measures.

While many German nationalists in Slovenia became enraptured by the rise to political power of the National Socialists, a significant minority composed particularly of 'Austro-Catholics' remained decidedly apprehensive. These ethnic Germans in Slovenia, who made up the smaller side of the divided minority community, found their loyalties belonging more to a distinct type of Austro-Catholic identity that was a part of the German nation and culture but incompatible with the Nazis' ideas of German nationalism. Intensifying these competing loyalties was the increasing perception of Austria, both from within and outside the country, as a Catholic German bastion of anti-Nazi sentiment. Although these Germans spoke the German language and were proud of their German cultural heritage, my analysis of the pro-Nazi German newspapers' reporting on and editorializing of events show that this did not necessarily mean that they were politically aligned with the nationalism, ideology, and extremist actions of the National Socialists of the Third Reich. American and German diplomatic reports from the time show that outsiders perceived most of the Germans in Slovenia to be pro-Nazi, while the local German-language newspapers' nuanced reporting on wider events evinces a strong current of an anti-Nazi, Catholic, and Austrian orientation present among the minority community.

It is clear that, from the time of Hitler's rise to power in 1933 to the German invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, there were many Germans in Slovenia who became fervent supporters of the Third Reich and its ideology. Moreover, the Reich's reach into German culture and society in Yugoslavia was long indeed, and should not be discounted.⁵² But this influence was never total, and both cultural and societal anti-Nazi bulwarks remained – the most prominent being Catholicism and a distinctive Austrian identity, many of whose adherents had a different idea of nationalism, a different idea of what it meant to be German.

Endnotes

- 1 Charles W. Ingrao/Franz A. Szabo, *The Germans and the East*, West Lafayette/IN 2008, 1. I use the terms 'German' and 'German-speaking' interchangeably in this paper to signify the ethnic German population in Slovenia. Though self-identified Germans in Slovenia at this time called themselves "Germans", they had previously been a part of the Habsburg Empire.
- 2 The modern-day borders of Slovenia contained over 100,000 ethnic Germans in 1910, comprising approximately 10 percent of the total population. Mitja Ferenc/Božo Repe, *Die Deutsche Minderheit in Slowenien in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: Dušan Nečak/Boris Jesih/Božo Repe/Ksenija Škrilec/Peter Vodopivec, eds., *Slowenisch-österreichische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Ljubljana 2004, 161–176, 163. There is considerable ambiguity about this number, as well as the successive Yugoslav

censuses in the 1920s and 1930s that showed the number of ‘Germans’ in Slovenia dwindling by tens of thousands.

- 3 On the eve of World War I, Slovenia’s German-speaking population generally enjoyed predominance in such prominent societal positions as the courts, the banks, big business, politics, and large landed estates. *Ibid.*, 162.
- 4 Primary sources for this analysis are mainly German-language newspapers based out of the cities of Slovenia that had a German majority population at the time. The newspapers are understood in the context of their editorial stance and readership; the *Deutsche Wacht* and *Deutsche Zeitung* (located in Cilli/Celje) were generally conservative nationalist, while the *Marburger/Mariborer Zeitung* tended to be more moderate. I have also used primary documents from the United States National Archives, with reports in the Records of the Department of State and captured records of the German Foreign Office. All articles from the *Deutsche Wacht*, *Deutsche Zeitung*, *Mariborer Zeitung*, and *Marburger Zeitung* used in this paper were accessed from the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (Austrian National Library) and *Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije* (Digital Library of Slovenia), part of the *Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica* (National and University Library of Slovenia).
- 5 See Michael Nagel, *Deutschsprachige Presse außerhalb des deutschen Sprachraumes. Entwicklungen, Perspektiven, Forschungsansätze*, in: Andrea Corbrea-Hoišje/Ion Lihaciu/Alexander Rubel, eds., *Deutschsprachige Öffentlichkeit und Presse in Mittelost- und Südosteuropa (1848–1948)*, Konstanz 2008, 15–44. For more on the German-language press in Slovenia, see Tanja Žigon, *Deutschsprachige Presse in Slowenien (1707–1945)*, three volumes, Munich 2004.
- 6 This differentiation is important, as views of Slovenia’s German minorities as being staunchly pro-Nazi contributed to the reasoning behind their expulsion after the war. For example, the Slovene historian Tone Ferenc, in a brief chapter about interwar Slovenia and Slovenes’ resistance to Nazi aggression after 1941, discusses Slovenia’s interwar ethnic-German population as if they were a homogenous group, the entirety of whom were ardent nationalists and proponents of National Socialism. See Tone Ferenc, *The Austrians and Slovenia during the Second World War*, in: F. Parkinson, ed., *Conquering the Past. Austrian Nazism Yesterday and Today*, Detroit/MI 1989, 207–233.
- 7 This was done through enacting policies that banned the use of the German language in public, removed German-speakers from civil service, administrative, and judicial posts, and closed down or substantially changed much of the previous German-language school system. See Arnold Suppan, *Lage der Deutschen in Slowenien zwischen 1918 und 1938*, in: Helmut Rumpler/Arnold Suppan, eds., *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Slowenien, 1848–1941*, Munich 1988, 172–237.
- 8 John Dyneley Prince to Frank B. Kellogg, 25 Jan. 1927. U.S National Archives (NARA), RG-59.
- 9 The 1921 census gave a combined population of almost 12 million in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; about 4.3 percent were Germans (Catholics and Protestants) spread throughout the entire Kingdom. John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country*, Cambridge/UK 1996, 129. Roman Catholicism was the preferred religion of the overwhelming majority of Slovenia’s population, both German and Slovenian.
- 10 Germans in Slovenia were Catholic, but Germans in the rest of Yugoslavia were Protestant, for the most part. Anthony Komjathy/Rebecca Stockwell, *German Minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the Wars*, New York 1980, 130.
- 11 While the overwhelming majority of Germans in Slovenia were Roman Catholic, their also overwhelmingly urban population contrasted with the largely rural and 25 percent Protestant population of ethnic Germans elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”. Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, 128.
- 12 The Great Depression had reached Slovenia by 1931, causing unemployment to increase rapidly through 1933, and not reaching its pre-Depression peak until 1938. Toussaint Hočevar, *The Structure of the Slovenian Economy 1848–1963*, New York 1965, 131.
- 13 German-language newspapers in Slovenia had been emphasizing the spiritual aspects of the living German *Volksgemeinschaft* for years. For example, the Maribor/Marburg city council had declared in November 1918 that the Germans of Slovenia were an “organic component” of Germany and Austria. See *Eine Kundgebung der Stadt Marburg*, in: *Deutsche Wacht (DW)* (16.11.1918), 4.
- 14 *Das Deutsche Wunder*, in: *Deutsche Zeitung (DZ)* (9.3.1933), 1.

- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid. Including “Germans all over the world” as part of the *Volk*, not just the citizens of the Reich, supported National Socialism’s ideology of the *Volk* as a living, breathing, indivisible component nation comprised of all Germans throughout the world. Valdis Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933–1945*, Chapel Hill/NC 1993, 19.
- 18 Though millions of German Catholics and Protestants voted for Hitler in 1933, many Christians found the Nazis incompatible with their religious beliefs; in some parts of the country, Catholics “were explicitly forbidden to become members of the Nazi Party.” J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945*, New York 1968, 3–6; as for Austria, the Nazi Party saw Catholics as “the chief sources of anti-German hate” in that country – see Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis. A History of Austrian National Socialism*, Chapel Hill/NC 1981, 99.
- 19 Schüsse in die Weltgeschichte, in: *DZ* (8.10.1933), 1.
- 20 By the spring of 1933, the Austrian Nazis “appeared to be well prepared to challenge the government in a test of strength and will power.” Chancellor Dollfuß “refused to be intimidated” by this growing threat, and exploited a parliamentary procedure in March to rule Austria by decree. He proceeded to outlaw the Austrian Nazi Party and wage a campaign of violence against both Nazi and Socialist agitation against his rule over the next several years. Pauley, *Hitler*, 102–104. Austria’s Christian Social movement saw “political Catholicism” as a greater force than ethnic German nationalism as espoused by the Nazis, who in any case were perceived to be anti-Catholic. Similar to the German-language press in neighboring Slovenia, this did not stop pro-Nazi sentiment in newspapers from claiming a majority in favor of *Anschluss* and National Socialism after the *Machtergreifung* in 1933. Julie Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism and the Austrofascist state 1933–1938*, New York 2011, 108–109.
- 21 This same type of dynamic was present in Austria at the time, whose geographical proximity to the Third Reich heightened the conflicted identities and nationalisms among German-speakers there. Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 109–120.
- 22 Zuversicht – Ruhe und Arbeit in Deutschland, in: *DZ* (15.2.1934), 1.
- 23 Die Christlichen Grundsätze des Dritten Reiches, in: *DZ* (1.3.1934), 2.
- 24 Though von Papen himself was spared retribution for his less-than-subtle anti-Nazi comments, several thousand Catholics gathered for a rally a short time later to hear another speech by Erich Klausener’s Catholic Action, which would incense Hitler and lead to the death of the man who wrote von Papen’s speeches during the Night of the Long Knives. Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich. A New History*, New York 2000, 677–678.
- 25 That is, the type of Austrian identity that competed with the Nazis “as defenders of the ‘true Germany’ and ‘true Germanism.’” Dollfuß displayed this uniquely Austrian-German nationalist identity when he proclaimed: “We want a German Austria and a free Austria. [...] At a time when the world shrinks from a certain German spirit we want to show the world that we possess a Christian German civilization. In our Austrian way we feel ourselves to be a true component of the German way and of German life [...]” This German-Austrian identity allowed Austrians to continue to see themselves as members of the German nation and culture, but that the Christian and Austrian concept of Germanness was irreconcilable with the Nazi one in the Third Reich. William T. Bluhm, *Building an Austrian Nation. The Political Integration of a Western State*, New Haven/CT 1973, 35–36. Dollfuß and his successors “defined the nature of their regime as Christian and German and Austrian – Austrian not as a contradiction to German but as the resumption of pre-republican traditions with a distinct Catholic flavor.” Anton Pelinka, *Austria. Out of the Shadow of the Past*, Boulder/CO 1998, 12.
- 26 Zwiespalt, in: *DZ* (26.4.1934), 1.
- 27 Zwischenspiele an der Donau, in: *DZ* (4.6.1936), 1.
- 28 Bundesregierung Dr. Seyss-Inquart, in: *Mariborer Zeitung (MZ)* (13.3.1938), 1.
- 29 Schuschniggs Abschiedsrede im Rundfunk, in: *MZ* (13.3.1938), 2.
- 30 J.S. Conway, “Machtergreifung” or “Due Process of History”. *The Historiography of Hitler’s Rise to Power*, in: *The Historical Journal* 8/3 (1965), 399–413, 399.
- 31 Der Einmarsch der Deutschen Truppen, in: *MZ* (15.3.1938), 2–3.

- 32 Die Empfangsfeierlichkeiten in Wien, in: MZ (16.3.1938), 1.
- 33 Despite a post-war portrayal of Austria as having been the “first victim” of Hitler’s aggression, the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany was in fact widely popular. Pelinka, *Shadow*, 16–18. This is not to say, however, that it was universally welcome. Though Austria’s history of support for National Socialism – for example, Austria having a higher percentage of Nazi Party members than in Germany, and a disproportionate amount of Nazi concentration camp guards actually coming from Austria – would be downplayed afterwards, there were many Austrians at the time who, as in Slovenia, had strong anti-Nazi opinions. See Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York 2005, 2–3, 52–53.
- 34 Report of the German Embassy in Yugoslavia to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, “Auswirkung des ‘Anschlusses’ und der sudetendeutschen Autonomiebestrebungen auf die Lage der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien”, 15 Jun. 1938. NARA, RG-242, T-120, Roll 3107, frame E540660-E540661.
- 35 Report of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, “Die Lage des Deutschtums in Jugoslawien”, 22 Dec. 1938. NARA, RG-242, T-120, roll 1363, frame D520122-D520124.
- 36 Jerca Voduš-Starič, *The Beginning of the Ideological Dispute and its Consequences on German-Slovene Relations*, in: Harald Heppner, ed., *Slowenen und Deutsche im gemeinsamen Raum. Neue Forschungen zu einem komplexen Thema*, Munich 2002, 152–168, 159.
- 37 Serb attacks on German minorities at meetings of the *Kulturbund* had to be broken up by the police, while police in Slovenia beat ethnic Germans in Ljubljana in April of 1940. As well, flyers began circulating in Slovenia that advocated death for all ethnic Germans, and by June 1940, were “warning the population that the ethnic Germans were a fifth column.” Komjathy/Stockwell, *Minorities*, 139–140.
- 38 Komjathy/Stockwell, *Minorities*, 140. In addition, the new military government was strongly suspected by the German government of physically “mishandling” members of the ethnic German minority community in Belgrade and elsewhere. Morris and Cordell Hull, 31 Mar. 1940. NARA, RG-59.
- 39 Though the Nazis intended to simply extend the civilian administrative area of Austria that bordered Slovenia to Lower Styria and Carinthia, this was never accomplished, as partisan resistance was too fierce. But the occupiers did implement the Nuremberg Racial Laws and introduced a military draft that forced Slovenes to fight for the Germans. Dušan Nečak, *Die “Deutschen” in Slowenien (1918–1955)*. Kurzer Abriss, Ljubljana 1998, 18. This unpreparedness is understandable in light of the fact that the Germans had anticipated “70–80 percent” of Slovenes being “in favor of Germany” during the invasion, ostensibly because of anti-Serb sentiment. Report of the German Embassy in Croatia to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, “Abschliessender Bericht über die Umsiedlung”, 20 Nov. 1941. RG-242, T-120, roll 5781, frame H296639-296649.
- 40 This did not include the city of Ljubljana. Jozo Timosevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945. Occupation and Collaboration*, Stanford/CA 2001, 61. The Nazis controlled most of Slovenia north of Ljubljana, and intended to annex the region to the Third Reich. The Yugoslav census of 1931 showed 25,054 ethnic Germans in what would become Nazi-occupied Slovenia, with the *Kulturbund*’s own internal studies only marginally increasing the number of Germans, at 28,075 in January 1941. *Ibid.*, 83.
- 41 In the summer of 1940, Yugoslav authorities discovered a (Nazi) German spy network in Marburg/Maribor, which had contacts via radio with Graz. These agents had prepared, in the days leading up to the invasion, a list of more than 3,500 Yugoslav citizens – mostly from Slovenia – who were to be immediately arrested. Nečak, “Deutschen”, 15–16. While a small minority of nationalist activists participated in fifth column-like activities, the secret radio stations set up by the SD were operated exclusively by *Reichsdeutsche*, not the German minorities. Komjathy/Stockwell, *Minorities*, 140–141.
- 42 Komjathy/Stockwell, *Minorities*, 140–141.
- 43 *Marburg* is the German name for *Maribor*.
- 44 *Geschichtliche Wendung*, in: MZ (9.4.1941), 1.
- 45 *Volksgenossen*, in: MZ (10.4.1941), 3.
- 46 *Marburg Frei!*, in: MZ (1.4.1941), 3.
- 47 Memorandum from German Embassy in Yugoslavia to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, 4 May 1939. NARA, RG-242, T-120, Roll 1453, frame D600645-D600651.
- 48 *Auferstehung 1941*, in: MZ (12.4.1941), 1.

- 49 The extent to which ethnic Germans in Slovenia collaborated with and participated in Nazi occupation administration and anti-partisan efforts is disputed. Stefan Karner downplays the participation of Slovenes, arguing that many Germans – including even Nazi supporters – spoke out about the brutal, racist occupation policies; he claims that the “majority” of ethnic Germans in Slovenia “rejected” the occupation policies of the NSDAP administration, while others followed orders and still others adopted a silent “modus vivendi” with the local Slovene population. See Stefan Karner, *Die Deutschsprachige Volksgruppe in Slowenien. Aspekte ihrer Entwicklung, 1939–1997*, Klagenfurt et al. 1998, 72–76, 94, 117–118. In contrast, Dušan Nečak argues that “most” Germans were in fact sympathizers of the Nazis, citing the “80 percent” of “functions of the occupying administration” being composed of “local” Germans. See Nečak, “Deutschen”, 14–15, 19. The SS unit that was raised with local Germans in Slovenia ended up totaling around 1,600 men. Dušan Nečak, “Die Deutschen” in Slowenien 1938–1948, in: Dušan Nečak/Boris Jesih/Božo Repe/Ksenija Škrilec/Peter Vodopivec, eds., *Slowenisch-österreichische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Ljubljana 2004, 373–402, 382–383. See also Damijan Guštin/Vladimir Prebilič, *Die Rechtslage der deutschen Minderheit in Jugoslawien 1944 bis 1946*, in: Manfred Kittel/Horst Möller/Jiří Pešek/Oldřich Tůma, eds., *Deutschsprachige Minderheiten 1945. Ein europäischer Vergleich*, Munich 2007, 297–346, 302–303.
- 50 James B. Stewart to Cordell Hull, 17 Mar. 1942. NARA, RG-59.
- 51 Anton Scherer, *Die Deutschen in der Untersteiermark, in Ober-Krain und in der Gottschee*, in: Ernst Hochberger/Anton Scherer/Friedrich Spiegel-Schmidt, *Die Deutschen zwischen Karpathen und Krain*, Munich 1994, 111–156, 131. The German cultural association that had hitherto advocated increased minority rights in Yugoslavia, the *Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*, was replaced shortly after the invasion by the *Steirischer Heimatbund*, whose leader Franz Steindl was given the order from Hitler to “make (Lower Styria) German.” It is unclear how much membership in the *Heimatbund* can tell us about the amount of support for and opposition to the Nazis among Germans in Slovenia. For example, in Marburg/Maribor in 1940, even though the main German-language newspaper there had been consistently pro-Nazi for years, less than half of the city’s German population was registered in the Nazi-controlled *Kulturbund*. Of those registered, most were middle-aged (between 30 and 60) with a significant minority of younger men (15–30 years old). A majority were Protestant, with few Roman Catholic members. Vodušek-Starič, *Beginning*, 153.
- 52 This can be seen in the *Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund*, whose leadership was thoroughly Nazified by 1939 and actively sought to become an arm of the Third Reich. Hans Rasimus, himself an ethnic German who was expelled from Yugoslavia after the war, denies that the *Kulturbund* had any “basis for National Socialism” and resented that the Yugoslav government conflated its own German minority with the National Socialists of the Third Reich. Hans Rasimus, *Als Fremde im Vaterland. Der Schwäbisch-Deutsche Kulturbund und die ehemalige deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien im Spiegel der Presse*, Munich 1989, 490.